

## Former Mexican Governor Could Face U.S. Drug Trial

The Washington Post  
June 22, 2007

MEXICO CITY, June 21 -- A former Mexican governor accused of involvement in drug trafficking was arrested Thursday and is awaiting possible extradition to the United States.

A federal court in [New York](#) is seeking the extradition of Mario Villanueva Madrid -- onetime governor of [Quintana Roo](#) state, which includes [Cancun](#) -- for allegedly helping Mexican drug dealers smuggle at least 200 tons of cocaine into the United States while he was in office from 1993 to 1999.

Villanueva would be the latest in a series of high-profile figures extradited to the United States by Mexican authorities, who have vowed to cooperate more with American law enforcement. In January, Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, reputed head of the powerful Gulf cartel, was extradited to the United States, a move hailed at the time by U.S. Ambassador Antonio O. Garza Jr. as "a monumental moment in our two nations' battle."

Police arrested Villanueva, 58, early Thursday morning, moments after he was released from a [Mexico](#) City prison where he had been serving time on drug-trafficking and money-laundering charges. While family members watched, Villanueva yelled, "They're kidnapping me. Help me. They kidnapped me," according to the newspaper El Universal.

Villanueva's saga has captivated Mexicans for eight years. In 1999, he went into hiding two weeks before he was scheduled to leave office and lose immunity against prosecution.

During two years as a fugitive, Villanueva argued that he was a victim of persecution and accused President Ernesto Zedillo of targeting him as payback for years of political squabbles. In 2000, while an international manhunt was underway, Milenio magazine published an interview with Villanueva in which he complained of a "brutal injustice."

"This prison is worse than whatever they have," Villanueva said of his life as a fugitive. "I have no communication with anybody. Every day, I write a letter to my wife that I can't send."

Villanueva was tracked down in 2001 and has spent the last six years in prison. A Mexican court announced this week that he had been convicted of money laundering; a statement issued Thursday by the office of [Mexico's](#) attorney general said Villanueva had deposited more than \$7.4 million in Swiss bank accounts. The sentence for money laundering had been fulfilled by time already served and he was ordered freed.

Mexican authorities failed to convict Villanueva on drug-trafficking charges, an outcome that U.S. officials are hoping to reverse.