

Treasury and Costa Rican Government Cooperate on Sanction Against Notorious Narcotics Trafficker



November 15, 2023

Narcotics Trafficking Tied to 66 Percent Increase in Costa Rica's Homicide Rate Over Previous Decade

WASHINGTON — Today, in support of President Biden's National Drug Control Strategy and in cooperation with the government of Costa Rica, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated **Gilbert Hernan de Los Angeles Bell Fernandez (Bell)**, a Costa Rican narcotics trafficker, known not only for the volume of drugs he moves but the violence with which he operates, who has played a significant role in Costa Rica's recent transformation into a major narcotics transit hub.

According to the State Department's 2023 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Costa Rica has a growing domestic drug consumption problem, as drugs warehoused in Costa Rica increasingly enter the local market and domestic criminal organizations gain influence with increased narcotics revenues. The national homicide rate rose from 11.2 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2021 to 12.6 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2022. The homicide rate in the province of Limon is 35.8 per 100,000 inhabitants. Despite these challenges, Costa Rica works closely with the United States to professionalize police, strengthen citizen security, and increase drug interdictions. However, resource limitations strain Costa Rican law enforcement services and pose significant challenges to future success.

"Today's action demonstrates our shared commitment to address the surge in violent crime in Costa Rica, driven by narcotics trafficking," said Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. "The United States will continue to partner with the government of Costa Rica, as well as with our key partners in the region, to leverage our collective tools and authorities against these groups' illicit facilitation networks."

"MACHO COCA": A NOTORIOUS NARCOTICS TRAFFICKER

Bell, also known as “Macho Coca”, is one of the most prolific drug traffickers in Limón, moving large quantities of cocaine; he is also known as one of the most violent traffickers in Limón. Bell was arrested by Costa Rican authorities in 2015 on drug-related charges and has had property seized by Costa Rican authorities in multiple raids, including several boats allegedly used for drug transshipment seized in February 2023.


OFAC designated Bell pursuant to Executive Order 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.

Today’s action is also the result of close collaboration with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s Costa Rica Country Office.

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. Unless authorized by a general or specific license issued by OFAC, or exempt, OFAC’s regulations generally prohibit all transactions by U.S. persons or 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 (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](#).

For more information on the individual designated today, [click here](#).

To view the chart on the individual designated today, [click here](#) .

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