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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Approved by JAK
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Re: Trial Convictions for First Degree, Special Circumstances Murder: Vicente Ibarra and Freddie Santa Cruz: Kern County Superior Court Case Number BF162787C+D

Bakersfield -- Kern County District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer announced a significant conviction in a homicide case today. On **April 15, 2022**, a Kern County jury found defendants Vicente Ibarra and Freddie Santa Cruz guilty of First-Degree Murder with the special circumstance of lying-in wait in addition to charges of Conspiracy to Commit Murder, Shooting at an Inhabited Dwelling, and Felon in Possession of a Firearm.

Ibarra was also found guilty of additional crimes including Attempted First-Degree Murder, Shooting at an Inhabited Dwelling, Assault with a Semi-Automatic Firearm. Upon being convicted by the jury, defendant Ibarra entered pleas of no contest to the remaining charges that included two counts of Criminal Threats and the gang charges which included the special circumstance of committing the murder in furtherance of a criminal street gang, amongst other enhancements asserting that the crimes were committed for gang-related benefit.

On **April 19, 2022**, the same jury also reached a verdict for co-defendant Freddie Santa Cruz relating to the remaining gang charges and allegations. The verdict included the special circumstance of committing the murder in furtherance of a criminal street gang, Active Gang Member in Possession of a Loaded Firearm, Active Gang Participation, and gang allegations for the First-Degree Murder, Conspiracy to Commit Murder, Shooting at an Inhabited Dwelling, and Felon in Possession of Firearm. The case was prosecuted by Supervising Deputy District Attorney Richard Choi.

During the holiday season of 2015, Ibarra and Santa Cruz, along with other active gang members, began what ultimately resulted in a spree of three separate shooting incidents and the murder of Ismael Ramirez. Both Ibarra and Santa Cruz were active members of the Varrio Wasco Rifas criminal street gang, a local gang centered in Wasco, CA. In the afternoon hours of December 29, 2015, one victim, a reformed gang member, had just arrived at his mother's residence in Wasco, CA. Shortly after the victim arrived and entering the residence, Ibarra arrived at the residence, exited a vehicle and fired numerous shots from a

9mm handgun at the victim, striking the residence multiple times.

Two days later, on the evening of New Year's Eve, multiple active Varrio Wasco Rifas gang members decided to go on a mission to kill the same reformed gang member that had been targeted in the previous shooting that Ibarra had committed. As part of that conspiracy, Vicente Ibarra and Freddie Santa Cruz traveled together with other active gang members to the victim's home. Once there, they found Ismael Ramirez, an innocent bystander who Ibarra and Santa Cruz incorrectly believed to be their intended target, the reformed gang member. While Mr. Ramirez was bringing in groceries in from his vehicle, he was shot multiple times with a 12-gauge shotgun and a 9mm handgun. Mr. Ramirez ultimately succumbed to his wounds a few days later.

Immediately after fleeing the murder, Ibarra and Santa Cruz drove to another Wasco residence where they committed yet another shooting, which resulted in gunshots striking a residence and vehicle parked in the driveway. Criminalists from the Kern Regional Crime Lab matched forensic evidence left at the three separate shooting scenes to a 9mm handgun found on Defendant Ibarra's person.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented on the convictions, stating; "The consequences of gang violence extend well beyond crimes committed between and against gang members. Gang violence frequently victimizes innocent bystanders and endangers entire communities, which is why effective prosecution of gang-related crime continues to be a priority. Kern County is undoubtedly safer because of the apprehension and conviction of these two killers."

The sentencing date is set for June 17, 2022, before the Honorable Kenneth Twisselman II in Department 9. Both Ibarra and Santa Cruz face sentences of life without possibility of parole.

Vicente Ibarra



Freddie Santa Cruz

