Treasury Identifies Sinaloa-based Mexican Narcotics Trafficker That Helps Fuel the U.S. Opioid Epidemic

Kingpin Act Sanctions Target Jesus Gonzalez Penuelas

WASHINGTON – Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) identified Jesus Gonzalez Penuelas and the Gonzalez Penuelas Drug Trafficking Organization (Gonzalez Penuelas DTO) as Significant Foreign Narcotics Traffickers pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (Kingpin Act). Jesus Gonzalez Penuelas (a.k.a. “Chuy Gonzalez”) and his drug trafficking organization are among the largest sources of raw opium gum and heroin in northern Mexico, and increasingly are a major distributor of fentanyl to U.S. markets. OFAC also designated today six individuals and one entity as Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers pursuant to the Kingpin Act for their links to the Gonzalez Penuelas DTO. OFAC coordinated this action with, among others, the Department of Justice, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Department of Homeland Security. Today’s action is being announced as DEA carries out Operation Money Sweep, a collaborative effort between DEA and other law enforcement partners to disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations, such as the Gonzalez Penuelas DTO, by targeting their money laundering activities.

“Treasury is targeting those criminal leaders such as Jesus Gonzalez Penuelas and organizations that help fuel our nation’s opioid epidemic,” said Andrea Gacki, Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control. “The Gonzalez Penuelas Drug Trafficking Organization smuggles various drugs, including heroin and fentanyl, from Mexico for distribution in multiple U.S. cities. Treasury and our U.S. government partners, including the Drug Enforcement Administration, will continue to use every available resource to dismantle these criminal networks.”

Mexican national Jesus Gonzalez Penuelas has been the leader of an independent methamphetamine, marijuana, and heroin production and distribution organization since at least 2007. He oversees multiple heroin processing laboratories in Sinaloa. In addition, the Gonzalez Penuelas DTO is responsible for transporting and selling cocaine and M-30s
The Gonzalez Penuelas DTO operates primarily in Sinaloa and Sonora, Mexico, various ports of entry in the United States, and numerous U.S.-based distribution cells in California, Texas, Colorado, Washington, Utah, and Nevada. The upper echelons of the Gonzalez Penuelas DTO hierarchy consist of Jesus Gonzalez Penuelas’ family members. The Gonzalez Penuelas DTO cooperates with other DTOs within Mexico, including acting as an enforcement arm for the various Mexican DTO’s trafficking routes, and is aligned with Mexican drug kingpins Fausto Isidro Meza Flores and Rafael Caro Quintero, both of whom are subject to Treasury sanctions.

“These sanctions targeting Gonzalez Penuelas and his associates will go a long way to disrupting the heroin supply flowing across the Southwest Border,” said Deanne Reuter, Special Agent in Charge of DEA Denver Field Division. “DEA applauds the work of our partners in the United States Attorney’s Offices and the Treasury Department in making it harder for Gonzalez Penuelas to commit these crimes that affect our communities.”

OFAC also designated several key associates of Jesus Gonzalez Penuelas today: his brothers Ignacio and Wilfrido Gonzalez Penuelas, Efrain Mendivil Figueroa, Adelmo Nunez Molina, and Raul and Juana Payan Meraz. Ignacio Gonzalez Penuelas, a Mexican national, serves as a primary lieutenant for the organization by overseeing the security of narcotics shipments. In 2018, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Colorado charged Ignacio Gonzalez Penuelas with multiple drug trafficking offenses. Mexican national Wilfrido Gonzalez Penuelas is involved in heroin and opium trafficking by operating street-level stores within the Gonzalez Penuelas DTO’s territory in Mexico. Efrain Mendivil Figueroa is also a Mexican national and one of the Gonzalez Penuelas DTO’s fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine distributors and transportation coordinators. In 2019, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Oregon charged him with trafficking heroin, methamphetamine, and fentanyl. Mexican national Adelmo Nunez Molina is a raw opium gum source-of-supply for Jesus Gonzalez Penuelas. In 2019, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Colorado charged Adelmo Nunez Molina with various drug trafficking charges. Raul Payan Meraz, a Mexican national, oversees poppy production for the Gonzalez Penuelas DTO. Juana Payan Meraz, also a Mexican national, is a narcotics trafficking associate of Raul Payan Meraz.
OFAC also designated the construction company City Plaza, Sociedad Anonima de Capital Variable, based in Guasave, Sinaloa, for being owned or controlled by Efrain Mendivil Figueroa.

As a result of today’s OFAC action, all property and interests in property of the identified or designated persons that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons must be blocked and reported to OFAC. OFAC’s regulations generally prohibit all transactions by U.S. persons or persons within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property of designated or otherwise blocked persons.

Since June 2000, more than 2,200 entities and individuals have been sanctioned 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 $1,548,075 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 Title 18 of the United States Code for criminal violations of the Kingpin Act.

View more information on the entities designated today.

View the Kingpin Act chart on entities designated today.