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**FORMER IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT CONTRACTING
OFFICER PLEADS GUILTY IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT TO
VIOLATING CONFLICT OF INTEREST LAWS BY AWARDING
CONTRACTS TO HIS OWN COMPANIES**

PREET BHARARA, United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York announced today that DAVE BALGOBIN, a former Immigration and Customs Enforcement contracting officer, pleaded guilty to violating the criminal conflict of interest laws by improperly using his authority as an ICE employee to award lucrative contracts to companies controlled by BALGOBIN and his relatives.

According to documents filed in Manhattan federal court, as well as statements made during BALGOBIN'S guilty plea proceeding before United States Judge ALVIN K. HELLERSTEIN:

Since December 2001, BALGOBIN, the defendant, has been employed by the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") and/or its predecessor agency, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service ("INS"). BALGOBIN worked as a Purchasing Agent for ICE from 2001 until 2006, when he was promoted to Mission Support Specialist in the Detention and Removal Office in New York, New York (the "ICE-DRO Field Office"). ICE-DRO is responsible for housing ICE detainees in deportation proceedings. In his capacity as a Mission Support Specialist, BALGOBIN authorized the ICE-DRO Field Office to enter into contracts for certain goods and services.

In May of 2008, DHS-OIG was contacted by employees at the Office of Acquisition Management ("OAM") in Washington, D.C. regarding a requisition for a courier services contract in the ICE-DRO Field Office. As detailed in the requisition, the courier service contract for ICE-DRO's Field Office had been awarded to a company called Countrywide Office Solutions ("Countrywide"), which had a quoted price that was substantially lower than the competing quotes. The ICE-DRO contact for the contract requisition was BALGOBIN. Concerned about the substantial price disparity between the vendors, an OAM employee unsuccessfully attempted to contact a representative of

Countrywide. After failing to reach anyone at Countrywide, the OAM Employee called BALGOBIN, who told the OAM Employee that Countrywide was having phone problems, but that he would pass the message along. BALGOBIN added that a Countrywide employee was presently working at the ICE-DRO Field Office on another project. Shortly after speaking with BALGOBIN, the OAM Employee received a call and an e-mail message from a person who identified himself as a Countrywide Employee; however, the e-mail message was preceded by the typewritten name "Dave Balgobin." When contacted again by OAM, BALGOBIN claimed that this link appeared because he allowed the employee to send the e-mail to OAM from BALGOBIN's computer.

Concerned about the possible connection between Countrywide and BALGOBIN, the OAM Employee conducted a further inquiry and determined that a second contractor that provided janitorial services to ICE-DRO (called "Aroma Scientific Corporation") listed the same contact name and business address as Countrywide. In addition, the telephone number for both Countrywide and Aroma Scientific Corporation was affiliated with individuals with the last name "Balgobin." Through this investigation, DHS-OIG has determined that BALGOBIN was an authorized signatory on the checking accounts for both Countrywide and Aroma Scientific Corporation, as well as a third business, Aromed Corporation, that had a contract with the ICE-DRO Field Office to provide clothing for ICE detainees.

DHS-OIG agents subsequently interviewed BALGOBIN, who acknowledged that he was the sole contracting officer at the ICE-DRO Field Office, and stated that his wife ran the daily operations of Countrywide, Aroma Scientific Corporation and Aromed. BALGOBIN admitted that all three companies provide goods and services to the ICE-DRO Field Office, which is the companies' sole client. BALGOBIN stated, in sum and substance, that he had a conflict of interest because, he was not supposed to have a "government-business relationship" with family members. BALGOBIN also admitted that he never disclosed a conflict of interest with Countrywide, Aroma Scientific Corporation, and/or Aromed Corporation during the course of his employment with ICE or INS.

BALGOBIN, 50, faces a maximum of five years in prison on the charge of violating the felony conflict of interest statute. He is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge HELLERSTEIN on October 15, 2010. BALGOBIN will also be sentenced to forfeit real property located in the Poconos, as well as \$125,000 in criminal proceeds to the Government.

This case is being prosecuted by the Office's Public Corruption Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys RUA M. KELLY and MICHAEL LOCKARD are in charge of the prosecution.

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