

## FOCUS LATIN AMERICA

# Mexico Worries About Scorn If Another Drug Lord Is Released



MEXICO'S ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hector Palma was a founder and leader of the Sinaloa cartel, along with imprisoned drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman.

### Associated Press

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador worried that yet another shadowy release of a drug lord is about to make Mexico a target of international ridicule.

Almost eight years ago, drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero walked out of a Mexican prison late at night with an improperly ordered release. He has since returned to drug trafficking and unleashed bloody turf battles in northern Mexico border state of Sonora.

On Saturday, another top capo of the Sinaloa cartel was about to walk in similar circumstances.

Hector "El Güero" Palma was hours away from freedom after a judge's secretary sent a letter — on a Saturday and national holiday — saying the government had to release him immediately after he was acquitted on organized crime charges.

"This is a matter of national import," López Obrador said Monday. "Imagine the suspicion, the jokes, the memes."

"Something similar happened when Mr. Caro Quintero was released," López Obrador recalled. "They accused us from abroad, accused the government of complicity. No foreign government should accuse the Mexican government, and we shouldn't give them a pretext to do that."

On Sunday, the judge sent another notification saying Palma had to be released by 4 p.m. López Obrador said prosecutors won a 48-hour extension to look for any outstanding warrants that could justify holding him. That runs out on Tuesday. The president has said that if none can be found, Palma should be released.

Mexico is beginning to earn a reputation as a government that, under López Obrador, has released more drug lords than it has captured, part of the president's stated policy of no longer detaining drug lords to avoid violence.

Former U.S. Ambassador Christopher Landau said in April that López Obrador views the fight against drug cartels "as a distraction. ... So he has basically adopted an agenda of a pretty laissez-faire attitude towards them, which is pretty troubling to our government, obviously."

López Obrador's policy hasn't accomplished much in decreasing drug violence in Mexico, and Palma's release, like Caro Quintero's, may only cause more bloodshed.

Known as "El Güero," or "Blondie," Palma was a founder and leader of the

Sinaloa cartel, along with imprisoned drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman. He and Guzman drew unwanted attention in 1993, when a Roman Catholic cardinal was killed in a shootout between Sinaloa gunmen and the rival Arellano Félix gang at an airport in Guadalajara. The gunmen apparently mistook the cardinal's luxury car for that of a rival.

Palma was arrested in Mexico in 1995, and served 12 years in Mexico on bribery and weapons charges before he was extradited to the United States in 2007, where he served nine years of a 16-year sentence for cocaine trafficking, before being sent back to Mexico, where he was held for trial on the organized crime charges that he was acquitted of last week.

Mexico's judicial system is already in low esteem, and the late-night or weekend release orders don't help its reputation for alleged corruption. López Obrador said he would push for a reform so that such release orders couldn't be issued on weekends.

While Caro Quintero's release predates López Obrador's administration — the president took office in December 2018 — the president has recently said it was "justified," because supposedly no verdict had been handed down against the drug lord after 27 years in jail.

In fact, there was a verdict; an appeals court improperly overturned it, but the verdict was later upheld by the Supreme Court. It was too late by then; Caro Quintero was spirited off in a waiting vehicle, is now a fugitive, and has tried to rebuild his old drug empire by fighting other drug gangs for turf in Sonora.

The issue is a particularly thorny one for López Obrador, because in 2019, López Obrador ordered the release of Ovidio Guzman, one of "El Chapo" Guzman's sons, to avoid bloodshed.

López Obrador has said his "hugs not bullets" policy is meant to avoid violence. But murder rates have declined only slightly from their peak in 2019.

Caro Quintero walked free while serving a 40-year sentence for the torture-murder of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena in 1985, and has since apparently resumed his role as violent drug trafficker.

Caro Quintero is at the top of the DEA's most wanted list, with a \$20 million reward for his capture.



## CITY OF DORAL NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

All residents, property owners and other interested parties are hereby notified of a **COUNCIL ZONING MEETING** on **May 19, 2021, beginning at 10:30 AM.**

**General Public Comments:** members of the public that wish to provide comments in writing may do so by emailing the City Clerk at [cityclerk@cityofdoral.com](mailto:cityclerk@cityofdoral.com). Comments must be submitted with your name and full address by **Tuesday, May 18, 2021 at 5:00 pm**. The comments will be circulated to the elected officials and administration, as well as remain as a part of the record for the meeting.

**Public Hearing Comments (Pre-Registration):** interested parties that wish to speak on the Public Hearing item(s) **ONLY**, must register by **Tuesday, May 18, 2021 at 5:00 pm** via this link: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8692485354599901197>

The meeting will be broadcasted live for members of the public to view on the City of Doral's website (<https://www.cityofdoral.com/government/city-clerk/council-meetings>) as well as Channel 77 and Facebook Live.

The City of Doral proposes to adopt the following Ordinance:

### ORDINANCE No. 2021-14

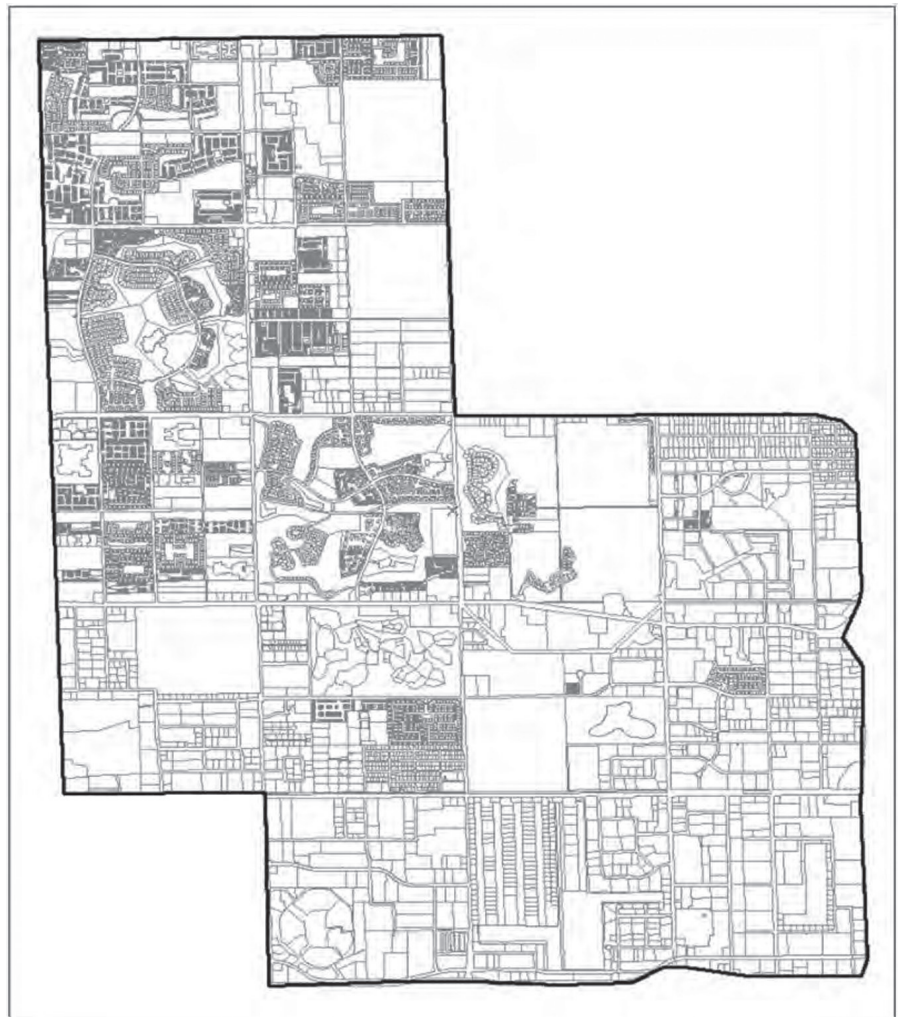
**AN ORDINANCE OF THE MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF DORAL, FLORIDA, APPROVING/DENYING AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING A SIX-MONTH MORATORIUM ON THE PROCESSING OF NEW DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS AND ON THE ISSUANCE OF DEVELOPMENT ORDERS AND PERMITS FOR PROPERTIES LOCATED WITHIN THE "DORAL DÉCOR DISTRICT"; PROVIDING FOR EXTENSION OF SAID MORATORIUM BY RESOLUTION; PROVIDING FOR VESTED RIGHTS; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICTS; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE**

**HEARING NO.:** 21-05-DOR-06

**APPLICANT:** City of Doral

**REQUEST:** The City of Doral Staff is requesting Mayor and City Council approval of a six-month moratorium on the processing of applications and on the issuance of development orders and permits for properties located within the Doral Décor District.

### Location Map



Inquiries regarding the item may be directed to the Planning and Zoning Department at 305-59-DORAL.

Pursuant to Section 286.0105, Florida Statutes If a person decides to appeal any decisions made by the City Council with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing, they will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose, may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. This notice does not constitute consent by the City for introduction or admission of otherwise inadmissible or irrelevant evidence, nor does it authorize challenges or appeals not otherwise allowed by law. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, any person who is disabled and who need special accommodations to participate in this meeting because of that disability should contact the Planning and Zoning Department at 305-59-DORAL no later than three (3) business days prior to the proceeding.

Connie Diaz, MMC  
City Clerk  
City of Doral City of Doral  
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