

Treasury Increases Pressure on Mexican Heroin Traffickers

March 6, 2018

New Kingpin Act Sanctions Target Joel Efren Ruelas Avila

Washington –The U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) today increased its pressure on major Mexican heroin traffickers by targeting individuals and companies close to the new leadership of the Ruelas Torres drug trafficking organization (Ruelas Torres DTO). Treasury imposed additional sanctions on eight Mexican individuals and eight Mexican companies linked to the Sinaloa-based criminal organization, which has been led by Joel Efren Ruelas Avila since the 2017 death of his father Jose Luis Ruelas Torres. This action is taken pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (Kingpin Act). As a result of today’s action, U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions or otherwise dealing with these individuals and companies, and any assets they may have under U.S. jurisdiction are frozen.

“Heroin use is an epidemic in the United States, fueled by smugglers like Joel Efren Ruelas Avila and his drug trafficking organization who bring deadly drugs across our Southern border and seek to launder illicit proceeds back into Mexico,” said Sigal Mandelker, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. “OFAC, DEA and the Department of Justice continue to methodically target the individuals and businesses who profit from the sale of this poison.”

Today’s OFAC action designates Mexican nationals Maria Monserrat Avila Rocha, Patricia Lourdes Ruelas Avila, Jose Maria Ruelas Avila, Trinidad Ruelas Avila, Raquel Rivera Guerrero, and Cruz Sanchez Medrano, all family members of Joel Efren Ruelas Avila. The OFAC action also targets Mexican nationals Pedro Sanchez Medrano and Reyna Isabel Rivera Sandoval, key associates of the Ruelas Torres DTO. The eight Mexican entities designated today include five agricultural companies, Agricola Ruelas S.P.R. de R.I., Alondra Produce, S.P.R. de R.I., Comercializadora Gael 4, S.A. de C.V., Dispensora Gael, S.A. de C.V., and Felixtapia S.C. de R.L. de C.V.; two construction companies, Constructora Joel, S.A. de C.V. and Constructora Vania, S.A. de C.V.; and one clothing boutique, Cruzita Novedades. All of the entities designated today are based or registered in the Mexican state of Sinaloa. OFAC, the Drug Enforcement

Administration's (DEA) Denver Field Division, and Mexican authorities worked closely to execute today's action.

The Ruelas Torres DTO has been involved in the manufacture and distribution of heroin from Sinaloa, Mexico to the United States for generations. The Ruelas Torres DTO is now led by Joel Efren Ruelas Avila and immediate family members who support narcotics trafficking activities, including money laundering or maintaining assets on behalf of the Ruelas Torres DTO.

In 2015, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Colorado charged Mexican national Jose Luis Ruelas Torres and his son Joel Efren Ruelas Avila with running a Continuing Criminal Enterprise, along with related narcotics trafficking and money laundering offenses. OFAC identified Mexican national Jose Luis Ruelas Torres and the Ruelas Torres DTO as significant foreign narcotics traffickers pursuant to the Kingpin Act in May 2017. Mexican authorities arrested Jose Luis Ruelas Torres in April 2017, and he died in October 2017 while awaiting extradition to the United States. His son Joel Efren Ruelas Avila, who OFAC also designated in May 2017, leads the Ruelas Torres DTO and remains at large.

Since June 2000, more than 2,000 entities and individuals have been named pursuant to the Kingpin Act for their role in international narcotics trafficking. Penalties for violations of the Kingpin Act range from civil penalties of up to \$1,437,153 per violation to more severe criminal penalties. Criminal penalties for corporate officers may include up to 30 years in prison and fines of up to \$5 million. Criminal fines for corporations may reach \$10 million. Other individuals could face up to 10 years in prison and fines pursuant to the Title 18 of the United States Code for criminal violations of the Kingpin Act.

[Information on the individuals and entities designated today.](#)

[The Kingpin Act chart on individuals and entities designated today](#) .

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