

# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

## Treasury Sanctions Drug Traffickers Operating Across Europe and North America

July 19, 2023

WASHINGTON — Today, the Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned three Belgian nationals and one Mexican national for international drug trafficking, including cocaine and fentanyl. Those designated today are involved in the importation and distribution of narcotics destined for U.S. and European markets.

“Today’s actions underscore the importance of our collective efforts to disrupt the global illicit drug trade,” said Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. “Treasury, in close coordination with our law enforcement partners, will continue to target the drug facilitators that threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands in the United States and around the globe every year.”

OFAC’s actions are the result of ongoing collaboration with U.S. government partners, including the Drug Enforcement Administration’s (DEA) Belgium, San Diego, and Atlanta Field Offices. Additionally, today’s actions were coordinated closely with the Antwerp prosecutor’s office, Federal Judicial Police Antwerp (Belgium), and the Government of Mexico’s La Unidad de Inteligencia Financiera (Mexico’s Financial Intelligence Unit).

### **DISRUPTING COCAINE-RELATED TRAFFICKING IN BELGIUM**

Today, OFAC sanctioned three Belgian nationals, including **Othman El Ballouti**, who is a high-level drug trafficker, as well as his younger brother, **Younes El Ballouti**, and his associate, **Youssef Ben Azza**. Othman El Ballouti manages an international criminal organization that smuggles significant quantities of cocaine via shipping containers through the Port of Antwerp in Belgium for wider distribution throughout Europe. Othman El Ballouti’s money laundering and narcotics supply chain networks are linked to businesses based in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), as well as South American cocaine suppliers, to include Ecuadorian national [Wilder Emilio Sanchez Farfan, who OFAC designated in February 2022](#). Sanchez Farfan was arrested in Colombia in February of this year.

Younes El Ballouti serves as a manager in his brother’s narcotics trafficking organization. In January 2023, Younes El Ballouti was sentenced, in absentia, to an 8-year prison term in Belgium for his

involvement in multiple drug shipments. Youssef Ben Azza, who has been involved in drug trafficking for over a decade, assists Othman El Ballouti in establishing ostensibly legitimate companies, which are created to conceal the organization's involvement in illicit activities.

Currently, Othman El Ballouti, Younes El Ballouti, and Youssef Ben Azza are wanted by Belgian authorities for cocaine trafficking. They are believed to be living in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in an attempt to evade prosecution. They were designated by OFAC pursuant to E.O. 14059 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.

## **DISRUPTING FENTANYL-RELATED TRAFFICKING IN MEXICO**

Today, OFAC also sanctioned Mexican national, **Franco Tabarez Martinez**, a narcotics trafficker operating in Guerrero, Mexico, who works in alliance with [La Nueva Familia Michoacana drug trafficking organization](#), which was designated by OFAC in November 2022 pursuant to E.O. 14059. Tabarez Martinez distributes cocaine, fentanyl, and methamphetamine to the United States, including Atlanta, Georgia and Houston, Texas. In addition, Tabarez Martinez manages methamphetamine laboratories in Mexico and has received fentanyl powder from the PRC.

On July 7, 2023, an indictment charging Tabarez Martinez with drug trafficking, among other charges, was unsealed in the Northern District of Georgia. Tabarez Martinez was previously imprisoned in the United States for drug trafficking.

OFAC designated Tabarez Martinez pursuant to E.O. 14059, 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.

## **LA NUEVA FAMILIA MICHOCACANA**

As noted above, OFAC sanctioned [La Nueva Familia Michoacana](#) in November 2022 pursuant to E.O. 14059. La Nueva Familia Michoacana operates in approximately 35 Mexican municipalities in the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, Morelos, and the Estado de Mexico. Of note, the organization is engaged in the trafficking of various illicit drugs—including methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl—from Central America to the United States, as well as the sale of rainbow fentanyl. In addition to drug trafficking, La Nueva Familia Michoacana generates revenue from other illicit activities, such as illegal mining and extortion.

La Nueva Familia Michoacana is the successor of the original La Familia Michoacana, which was originally designated in 2009 pursuant to the [Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act](#), and designated again in December 2021 pursuant to E.O. 14059.

## SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS

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

These actions are the latest part of a whole-of-government effort by the Biden-Harris Administration to combat the illicit opioid epidemic, including by going after the criminal networks manufacturing and trafficking illicit fentanyl. In addition to sanctions, the United States brought together almost 100 countries and international organizations to form a [Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats](#) and has partnered with law enforcement around the world to disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal organizations, as well as providing support to more than 20 million Americans in recovery, and offering over 30 rewards—totaling over \$75 million—for information to help bring fentanyl traffickers to justice through the [Narcotics](#) and [Transnational Organized Crime](#) Rewards Programs.

Treasury's action demonstrates the Administration's [strengthened approach](#) to saving lives by disrupting the trafficking of illicit fentanyl and its precursors into American communities. OFAC, in coordination with its U.S. Government partners and foreign counterparts, will continue to target and pursue accountability for foreign illicit drug actors.

In addition, persons that engage in certain transactions with the individuals and entities designated today may themselves be exposed to sanctions or subject to an enforcement action.

The power and integrity of OFAC sanctions derive not only from OFAC's ability to designate and add persons to the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (SDN List), but also from its willingness to remove persons from the SDN List consistent with the law. The ultimate goal of sanctions is not to punish, but to bring about a positive change in behavior. For information concerning the process for seeking removal from an OFAC list, including the SDN List, please refer to OFAC's [Frequently Asked Question 897](#). For detailed information on the process to submit a request for removal from an OFAC sanctions list, please [click here](#).

[Click here for more information on the individuals designated today.](#)

[View the chart on the individuals designated today.](#)

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