NEWS RELEASE

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ORANGE COUNTY MAN WHO ADMITTED HACKING INTO PERSONAL COMPUTERS SENTENCED TO SIX YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON FOR 'SEXTORTION' OF WOMEN AND TEENAGE GIRLS

LOS ANGELES – A Santa Ana man who hacked into dozens of computers to obtain personal data – and in some cases demanded sexually explicit videos from female victims in exchange for not distributing other images – was sentenced today to 72 months in federal prison.

Luis Mijangos, 32, an illegal alien from Mexico, received the six-year prison term from United States District Judge George H. King, who said the defendant engaged in "psychological warfare" and "cyberterrorism."

Mijangos pleaded guilty in March 2011 to computer hacking and wiretapping. When he pleaded guilty, Mijangos specifically admitted that in late 2009 he used malicious software to hack into a teenage girl's computer, which gave him control over the victim's webcam and allowed him to surreptitiously obtain naked photos of her. He also admitted that in April 2009, through the use of malware, he intercepted portions of a private conversation by listening through the microphone on a victim's computer.

In sentencing papers filed with the court this summer, prosecutors said Mijangos is a "computer hacker who infected the computers of hundreds of victims by sending Trojan emails and instant messages embedded with malicious software that gave him complete access to and control over the victims' computers." In addition to stealing financial information, Mijangos "read victims' emails and IMs, watched them through their webcams, and listened to them through the microphones on their computers.

Often, he then used the information he obtained to play psychological games with his victims."

Court documents filed in the case describe how Mijangos induced victims to download the malware onto their computers by making the files appear to be popular songs or videos. After the victims downloaded the malware, Mijangos was able to control their computers, allowing him to send instant messages containing malware from those computers to other people in the victims' address books. These later victims thought they were receiving messages from friends or family members.

Court papers also describe how Mijangos obtained images and videos from female victims, which he used to "sextort" victims by threatening to post intimate pictures on the Internet unless the victims provided Mijangos with more intimate images or videos. When one victim shared Mijangos "sextortionate" threats with a friend, Mijangos responded by posting nude pictures of the victim on her MySpace page, prosecutors said in their sentencing brief.

"We now live in a world gone digital, relying on our personal computers for everything from banking, to learning, to intimate communications with friends and family," said United States Attorney André Birotte Jr. "Mr. Mijangos invaded the sanctity of many personal digital worlds and used intimate content to victimize and prey upon unsuspecting victims."

Steven M. Martinez, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office, stated: "The sentence imposed on Mr. Mijangos is appropriate based on the chilling impact his behavior had on scores of young women. The FBI has seen a rise in similar cases based on the exploitation of emerging technologies by criminals, and it's my hope that this sentence serves as a warning for victims of Internet predators to advise law enforcement or a trusted source when threatened, and always refrain from sending compromising photographs via cyberspace."

At the time of Mijangos' arrest in June 2010, FBI computer forensics experts had determined that he had infected more than 100 computers that were used by approximately 230 individuals, at least 44 of whom were juveniles. In sentencing papers filed this year, prosecutors said that many other victims remain unidentified.

Mijangos told federal agents last year that he worked with "black hat" hackers to

obtain financial information that he claimed earned him as much as $3,000 per day, according to an affidavit filed in the case. But, prosecutors said in court papers that Mijangos also caused psychological harm to the young women and girls who were the victims of his “sextortion.”

During today’s sentencing hearing, two sextortion victims described how they were subjected to “nightmare” situations. One young woman said that before Mijangos victimized her she had been a victim of domestic violence, “and I want to tell you, there’s no difference.”

In sentencing Mijangos, Judge King said: “This was nothing short of a sustained effort to terrorize victims.” The court later added that “a lot of people suffered – and suffered greatly.”

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Glendale Police Department. The federal investigation into Mijangos started when the Glendale Police Department referred the matter to the FBI after receiving a complaint from a victim and realizing a sophisticated computer hacker may have been victimizing numerous people.

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