

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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***For Immediate Release***

## **Imperial Beach Man Sentenced to Life in Fatal Stabbing of his Texas Boyfriend**

### **NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – December 11, 2017**

SAN DIEGO – David Enrique Meza of Imperial Beach was sentenced in federal court this morning to life in prison for fatally stabbing his boyfriend 24 times, slashing his throat to the point of near-decapitation and dumping his body in a ravine near Rosarito Beach, Mexico in order to inherit the boyfriend’s estate.

During today’s hearing, U.S. District Judge Jeffrey T. Miller called the murder an “inhumane, depraved act” and said the crime qualifies for a harsh sentence in part because of the unusually heinous, cruel nature of Meza’s actions. “The Merriam dictionary defines ‘heinous’ as hatefully or shockingly evil, abominable. This murder was shockingly evil – excessively so,” Judge Miller said.

On May 2, 2017, after two weeks of trial and seven days of deliberations, a jury found Meza guilty of murdering Texas retiree Jake Clyde Merendino in the early morning hours of May 2, 2015 in Mexico. Merendino’s body was found next to the highway between Rosarito and Ensenada in an area known as Los

Arenales. Meza was convicted of both charges in the indictment, including one count of Foreign Domestic Violence Resulting in Death and one count of Conspiracy to Obstruct Justice.

Judge Miller, in describing the reasoning behind the sentence, said at the hearing, “If we try to visualize what happened, we visualize blow, after blow, after blow, after blow, after slash, after slash, after slash, after blow, and repeat another three times...One can’t even imagine the torture and torment Mr. Merendino experienced.”

According to evidence presented at trial, Meza, then 25, and Merendino, then in his early 50s, met online in June 2013 and were involved in a romantic relationship thereafter. At the same time, Meza was also involved in a long-term romantic relationship with Taylor Marie Langston, a Chula Vista High graduate who was pregnant with his child at the time of the murder. Prosecutors said Meza was living a double life.

Merendino’s death came two days after he closed escrow on a luxury oceanfront condominium at Palacio del Mar in Rosarito. Meza was the beneficiary. Within days of the murder, Meza produced a handwritten will written on hotel stationery that made him sole heir to Merendino’s estate.

Judge Miller, who presided over the trial, told the courtroom that Meza was certainly motivated by greed, but he was also attempting to gain control of his spiraling circumstances. “His double life was collapsing under its own weight. A solution was the savage murder of Mr. Merendino.”

U.S. Attorney Adam Braverman said, “Nothing can spare the victim or his family the agony of this unspeakable crime, but today justice was delivered to a murderer who will suffer his own sort of agony – a lifetime in prison.”

“This life sentence, plus an additional 20 years for obstruction, is a just punishment for a callous, calculated and brutal murder,” stated FBI Special Agent in Charge Eric S. Birnbaum. “Our message to all crime victims and today, a message in the name of Jake Clyde Merendino: Every day, the FBI carries an unwavering commitment to work tirelessly to deliver justice for the victims of crime. Alongside our colleagues at United States Attorney’s Office and our law enforcement partners in Mexico, the FBI is proud to have done that today.”

According to evidence presented at trial, Meza and Merendino drove to Mexico on April 30, 2015, so Merendino could close on his \$273,000 ocean-view condominium at Palacio Del Mar in Rosarito.

The next day, on May 1, Meza and Merendino returned to Baja, this time with Merendino driving his Range Rover and Meza following on a motorcycle (a 2014 Christmas gift from the victim). The new condo was not yet ready for occupancy, so they checked in to a room at Bobby’s by the Sea, a hotel nearby.

At about 10:30 p.m., the hotel manager heard a motorcycle leaving the hotel parking lot, and Meza was captured on a border camera entering the U.S. at about 11 p.m. Meza returned to Mexico in the early morning hours of May 2, 2015, and his movements were tracked to the murder scene via GPS on his cell phone.

Merendino was last seen alive in the early morning hours of May 2, when he drove out of Bobby's by the Sea parking lot, telling the hotel security guard that he needed to help a friend stranded on the road. His body was found at around 3 a.m. by Mexican police officers. At 3:57 a.m. Meza crossed into the United States on his motorcycle.

At 7 p.m. the same day as the murder, Meza and his fiance returned to the Bobby's by the Sea hotel in the black SUV. Meza told hotel staff he was there to pick up his personal items from the room he had shared with Merendino.

After the slaying, Meza filed an application to probate a 2014 handwritten will in which Merendino left his entire estate to Meza.

U.S. Attorney Braverman thanked law enforcement counterparts from Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado - the Attorney General's office in the state of Baja California – as well as the Rosarito Municipal Police, for their assistance in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes.

Braverman noted that in certain circumstances, the United States has legal jurisdiction to prosecute crimes committed in other countries when U.S. citizens are victimized. "The United States will use every tool at its disposal to investigate and prosecute offenders who prey on U.S. citizens abroad."

**DEFENDANT**

**Case Number: 15CR3175-JM**

David Enrique Meza

Age: 27

**SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

**Count One**

Interstate or Foreign Domestic Violence Resulting in Murder, in violation of Title 18 United States Code, Section 2261 (a) (1).

Maximum Penalty: Life in prison

Sentence: Life in prison

**Count Two**

Conspiracy to Obstruct Justice, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1512 (k).

Maximum Penalty: 20 years in prison

Sentence: 20 years in prison

**AGENCY**

Federal Bureau of Investigation