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DECEMBER 17, 2008 SPOKANE, WA

Child rapist and pornographer Kenneth Freeman pleads guilty One of ICE's "most wanted" fugitives agrees to 50-year prison sentence for his crimes

SPOKANE, Wash. - A former international fugitive once featured on U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) "most wanted" list pleaded guilty in federal court here today to federal charges, including two counts of producing child pornography and one count of interstate transportation of a minor for sexual purposes.

In addition to the federal charges, Kenneth John Freeman, 46, formerly of Richland, Wash., also pleaded guilty to state charges, specifically three counts of rape of a child in the first degree.



Under the plea agreement announced today by the U.S. Attorneys for the Districts of Eastern Washington and Oregon, the defendant agreed to a 50-year federal prison term. The plea also contemplates a 20-year prison sentence on the state charges, which will run concurrent with the federal sentence.

Freeman has been in custody since his arrest in Hong Kong on May 1, 2007. Freeman's arrest capped a lengthy investigation led by ICE that involved law enforcement agencies around the world. He was extradited to the United States in October 2007.

According to the plea agreement, Freeman sexually abused his preteen daughter from May 2000 until July 2001. Freeman filmed the sexual abuse, which occurred in Washington and Oregon, and distributed the pictures and videos internationally over the Internet.

Freeman fled the country in March 2006. Nine months later, he was profiled on the television program "America's Most Wanted." The show featured an interview with his daughter and a plea for him to surrender to law enforcement authorities. A detective with the Toronto Police Service saw the show and for the first time linked Freeman to the child pornography images and videos that were some of the most frequently downloaded in the world.

Based on this information, Freeman was immediately placed on ICE's and the U.S. Marshals' "most wanted" lists and became the subject of a worldwide manhunt. A team of investigators from various law enforcement agencies including the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security tracked Freeman to China.

On May 1, 2007, the pursuit ended when Hong Kong authorities arrested Freeman, a former competitive bodybuilder, as he arrived at the city's bus depot to begin a holiday trip. Throughout the pursuit, special agents from the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security and law enforcement authorities in Beijing, Suzhou and Hong Kong were key players on the ground. Ultimately, Freeman consented to his extradition and agreed to be returned to the United States to face the charges against him.

"As a former fugitive on ICE's and the U.S. Marshals' "most wanted" lists, Kenneth Freeman distinguishes himself as one of the most heinous and despicable pedophiles ICE has ever encountered," said Leigh Winchell, special agent in charge of ICE's Office of Investigations in the Pacific Northwest. "His capture overseas and eventual return to Washington state to face justice are powerful reminders that the world's sexual predators increasingly have no place to hide. But ICE's work is not done. We will continue to target those who sexually exploit our children, robbing them of their innocence and their youth."

ICE's participation in this investigation is part of Operation Predator, an ongoing ICE initiative targeting those who sexually exploit children. Since Operation Predator was launched in July 2003, ICE agents have arrested more than 11,500 individuals nationwide.

"Thanks to the outstanding work of our local, federal and international law enforcement partners, Mr. Freeman was captured, has pleaded guilty and will no longer be a danger to society," said James A. McDevitt, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington. "I want to especially thank the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon and the Benton County Prosecutor's Office for their outstanding cooperation in the resolution of this matter. This case demonstrates the success of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to combat the epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse."

This case was investigated by the Richland Police Department, the Benton County Sheriff's Office; the Kennewick Police Department; the U.S. Marshals Service; and ICE, including its attaché offices in Canada and China. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children also aided in the investigation. The federal charges are being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorneys' Offices for the District of Oregon and the Eastern District of Washington. The state charges are being handled by the Benton County Prosecutor's Office.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

ICE is a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of