

Jury picked in trial of Cuban terrorist

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The second trial of reputed Omega 7 leader Eduardo Arocena got under way Monday with the selection of a six-man, six-woman jury to hear conspiracy and gun possession charges against him and former firearms dealer Milton Badias.

Arocena faces one count of conspiracy to manufacture and possess machine guns and silencers and one count of possession of automatic firearms. Badias faces a single count of conspiracy.

Although attorneys agreed on a jury late Monday, U.S. District Judge William Hoeveler put off swearing in the 12 jurors and four alternates until after a pre-trial hearing scheduled for this morning.

Monday's trial began amid tight security for Arocena. At least six U.S. marshals — at times



Arocena

outnumbering spectators — guarded entrances to Hoeveler's courtroom.

For security reasons, Arocena is wearing a bullet-proof vest while he is being transported from the Dade County Jail — where he is staying during the trial — to the courthouse.

Arocena's court-appointed attorney, Miguel San Pedro, objected Monday to his client having to stay at the jail. He said Arocena, who has complained about conditions there, believes he was put there as a "reprisal" on the part of the U.S. government.

Hoeveler rejected the complaint. "I'm sure one of the reasons is convenience," he said.

Before the trial began, Arocena was being held at the Metropolitan Correctional Center next to Metrozoo in Southwest Dade, more than 20 miles from the federal courthouse.

Monday, everyone visiting Arocena in a small cubicle off the courtroom where he is being held during recesses was photographed by federal marshals.

The federal agents said they wanted to make sure from now on only Arocena's immediate family and his attorney are allowed

to visit him.

As attorneys questioned potential jurors Monday, Arocena, wearing gold-rimmed aviator glasses and a tan three-piece suit, listened impassively to a translator on an earphone, his chin resting on his left hand.

San Pedro told Hoeveler he intends to show Arocena was "framed" by members of Omega 7 who believed he was a government informant.

Arocena has denied that he is "Omar," the leader of the terrorist group, although he stated in a previous trial in New York City that he "unconditionally supports" Omega 7's actions.

Arocena faces another trial — this one on charges of bombing the Venezuelan and Mexican consulates in Miami and a Little Havana cigar firm — after the conspiracy and possession trial ends.

Arocena already has been sentenced to life plus 35 years in New York after he was convicted on the murder of a diplomatic attache with the Cuban delegation to the United Nations and of masterminding 25 bombings during a 10-year period.