

This letter responds to your request for information concerning Operation Fast and Furious, an ongoing criminal investigation of an extensive gun-trafficking enterprise. Operation Fast and Furious is a part of Project Gunrunner, a broad ATF initiative to deal with weapons trafficking along the Southwest Border. As of March 2010, Project Gunrunner had led to the arrest of 1,397 defendants --850 of which had been convicted--and the seizure of over 6,688 firearms.

Operation Fast and Furious was opened over a year ago and approved by the ATF Phoenix Field Office and the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona, consistent with established procedures for such matters. The investigation was subsequently approved by the multi-agency Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force Program. The purpose of the investigation is to dismantle a transnational organization believed to be responsible for trafficking weapons into Mexico, in part by prosecuting its leadership. The investigation is led by a dedicated team of Federal prosecutors and ATF agents. To date, this investigation has resulted in an indictment charging 20 defendants with conspiracy to purchase hundreds of firearms from September 2009 to December 2010.

Allegations in the media and elsewhere suggest that Operation Fast and Furious was a failed effort. To the contrary, the investigation has dismantled a large, complex, international firearms trafficking case, and the investigation has not concluded. Without the perseverance of this multi-agency task force, this sophisticated criminal network would still be trafficking hundreds of weapons into Mexico today and in the future.

Operation Fast and Furious neither involved a "sting" in Mexico nor any "controlled deliveries" of weapons into Mexico. At no time did ATF agents observe weapons from Operation Fast and Furious cross into Mexico. There were no undercover law enforcement officers involved in Operation Fast and Furious and ATF did not provide weapons to suspects in that investigation.

The Department of Justice has a long standing policy against the disclosure of non-public information about ongoing criminal investigations. This policy is based, in part, on the strong interest in protecting the effectiveness of ongoing law enforcement efforts. Therefore, I am unable to share with you any particular details of Operation Fast and Furious.