

Treasury Sanctions Nicaraguan Government Officials Involved in Human Rights Abuse and Social Security Corruption

November 7, 2019

WASHINGTON – Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated three Nicaraguan government officials, Ramon Antonio Avellan Medal, Lumberto Ignacio Campbell Hooker, and Roberto Jose Lopez Gomez, who have had a role in directing entities engaged in human rights abuses, election fraud, and corruption. Additionally, Ramon Antonio Avellan Medal is being designated for human rights abuse pursuant to the Nicaragua Human Rights and Anticorruption Act of 2018 (NHRAA).

“We are targeting members of the Ortega regime who have engaged in human rights abuse and corruption,” said Treasury Deputy Secretary Justin Muzinich. “The United States stands with the Nicaraguan people in their calls for a return to democracy — including through early, free, and fair elections.”

Today’s action is being taken pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13851, and targets Nicaraguan government officials who persecute Nicaraguan citizens exercising their fundamental freedoms; who rig elections; and who abuse the social security system as a vehicle for corruption. 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 such 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 within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property of blocked or designated persons. Further details on these designations are included below.

RAMON ANTONIO AVELLAN MEDAL

Ramon Antonio Avellan Medal (Avellan) is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13851 and the NHRAA for being a current official of the Government of Nicaragua, and for being the Deputy Director General of the Nicaraguan National Police (NNP), an entity that has, or whose members have, engaged in significant acts of violence or human rights abuse against persons associated with the protests that began on April 18, 2018.

Avellan carried out the regime's campaign against the opposition and enforces repressive measures, conducts arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, and disappearances of anti-government protesters. Avellan led "Operation Clean Up" on behalf of President Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo to dismantle barricades erected by democratic protesters in Masaya and Monimbo. Attacks by the NNP and parapolice under his command led to 107 deaths and hundreds injured.

LUMBERTO IGNACIO CAMPBELL HOOKER

Lumberto Ignacio Campbell Hooker (Campbell) is the acting President of the Nicaraguan Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), and he is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13851 for being a current official of the Government of Nicaragua.

Campbell has been acting President of the CSE since 2018, and prior to that, was CSE Vice President since 2014. The CSE continues to be involved in undemocratic tactics to ensure that President Ortega and his allies win elections, including ordering government employees to vote for Ortega and other FSLN candidates.

ROBERTO JOSE LOPEZ GOMEZ

Roberto Jose Lopez Gomez (Lopez) is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13851 for being a current official of the Government of Nicaragua, and for being the Director of the Nicaraguan Social Security Institute (INSS), an entity that has, or whose members have, engaged in a transaction or series of transactions involving deceptive practices or corruption by or on behalf of, or otherwise related to the Government of Nicaragua, or a current or former official, such as misappropriation of public assets or expropriation of private assets for personal gain or political purposes, corruption related to government contracts, or bribery.

Lopez's April 16, 2018 announcement of changes to the INSS sparked the protests that marked the onset of the political crisis. The INSS is one of the main vehicles facilitating corruption, and has been used as a government slush fund. The INSS has been implicated in corruption scandals and money laundering schemes under Lopez' watch, from financing a multimillion dollar high-rise on land owned by Lopez, to favoring contracts with government-affiliated construction firms and pharmaceutical suppliers, to making illegitimate payments to officials via shell companies. The INSS gives out loans significantly above cost, then allows borrowers to default on the loan but clears the debt by allowing them to turn over assets worth much less than the value of the loan.

Identifying information on the entities designated today.

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