

Treasury Sanctions Security Officials Associated with Violence and Obstruction of Humanitarian Aid Delivery

March 1, 2019

Treasury further targets security officials loyal to Maduro as humanitarian aid is prevented from entering Venezuela

Washington – Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated six Venezuelan government officials who are aligned with illegitimate former President Nicolas Maduro and associated with the obstruction of humanitarian aid deliveries into Venezuela on February 23, 2019. In order to prevent much needed aid from reaching the suffering people of Venezuela, Maduro closed Venezuela’s border and deployed official, and unofficial, military and security forces to Venezuela’s borders with Colombia and Brazil where the humanitarian aid convoys were set to cross. This action, taken pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13692, targets six security officials who control many of the groups that prevented humanitarian aid from entering Venezuela, thereby exacerbating the humanitarian crisis that has left millions of Venezuelans starving and without access to medical care under the Maduro regime

“Former President Nicolas Maduro’s border blockades of trucks and ships loaded with humanitarian aid are the latest example of his illegitimate regime weaponizing the delivery of food and critically needed supplies in order to control vulnerable Venezuelans. We are sanctioning members of Maduro’s security forces in response to the reprehensible violence, tragic deaths, and unconscionable torching of food and medicine destined for sick and starving Venezuelans,” said Treasury Secretary Steven T. Mnuchin. “The United States strongly supports the efforts of Interim President Juan Guaidó, and Treasury will continue to target Maduro loyalists prolonging the suffering of the victims of this man-made humanitarian crisis.”

To combat the significant humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, the United States led a multilateral initiative on February 23 to fund and stage hundreds of tons of humanitarian aid for delivery into Venezuela. Trucks were organized to carry these supplies across the border from Colombia and Brazil into Venezuela, but the Venezuelan military and security forces controlled by Maduro blocked the aid before it could cross the border. These Maduro-controlled groups and units

fired tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters and set some humanitarian aid trucks ablaze. Additionally, a vessel carrying humanitarian aid from Puerto Rico to Venezuela received direct threat of fire by Venezuelan naval ships.

One of the groups staged along the Venezuelan border to prevent the humanitarian aid from reaching the people was Maduro's Special Police Unit, the FAES, or the Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales. The FAES' appearance at the border came at the same time as the announcement that humanitarian aid would be arriving to the border regions. Maduro created the FAES originally to put down armed gangs and rescue hostages; since then, the FAES has been used by Maduro to suppress dissent using deadly operations, to crack down on Maduro's political opponents and the opposition, and to control crowds of protesters. Maduro has cultivated the FAES to serve as a force loyal to him and not to the Venezuelan people or the constitution. The illegitimate Maduro regime uses the FAES to suppress public shows of defiance by members of the armed forces, including when the Maduro regime arrested members of the Venezuelan National Guard after they pledged allegiance to the opposition in January 2019.

After stopping aid from reaching Venezuelan citizens, Maduro severed diplomatic ties with Colombia. According to the Colombian foreign minister, following clashes with Venezuelan security forces throughout the day, Colombian authorities documented that the violent actions of the Maduro regime had left at least five people dead and 285 people injured, of whom 27 required hospitalization.

The following six individuals designated today control many of the groups that prevented humanitarian aid from entering Venezuela on February 23, and these individuals have been determined to be current or former officials of the Government of Venezuela:

- **Richard Jesus Lopez Vargas (Lopez)** is a Major General and the Commanding General of the Venezuelan National Guard, or the *Guardia Nacional Bolivariana*, commonly referred to as the GNB, as well as a member of the High Command of the GNB. Lopez is a Venezuelan military officer who has kept Maduro in power, and is one of the senior Venezuelan military officers who is helping Maduro maintain control over the Venezuelan armed forces.
- **Jesus Maria Mantilla Oliveros (Mantilla)** is a Major General and the Commander of Strategic Integral Defense Region Guayana, or the *Región Estratégica de Defensa Integral Guayana*, commonly referred to as REDI Guayana. Ahead of the humanitarian deliveries on February 23, Maduro urged Mantilla to reinforce security measures on the Venezuelan border with Brazil in order to protect the Venezuelan people from any provocations or

violence that would occur on the border. Maduro added that his illegitimate regime was preparing plans for the permanent deployment of military corps to these border areas.

- **Alberto Mirtiliano Bermudez Valderrey (Bermudez)** is the Division General for the Integral Defense Zone in Bolivar State, or *Zona Operativa de Defensa Integral del estado Bolivar*, commonly referenced to as ZODI Bolivar State, bordering on Brazil. Bermudez is close to the Commander of REDI Guayana, Mantilla, and the Commander General of the GNB, Lopez.
- **Jose Leonardo Norono Torres (Norono)** is the Division General and Commander for the Integral Defense Zone in Tachira State, commonly referred to as ZODI Tachira State, bordering on Colombia. In mid-February 2019, Norono identified the opposition members as stateless actors, calling them traitors who want to see Venezuela filled with blood.
- **Jose Miguel Dominguez Ramirez (Dominguez)** is the Chief Commissioner of the FAES in Tachira State. Additionally, Dominguez was the Director of Operations of the FAES, which falls within Venezuela's Bolivarian National Police, or *Policia Nacional Bolivariana*, commonly referenced to as the PNB. In 2018, Dominguez was quoted saying that the point of the FAES was to fulfill the function of eradicating organized criminal mafias engaged in smuggling and extortion, and that the most important focus of the FAES is to fight paramilitary groups at the border, who attack the population and encourage economic warfare. In reality, the FAES are known for their violent role in suppressing dissent from Maduro's political opponents, the opposition, and protesters, and as recent as February 23, preventing humanitarian aid from reaching the Venezuelan people who so desperately need it. According to Dominguez, there is explicit coordination between the FAES in Tachira and Commander Norono of ZODI Tachira. Previously, Dominguez was a member of the Venezuelan security team that opened fire on unarmed student protestors on February 12, 2014, resulting in the death of at least one of the students, Bassil Dacosta. Dominguez was also linked to the 2008 bombing of the Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce, also known as FEDECAMARAS, headquarters that resulted in one death.
- **Cristhiam Abelardo Morales Zambrano (Morales)** is the Director of the PNB and a Colonel within GNB. In early 2018, as the Regional Chief of the PNB in Tachira State, Morales was responsible for the escape of several convicts imprisoned in a PNB building in Tachira State.

For information about the methods that Venezuelan senior political figures, their associates, and front persons use to move and hide corrupt proceeds, including how they try to exploit the U.S. financial system and real estate market, please refer to FinCEN's advisories [FIN-2017-A006](#)

 , “Advisory on Widespread Public Corruption in Venezuela,” and [FIN-2017-A003](#)  ,
“Advisory to Financial Institutions and Real Estate Firms and Professionals.”

As a result of today’s action, all property and interests in property of these individuals, and of any entities that are owned, directly or indirectly, 50 percent or more by these individuals, that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked and must be reported to OFAC. OFAC’s regulations generally prohibit all dealings by U.S. persons or within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property of blocked or designated persons.

U.S. sanctions need not be permanent; sanctions are intended to bring about a positive change of behavior. The United States has made clear that the removal of sanctions is available for persons designated under E.O. 13692 or E.O. 13850 who take concrete and meaningful actions to restore democratic order, refuse to take part in human rights abuses, speak out against abuses committed by the former Maduro regime, and combat corruption in Venezuela.

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