

# Mexico Sends 4 Kingpins to Face Trial in the U.S.

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MEXICO CITY, Jan. 20 — Breaking with longstanding practice, [Mexico](#) extradited four major drug traffickers to the United States late Friday and sent a signal that the country's newly elected president, [Felipe Calderón](#), is serious about cooperating with his northern neighbor to dismantle cartels.

United States law enforcement officials have long complained about Mexican reluctance to hand over drug traffickers indicted in crimes north of the Rio Grande, as many drug kingpins have continued to operate their deadly networks from inside Mexican prisons, where they have been able to corrupt officials.

Until now, however, the Mexican government has resisted the extraditions, arguing that the drug cartel leaders must face justice here first. Also, until a recent Supreme Court ruling, Mexican officials were unable to extradite criminals because they face the death penalty in the United States, which is banned in Mexico. The court overturned that rule.

“The actions overnight by the Mexican government are unprecedented in their scope and importance,” the United States attorney general, [Alberto R. Gonzales](#), said in a statement on Saturday.

Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, the leader of the Gulf Cartel in Tamaulipas State, was among the 21 people flown under heavy armed guard to the United States on Friday night and handed over to federal authorities. He is under indictment in Texas for trafficking in marijuana and threatening to kill three law enforcement agents.

The Mexican government also turned over Ismael and Gilberto Higuera Guerrero, brothers who were high-ranking members of the Arellano-Félix cartel in Tijuana, as well as Hector Palma Salazar, a

former leader in the Sinaloa cartel. All face racketeering and drug trafficking charges in Southern California.

The Sinaloa cartel controls the border around El Paso. Joaquín Guzman, known as El Chapo, escaped from prison in 2001 after bribing officials and still oversees the gang, along with several other important traffickers who have somehow eluded the Mexican police.

Former President Vicente Fox, who left office in December, created a special force to combat organized crime and arrested scores of high-ranking mobsters, weakening the three major cartels in Tijuana and Sinaloa State in the west and Tamaulipas State, along the eastern Texas border.

But his administration failed to break up the Sinaloa mob, and the arrests of people like Mr. Cárdenas and his counterpart in Tijuana, Benjamin Arellano-Félix, set off an underworld turf war that has increased in brutality and claimed thousands of lives in recent years.

Officials at the Drug Enforcement Agency privately voiced frustration with the Fox administration for not extraditing the drug kingpins to the United States, where they would be unable to run their networks from prison. A similar tactic proved effective in Colombia, Panama and other countries where drugs are produced and shipped.

Mr. Calderón and his attorney general, Eduardo Medina Mora, did not immediately say why they had switched course. The attorney general's office put out a statement saying simply that the people extradited had run out of appeals against extradition and that Mexico wanted them to face trial in the United States before the time limit ran out on the charges there.

But all are serving sentences or facing trials in Mexico. In the past, the Mexican authorities have said those were barriers to extradition.

A high-ranking federal prosecutor, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said President Calderón had decided to extradite the drug traffickers despite their pending legal proceedings. The aim is to make it difficult for them to communicate with their lieutenants

in Mexico. “It breaks up the entire logistical structure of these organizations here,” the prosecutor said.

Besides the four top drug traffickers, the Mexicans extradited seven other lower-level drug dealers, among them Gilberto Salinas Doria, who is wanted in the Southern District of New York on charges of helping to import 200 tons of cocaine.

They delivered four other prisoners wanted on charges of murder, drug trafficking and trafficking in prostitutes, officials said. One of these, Consuelo Carreto Valencia, is under indictment in New York City on charges of smuggling women and forcing them to become prostitutes.