Treasury Continues Pressure on Illegitimate Regime Officials Undermining Democracy in Venezuela

September 22, 2020

Washington – Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated five key figures that have facilitated the illegitimate Maduro regime’s efforts to undermine democracy in Venezuela. These individuals, including Maduro-supporting members of the Venezuelan National Assembly (Asamblea Nacional or AN), have acted as part of a broader scheme to manipulate parliamentary elections taking place in December 2020 by placing control of Venezuela’s opposition parties in the hands of politicians affiliated with Nicolas Maduro’s regime, undermining any credible opposition challenge to that regime.

“The United States remains committed to holding the Maduro regime and its supporters accountable for their blatant corruption to ensure that the Venezuelan people secure the free and fair election they deserve,” said Secretary Steven T. Mnuchin.

These individuals are being designated pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13692, as amended.

MADURO REGIME USURPATION OF VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION PARTIES

On July 1, 2020, the Maduro regime-aligned National Electoral Council (Consejo Nacional Electoral or CNE) announced that parliamentary elections will be held on December 6, 2020. In response, Interim President Juan Guaidó announced Venezuelans opposed to Maduro would not participate in the elections on the grounds that the members of the CNE were illegally selected by the illegitimate Maduro regime-controlled Supreme Court of Justice (Tribunal Supremo de Justicia or TSJ). Additionally, 37 opposition parties joined a statement saying they will boycott the elections because CNE members were illegitimately selected by the TSJ. Those opposition parties believe that the elections will be manipulated by the regime, and that participating would be equivalent to “collaborating with the strategy of the dictatorship.”
During the past three months, the TSJ has heard cases brought forward by corrupt illegitimate regime-affiliated members of parties ostensibly opposed to Maduro, challenging the leadership of three of the four largest opposition parties. In each case, the TSJ ruled in favor of the regime affiliates, resulting in the leadership of each of those parties being replaced by an ad hoc board of directors; many of the members of these boards were involved in a prior regime attempt to corruptly take over the Venezuelan National Assembly (Asamblea Nacional or AN) in January 2020. By handpicking the leaders of political parties otherwise opposed to him and appointing a new electoral monitor in contravention of the Venezuelan constitution, Maduro is undemocratically redrawing Venezuela’s electoral map ahead of the December 6 elections to ensure a favorable outcome that will prolong his attempted dictatorship.

OFAC is designating the following individuals:

1. **Miguel Antonio Jose Ponente Parra** (Ponente), the *ad hoc* TSJ Secretary General of Maduro-opposed party *Primero Justicia* (PJ), under *ad hoc* party chair Jose Dionisio Brito Rodriguez (Brito). Ponente is a national political delegate for PJ and chief of staff to Luis Eduardo Parra Rivero (Parra), the self-proclaimed speaker of a fraudulent Maduro-led iteration of the National Assembly. Today, Ponente was designated pursuant to E.O. 13692, as amended, for being a current or former official of the Government of Venezuela.

2. **Guillermo Antonio Luces Osorio** (Luces), the *ad hoc* TSJ Secretary General of Maduro-opposed party *Voluntad Popular* (VP), under *ad hoc* party chair Jose Gregorio Noriega Figueroa (Noriega). Luces is also an alternate deputy in the AN for the *Mesa de la Unidad Democratica* (MUD). Luces was a VP deputy until he was expelled from the party in December 2019 for his alleged involvement in Operation Scorpion (*Operación Alacrán*), a vote-buying bribery scheme led by Maduro and his cronies, including U.S.-designated David de Lima. Today, Luces was designated pursuant to E.O. 13692, as amended, for being a current or former official of the Government of Venezuela. (See background below for additional detail on Operation Scorpion.)

3. **Jose Bernabe Gutierrez Parra** (Jose Bernabe Gutierrez), the *ad hoc* TSJ party chair of Maduro-opposed party *Accion Democratica* (AD). Jose Bernabe Gutierrez was expelled from AD in June 2020 for conspiring with the Maduro regime to force AD to join a false opposition led by the regime and force AD’s participation in fraudulent elections called illegitimately by the CNE. His re-appointment to the AD leadership by the TSJ was a “package deal,” along with his U.S.-sanctioned brother Jose Luis Gutierrez Parra’s (Jose...
Luis Gutierrez) appointment to the CNE. Jose Bernabe Gutierrez and Jose Luis Gutierrez were allegedly paid off to accept these positions and exercise them in the interests of the illegitimate Maduro regime. Upon being named chair of AD, Jose Bernabe Gutierrez confirmed that AD would participate in the December 6 parliamentary election, in contravention of the party’s opposition to the elections prior to the TSJ’s ruling. Today, Jose Bernabe Gutierrez was designated pursuant to E.O. 13692, as amended, for being responsible for or complicit in, or responsible for ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, or having participated in, directly or indirectly, actions or policies that undermine democratic processes or institutions in or in relation to Venezuela.

4. Chaim Jose Bucaran Paraguan (Bucaran), who along with Adolfo Ramon Superlano (Superlano), petitioned the TSJ in June 2020 to challenge the leadership of the fourth largest Maduro-opposed party, Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT), and award leadership of UNT to themselves. Their goal is to install an ad hoc UNT Board of Directors that will allow the party to participate in the December 6 parliamentary election, which the current UNT leadership opposes. Bucaran was a UNT deputy in the AN until he was expelled from the party in January 2020 for participating in a Maduro regime effort to elect a pro-regime deputy as AN Speaker by physically preventing many opposition deputies from voting. Today, Bucaran was designated pursuant to E.O. 13692, as amended, for being a current or former official of the Government of Venezuela.

REGIME TAKEOVER OF FORMERLY ALLIED PARTY

In August 2020, the TSJ also replaced the leadership of the Partido Tendencias Unificadas Para Alcanzar Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria Organizada (Tupamaro), a party that used to be allied with Maduro’s ruling Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). The TSJ named Williams José Benavides Rondón (Benavides) ad hoc President of Tupamaro. Benavides is an alternate deputy in the AN for PSUV. After being named President of Tupamaro, Benavides tweeted out his support for Maduro from the official Tupamaro Twitter account; in addition, he confirmed that Tupamaro will participate in the December 6 parliamentary election. Today, Benavides was designated pursuant to E.O. 13692, as amended, for being a current or former official of the Government of Venezuela.

BACKGROUND ON THE ILLEGITIMATE REGIME’S PHASED APPROACH TO SEIZING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
The illegitimate regime's attempts to take over the AN started in November 2019, with “Operation Scorpion.” Led by former Venezuelan governor David De Lima (De Lima), the Maduro regime allegedly bought the votes of opposition deputies in the AN in amounts of up to $1 million dollars. These bribes were made in an effort to undermine the January 2020 re-election of Juan Guaidó as president of the AN. Treasury designated De Lima on September 4, 2020, pursuant to E.O. 13692, as amended, for being responsible for or complicit in, or responsible for ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, or having participated in, directly or indirectly, public corruption by senior officials within the Government of Venezuela.

In January 2020, a group of corrupted pro-Maduro opposition deputies in the AN organized to physically block many opposition deputies, including Juan Guaidó, from entering the building to vote in the election for President of the AN. Meanwhile, inside the Assembly building, a number of corrupted pro-Maduro regime AN deputies, including Brito, Noriega, Superlano, and Bucaran, voted to elect Parra despite not having a quorum. Eventually, the opposition deputies forced their way inside the Assembly and re-elected interim President Juan Guaidó. OFAC designated Brito, Noriega, Superlano, and Parra on January 13, 2020, pursuant to E.O. 13692, as amended, for being current or former officials of the Government of Venezuela.

In the spring of 2020, the TSJ issued several questionable legal rulings in support of Maduro’s selection of officials to key government positions, which have oversight of Venezuela’s national wealth and assets, and election processes. In June 2020, the TSJ named a new, regime-aligned CNE, undermining a power granted to the AN under Venezuela’s constitution. One of the new regime-aligned National Electoral Council officials is Jose Luis Gutierrez. This move is part of the series of efforts Maduro has taken to ensure a parliamentary electoral farce on December 6, 2020. OFAC designated Jose Luis Gutierrez on September 4, 2020, pursuant to E.O. 13692, as amended, for being a current or former official of the Government of Venezuela.

**TODAY’S ACTION**

As a result of today’s action, all property and interests in property of 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. In addition, any entities that are owned, directly or indirectly, 50 percent or more by the designated individuals are also blocked. OFAC’s regulations generally prohibit
all dealings by U.S. persons or those 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 may be available for individuals and entities designated pursuant to E.O. 13692, as amended, 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 illegitimate Maduro regime, or combat corruption in Venezuela.

View identifying information on the individuals designated today.

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