

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On Tuesday, April 23, 2013, Moises Cerna and Misael Santollo, the last two remaining defendants in the murder of Dr. J. Mario Gonzalez, were sentenced by Judge Steinhauser in the 155th District Court of Austin County, Texas. Their two co-defendants had already been tried and convicted by Austin County jurors.

Cristobal Cerna, the first defendant to be tried, was convicted of Capital Murder and sentenced to Life without Parole on February 15, 2012.

On September 24, 2012, Misael Santollo pled guilty to Murder, but his sentencing was put off until after the trials of his co-defendants. The State agreed to give him 38 years in prison if he testified truthfully against Noel and Moises Cerna. Santollo's early cooperation with investigators led to the recovery of several key pieces of evidence in the case.

Noel Cerna went to trial on the Capital Murder charge in November of 2012. Santollo testified against him. Noel Cerna was convicted of Capital Murder and sentenced to Life without Parole on November 19, 2012.

On Tuesday, Moises Cerna pled guilty to Murder and elected to have Judge Steinhauser assess his punishment within a range of 25 to 50 years in prison. Santollo testified in Moises Cerna's sentencing hearing. After hearing the testimony and arguments from the attorneys, Judge Steinhauser sentenced Moises Cerna to 50 years in prison.

Following Moises Cerna's sentencing, Misael Santollo was sentenced to 38 years in prison for his role in the botched kidnapping and extortion attempt that resulted in Dr. Gonzalez's death.

District Attorney Travis Koehn stated:

"My assistant, Brandy Davidson, and I worked closely with the Attorney General prosecutors who provided invaluable assistance in prosecuting these 4 criminals. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Wes Mau, Raphael Guerrero and Darin Darby, who assisted on behalf of the Attorney General's Office and contributed tremendous time and energy in bringing these men to justice.

We arrived at the two plea agreements in this case after considering the varying degrees of culpability of the defendants, the level of cooperation they did or did not provide, the risks and benefits associated with trial and appeal, and the safety of the community.

Noel and Cristobal Cerna will remain in prison for the rest of their lives. Moises Cerna will not be eligible for parole until 2034. Misael Santollo will not be eligible until 2028.

Although no amount of punishment will make this family whole or right the wrong that was done to Dr. Gonzalez, I believe the sentences for each of these four men are appropriate considering the facts and circumstances of each case. "

Koehn also praised the dozens of law enforcement officers who participated in the investigation.

“These men could not have been convicted without the tireless efforts of law enforcement officers in our county and counties all over the State. A joint, cooperative front was launched across Texas to identify the perpetrators of this murder, locate them, and prove up this case. The Austin County Sheriff’s Office, Bellville Police Department, Sealy Police Department, Department of Public Safety, Texas Rangers, Houston Police Department, Austin Police Department and Fort Bend County Crime Scene Unit all played pivotal roles in the investigation.

“There are too many valuable, hardworking officers to name individually, but their willingness to work together, their commitment, and their diligence should be a source of pride to all those in the Austin County community,” Koehn added.