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Woman acquitted of importing drugs in candles

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A single mother was acquitted Friday of federal charges that she used hollowed-out candles to import 12 pounds of cocaine into the United States.

Haydee Blanco, 29, of Manhattan and several family members wept for joy after the verdict was announced in federal court in Brooklyn.

Jurors later told defense attorney Florian Miedel that they didn't believe Blanco, who works as a supervisor at a Dean & DeLuca coffee shop, knew the drugs were in the candles when she agreed to bring them into the country on a flight last year from her native Dominican Republic. "Speechless," a teary-eyed Blanco, who has a pre-teen son, said when asked her reaction to the acquittal, "I was like, 'I can't believe it!'"

Blanco, a U.S. citizen born in the Dominican Republic, faced a possible 8-year sentence if she had been convicted, Miedel said.

He said that before his client was indicted, he brought her to the Brooklyn U.S. attorney's office for an "innocence proffer," a meeting with investigators to profess her innocence. But the government decided to charge her anyway, said Miedel, an attorney with the federal defender section of the Legal Aid Society.

Robert Nardoza, a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office, declined to comment Friday.

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