

# Jury convicts FARC leader

## A top Colombian FARC commander was found guilty of drug trafficking by a Washington federal jury.

The Miami Herald  
Feb. 21, 2007

**WASHINGTON** - A Colombian peasant who rose to become the financial chief of a powerful squadron of the leftist FARC guerrillas was convicted Tuesday by a federal jury on charges of conspiring to send more than five tons of cocaine to the United States.

Nayibe Rojas was the first high-ranking member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, convicted of drug running by a U.S. federal court, although the U.S. and Colombian governments have long alleged that the FARC was deeply involved in every facet of Colombia's cocaine industry.

Late last year, the U.S. government suffered an embarrassing setback when another Washington jury failed to reach a verdict on Ricardo Palmera -- a senior FARC leader better known as Simón Trinidad -- accused in the kidnapping of three U.S. defense contractors still held by the FARC. His retrial is scheduled for next month.

Rojas' case grew in importance after the Palmera hung jury because Colombian prosecutors often use the threat of extraditions to the United States to entice FARC members to collaborate with them.

The 12-member jury in Rojas' trial heard hours of taped phone and other conversations and testimonies by U.S. and Colombian law enforcement agents as well as by alleged former drug traffickers during the five-week trial. It issued the guilty verdict after deliberating for four days.

The defense painted Rojas, also known as Sonia, as a member of an insurgency battling injustices in Colombia, and government witnesses as shady and unreliable characters of Colombia's drug underworld.

Prosecutors cast Rojas as a gun-totting senior FARC logistics chief who gathered coca base from local farmers in the coca-rich Caquetá region in southern Colombia and then sold it to refiners and traffickers who then sent the cocaine to the United States.

The jury also issued guilty verdicts for her two codefendants, José Antonio Celis and Juan Diego Giraldo. Celis and Giraldo were not members of the FARC, but prosecutors argued that all three conspired to send more than five tons of cocaine to the United States.

The three could go to jail for as long as 30 years. Sentencing was scheduled for May 7.

Deputy Attorney General Paul J. McNulty called the outcome of the trial "a significant victory against the FARC."

"This case sends a message to major overseas drug trafficking organizations: We will investigate, prosecute and punish all those who manufacture and distribute illegal drugs for export to the United States," he said in a statement. "There is no international safe haven for illegal narcotics traffickers."

The Bush administration estimates that 80 percent to 90 percent of cocaine on U.S. streets comes from Colombia, and that the FARC controls 70 percent of that country's drug trade to finance its insurgency.