

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, October 20, 2010

New Jersey Man Pleads Guilty to Threatening Employees of Latino Civil Rights Organizations

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department announced today that Vincent Johnson of Brick, N.J., who went by the internet pseudonym "Devilfish," pleaded guilty in federal court in Trenton, N.J., to multiple charges related to a series of threatening communications he sent to employees of five civil rights organizations that work to improve opportunities for, and challenge discrimination against, Latinos in the United States.

During the plea proceedings, and in documents filed in court, Johnson admitted that from November 2006 to February 2009, he repeatedly sent threatening email communications to employees of the LatinoJustice Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund; the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund; the National Council of La Raza; the League of United Latin American Citizens; and the National Coalition of Latino Clergy and Christian Leaders.

Examples of Johnson's threatening language include: "Do you have a last will and testament? If not, better get one real soon."; "I am giving you fair warning that your presence and position is being tracked...you are dead meat...along with anyone else in your organization."; "My preference would be to buy more ammunition to deal with the growing chaos created by the pro-illegal alien groups. RIP [names of the victims] who are not the friends of our democracy."; and "After reading the article below can you give me simply one good reason why someone should not put a bullet between your eyes for your actions that are promoting lawlessness in this country?" Johnson admitted that his threats were intended to intimidate the victims in order to prevent them from aiding persons of Latino descent.

"Threats of hate-fueled violence because of the color of someone's skin, the language they speak or the country from which they come, will not be tolerated in this country," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "The defendant's conviction should send a clear message to others who would carry out similar criminal acts that they will be brought to justice and held accountable for their actions."

"Johnson admitted that he sent threatening emails to individuals and groups because of who they are and what they believe," said Paul Fishman, U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey. "Violence or threats of violence based on race, religion, national origin, gender, or sexual orientation are an intolerable violation of our most basic civil rights. Hiding behind the perceived anonymity of a computer screen to make hateful threats will provide no protection from prosecution."

"You can not hide behind technology to threaten people," said Michael B. Ward, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Newark Division. "The FBI has a very robust and active civil rights violations program and we take threats to civil liberties very seriously. Mr. Johnson attempted to intimidate his victims to make them fearful of engaging in activities protected by the U.S. Constitution. Anyone who feels they have been victimized in this way should know the FBI is on their side and we are only a phone call away."

Johnson pleaded guilty to five counts of interfering with the exercise of civil rights, each of which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. In addition, Johnson pleaded guilty to five counts of transmitting a threatening communication in interstate commerce, each of which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

District Court Judge Anne E. Thompson scheduled Johnson's sentencing for Jan. 26, 2011.

The case was investigated by the Washington, D.C., and Newark, N.J., field offices of the FBI. The case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Benjamin J. Hawk of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Eicher of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey.