

# Secretary Yellen Announces Treasury Sanctions Against New Generation of Violent Drug Trafficking Beltrán Leyva Organization

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## *U.S. Action, in Coordination with Government of Mexico, Targets Notoriously Violent Drug Trafficking Organization Involved in Fentanyl Trafficking*

MEXICO CITY — Today, Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen announced during her travel to Mexico that the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has sanctioned 15 Mexican individuals— several of whom are U.S. fugitives—and two Mexico-based companies linked, directly or indirectly, to the Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO). The BLO continues to be one of the most powerful drug trafficking organizations in the world and is heavily involved in the transportation and distribution of deadly drugs, including fentanyl, to the United States. It has been one of the largest suppliers of cocaine to the U.S. market for over two decades.

Secretary Yellen announced the new sanctions today during [her trip to Mexico City](#), where she is meeting with Mexican government and private sector counterparts to discuss deepening the strong partnership on countering fentanyl trafficking and other priorities in countering illicit finance. The designations also come after the launch of [Treasury's Counter-Fentanyl Strike Force](#), which is co-chaired by the Department's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence as well as IRS – Criminal Investigation, and which will effectively leverage Treasury's unique expertise and capability to interdict and disrupt the financial networks cartels rely on to traffic fentanyl and other deadly drugs.

“Communities in both Mexico and the United States suffer from the violence, addiction, and misery generated by the Beltrán Leyva Organization and other cartels,” said Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen. “Over the past year, we have used Treasury's powerful sanctions to expose and disrupt the financial flows of traffickers like the BLO, the Sinaloa Cartel, and CJNG. Treasury will continue to work with our partners in Mexico to take decisive action to disrupt illicit fentanyl production, violence, and arms trafficking, which claim the lives of tens of thousands of U.S. and Mexican citizens each year.”

This action was coordinated closely with the Government of Mexico, including La Unidad de Inteligencia Financiera (Mexico's Financial Intelligence Unit), consistent with the Bicentennial Framework, which was adopted at the inaugural meeting of the High-Level Security Dialogue in October 2021 and continues to guide bilateral security cooperation between the United States and Mexico.

## THE BELTRÁN LEYVA ORGANIZATION'S RISE TO POWER

For over two decades, the BLO has been a significant transporter of multi-ton quantities of cocaine into the United States. The BLO's split with the Sinaloa Cartel in 2008 ignited years of bloodshed in Mexico, as these organizations battled for control of strategic drug trafficking routes into the United States. In the years that followed, the Beltrán Leyva brothers—the founding members of the BLO—were either captured or killed. In their absence, a new generation of violent drug traffickers rose to power and assumed control of today's BLO.

The opioid epidemic, as well as the evolving landscape of illicit drug trafficking, has further emboldened the BLO to take advantage of the lucrative market for illicit fentanyl in communities across the United States.

## TODAY'S BELTRÁN LEYVA ORGANIZATION

Today, OFAC designated **Oscar Manuel Gastelum Iribe** (a.k.a. "El Musico") (**Gastelum Iribe**) and **Pedro Inzunza Noriega** (**Inzunza Noriega**), who along with Fausto Isidro Meza Flores (Meza Flores) — designated in 2013 pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (Kingpin Act) and in 2021 pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 14059 — make up today's BLO's leadership.

A notoriously violent drug trafficker, Gastelum Iribe, oversees the transportation of drugs from multiple countries, including Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala into various states in Mexico, including Quintana Roo, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Sinaloa, for ultimate distribution in the United States, including California, Arizona, Oregon, Washington, Illinois, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Massachusetts. Inunza Noriega works closely with Gastelum Iribe to traffic maritime loads of cocaine and manages the drug sources of supply. Gastelum Iribe is indicted on U.S. federal drug trafficking charges in the U.S. District Courts for the Northern District of Illinois (NDIL), the Southern District of California (SDCA), and the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

Violent drug trafficker **Jose GilCaro Quintero** has worked closely alongside Gastelum Iribe. In addition, Jose Gil Caro Quintero's son, **Jesus Jose Gil Caro Monge**, is also involved in the shipment of maritime loads of drugs from South America to Mexico. Jose Gil Caro Quintero is the cousin of Rafael Caro Quintero, who was responsible for the kidnapping, torture, and murder of a DEA agent in 1985. In 2000, the President identified Rafael Caro Quintero as a significant foreign narcotics trafficker pursuant to the Kingpin Act. Jose Gil Caro Quintero is indicted on U.S. federal drug trafficking charges in the U.S District Court for the District of Columbia and, if captured, will be jointly prosecuted by the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Narcotic and Dangerous Drugs Section (NDDS) and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the SDCA.

Also playing a prominent role in the organization is Mexican attorney **Oscar Pulido Diaz**, who has managed trafficking operations on behalf of clients with ties to the BLO and has facilitated extortion payments on behalf of the Los Chapitos faction of the Sinaloa Cartel and the BLO, among other drug trafficking organizations. Indicted on U.S. federal drug trafficking charges in the U.S. District Court for the SDCA, **Ricardo Estevez Colmenares** (a.k.a. "Bogar Soto Rodriguez") is a BLO plaza boss in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. A notorious drug trafficker who also acts as a hitman, he oversees trafficking operations in the state of Oaxaca.

OFAC also designated brothers **Mario German Beltrán Araujo (Mario BeltránAraujo)** and **Amberto Beltrán Araujo**, sons of Amberto Beltrán Leyva, who have been involved in drug trafficking on behalf of the BLO. Mario Beltrán Araujo has worked with Jose Gil Caro Quintero and, in 2019, was arrested alongside Jesus Jose Gil Caro Monge in Guerrero, Mexico for possession of drugs and weapons. Both were released soon after by Mexican law enforcement. Amberto Beltrán Araujo has trafficked drugs on behalf of Gastelum Iribe and oversees finances for the BLO. While Mario Beltrán Araujo is indicted on U.S. federal drug trafficking charges in the U.S. District Court for the SDCA, Amberto Beltrán Araujo is indicted on similar charges in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

In addition to trafficking cocaine and heroin, the organization also traffics methamphetamine and fentanyl to the United States. In 2021, **Juan Pablo Bastidas Erenas (Bastidas Erenas)** and **Jose de Jesus Estrada Gutierrez** (a.k.a. Josue de Jesus Estrada Gutierrez) (**Estrada Gutierrez**) co-invested in a load of drugs that resulted in record-breaking methamphetamine and fentanyl seizure conducted by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry. Due to its size, the seizure was dubbed "Methzilla" by law enforcement. In addition to trafficking on behalf of Gastelum Iribe, Bastidas Erenas and Estrada Gutierrez, both of whom are indicted on U.S. federal drug trafficking charges in the

U.S. District Court for the SDCA, have also worked for drug traffickers Alfonso Arzate Garcia (a.k.a. “El Aquiles”) and Rene Arzate Garcia (a.k.a. “La Rana”). In August 2023, the Arzate Garcia brothers were designated pursuant to E.O. 14059 and are also charged in the SDCA.



*Record-breaking seizure of fentanyl and methamphetamine at U.S.-Mexico border*

Gastelum Iribe and Meza Flores’ network of trafficking associates also includes logistics coordinators, **Servando Lopez Lopez (Lopez Lopez)**, **Juvenal Leon Rodriguez (Leon Rodriguez)**, **Ulises Franco Figueroa (Franco Figueroa)**, and **Francisco Abraham Flores Ortiz (Flores Ortiz)**, who coordinate drug shipments from South America to Mexico via air, land and sea, for distribution in the United States, on behalf of the organization. Additionally, the network includes **Oscar Aleman Meza (Aleman Meza)**, a boat mechanic involved in the prepping, arming, and management of maritime vessels, to include panga boats, for drug trafficking operations. While Lopez Lopez, Leon Rodriguez, Franco Figueroa, and Aleman Meza are each indicted on U.S. federal drug trafficking charges in the U.S. District Court for the SDCA, Flores Ortiz is indicted on similar charges in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

### *Panga boat laden with cocaine*

OFAC designated each of the 15 individuals 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.

Also today, OFAC sanctioned two Mexican companies, including **Editorial Mercado Ecuestre, S.A. de C.V.**, a publisher of equestrian-related media, and **Difaculsa, S.A. de C.V.**, a retail pharmacy, for being owned, controlled, or directed by, or for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, Gastelum Iribe and Aleman Meza, respectively.

In 2008, then-President George W. Bush identified the BLO as a significant foreign narcotics trafficker pursuant to the Kingpin Act. In December 2021, OFAC designated the BLO pursuant to E.O. 14059.

The targets of today's action are part of a multi-agency effort between Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and includes targets of a HSI Homeland Criminal Organization Target (HOMECORT) case. HOMECORT cases consist of the top transnational criminal networks as determined by HSI Joint Task Force-Investigations (HSI JTF-I). This action would not have been possible without OFAC's ongoing collaboration with the HSI San Diego Field Office, the HSI Mexico City Attaché Office, the FBI San Diego and Washington, D.C. Field Offices, the FBI Mexico City Attaché Office, the DEA San Diego and Chicago Field Divisions, and the DEA Mexico City Country Office. Finally, this action was coordinated closely with the U.S. Attorney's Offices for the NDIL and the SDCA, as well as the DOJ's NDDS.

## **SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS**

As a result of today's action, all property and interests in property of the designated persons described above 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, individually or in the aggregate, 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 and the Kingpin Act.

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 and in support of President Biden's National Drug Control Strategy, will continue to target and pursue accountability for foreign illicit drug actors. This action demonstrates the Biden-Harris Administration's [strengthened approach](#) to saving lives by disrupting the trafficking of illicit fentanyl and its precursors into American communities. These efforts are part of the Administration's comprehensive strategy to tackle the nation's overdose epidemic, which goes after two key drivers of this crisis: untreated addiction and the drug trafficking profits that fuel it. Today's action will help strengthen public safety by disrupting the illicit drug production and trafficking pipeline that profits by harming Americans. As a key part of the President's Unity Agenda, the Administration has also made historic investments in critical public health interventions including research, prevention, treatment, and recovery support services.

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 here](#). 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 individuals and entities designated today, click here.](#)

[To view a chart on the individuals and entities designated today, click here.](#)

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