Treasury Sanctions Three Fentanyl Traffickers Contributing to the U.S. Opioid Crisis

January 30, 2023

WASHINGTON – Today, the Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated the leader of a Mexico-based network and two associates pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 14059 for procuring precursor chemicals to manufacture and traffic illicit fentanyl and other synthetic drugs to the United States. Today’s action is the result of ongoing efforts by U.S. agencies to disrupt the importation into and distribution of illicit fentanyl within the United States. This action was coordinated closely with the government of Mexico and would not have been possible without the cooperation and support of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

“Illicit fentanyl has led to unprecedented overdose deaths in the United States, with a majority of these drugs flowing from Mexican cartels, including the Sinaloa Cartel, using precursor chemicals from East Asia,” said Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. “The United States will continue working with the government of Mexico to disrupt this deadly trade.”

Today’s designation includes Mexican national Jose Angel Rivera Zazueta (Rivera Zazueta), the leader of a drug manufacturing and trafficking organization based in Culiacan, Sinaloa and Mexico City, Mexico. Rivera Zazueta’s network operates on a global scale with nodes in the United States, Mexico, South and Central America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. Rivera Zazueta imports precursor chemicals from China into Mexico, which are then used to manufacture synthetic drugs, including fentanyl, MDMA (ecstasy), crystal methamphetamine, 2C-B, and ketamine.

Rivera Zazueta has worked closely with OFAC-designated Chinese chemical transportation company Shanghai Fast-Fine Chemicals, which has shipped various, often falsely labeled, precursor chemicals to Drug Trafficking Organizations in Mexico for illicit fentanyl production intended for U.S. markets. OFAC designated Shanghai Fast Fine Chemicals on December 15, 2021, pursuant to E.O. 14059. Additionally, Rivera Zazueta is responsible for moving large
quantities of cocaine from Colombia to the United States, Spain, Italy, Guatemala, Mexico, and other countries in Europe and Central America.

In addition to Rivera Zazueta, OFAC sanctioned his associates Nelton Santiso Aguila (Santiso Aguila), a Mexican national, along with Guatemalan national Jason Antonio Yang Lopez (Yang Lopez), for aiding in the procurement and importation of fentanyl precursor chemicals into Mexico for manufacturing, with the final product arriving in the United States.

OFAC designated Rivera Zazueta, Santiso Aguila, and Yang Lopez for having engaged in, or attempted to engage in, activities or transactions that have materially contributed to, or pose a significant risk of materially contributing to, the international proliferation of illicit drugs or their means of production pursuant to E.O. 14059.

**SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS**

As a result of today's action, all property and interests in property of these designated individuals 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. U.S. persons may face civil or criminal penalties for violations of E.O. 14059.

Today's action is part of a whole-of-government effort to counter the global threat posed by the trafficking of illicit drugs into the United States that is causing the deaths of tens of thousands of Americans annually, as well as countless more non-fatal overdoses. OFAC, in coordination with its U.S. government partners and foreign counterparts, will continue to target and pursue accountability for foreign illicit drug actors.

U.S. sanctions need not be permanent; sanctions are intended to bring about a positive change of behavior. Consistent with the findings of Treasury's 2021 Sanctions Review, the removal of sanctions is available for persons designated under counter narcotics authorities who demonstrate a change in behavior and no longer engage in activities linked to international illicit drug trafficking or other sanctionable activity. For information concerning the process for seeking removal from any OFAC list, including the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List, please refer to OFAC's Frequently Asked Question 897.

More information on the individuals designated today.

View a chart on the individuals designated today.