

Treasury Sanctions Human Smuggling and Drug Trafficking Organization Operating on Southwest Border

December 14, 2023

Administration-Wide Action Taken in Coordination with Government of Mexico

WASHINGTON — Following Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen’s trip to Mexico, where she continued [close coordination](#) with the Government of Mexico on countering the illicit drug trade and other shared security priorities, today Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned the **Malas Mañas** transnational criminal organization (TCO), a human smuggling and narcotics trafficking organization based in Sonora, Mexico, along with two individuals in its support network.

Human smuggling organizations like Malas Mañas value profit over human life, endanger the lives of migrants and undermine the U.S. asylum system. In addition to human smuggling, Malas Mañas traffics deadly drugs, including illicit fentanyl and methamphetamine, thereby threatening the national security of the United States and Mexico.

“On my recent visit to Mexico City, I shared Treasury’s commitment to working together with the Government of Mexico to target the illicit finances of criminal organizations that undermine the security and prosperity of both of our countries,” said Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen. “As part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s effort to target the human smugglers and drug traffickers operating on the U.S. southwestern border, we are imposing sanctions today to target Mala Mañas or likeminded organizations that take advantage of migrants and abuse the U.S. financial system.”

“The Department of Homeland Security continues to relentlessly pursue transnational criminal organizations. Through whole-of-government efforts targeting cartels and smugglers like the Malas Mañas, we are disrupting the illicit financial networks of criminals who profit off of vulnerable migrants and devastate our communities with fentanyl and other dangerous narcotics,” said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas. “Today’s announcement showcases the work of Homeland Security Investigations, alongside our partners at the Drug Enforcement Administration and Treasury Department, in safeguarding our nation and holding those who benefit from crime accountable.”

Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) worked with OFAC to sanction key members of Malas Mañas leadership and the organization itself to impede access to illicit proceeds from drug trafficking and human smuggling. The illicit proceeds generated by these activities cause instability in the region, promote corruption, and fund the cartels to expand their operations and distribution networks. HSI leverages its vast statutory authority, unique access to customs and financial data, and its years of expertise in investigating cross-border criminal activity to disrupt and dismantle the transnational criminal organizations involved in human smuggling, trafficking, narcotics and financial crimes. HSI and the Department of Homeland Security are committed to protecting our communities from these dangerous criminal organizations both here and abroad.

Today's action from OFAC, a member of the [Treasury Counter-Fentanyl Strike Force](#), would not have been possible without the cooperation, support, and ongoing collaboration between OFAC, Homeland Security Investigations, and the Drug Enforcement Administration. Additionally, OFAC coordinated this action with the Government of Mexico, including La Unidad de Inteligencia Financiera (UIF), Mexico's Financial Intelligence Unit.

DISRUPTING MALAS MAÑAS HUMAN SMUGGLING TCO

Established by Jorge Damian Roman Figueroa (Roman Figueroa) (a.k.a. "El Soldado") as early as 2016, **Malas Mañas** is a human smuggling TCO with a primary base of operations in Sonora, Mexico. The organization smuggles undocumented non-citizens — often including individuals from Guatemala and El Salvador — through Sonora, across the U.S. Southwest Border, and into Arizona, including Phoenix and Tucson. With operations on both sides of the border and hundreds of members, Malas Mañas is also involved in narcotics trafficking and weapons trafficking. Specifically, Malas Mañas has distributed illicit fentanyl, cocaine, and methamphetamine in the United States. Members of the organization have been known to wear merchandise, such as hats and shirts, featuring the Malas Mañas slogan, "SQLD,"—short for *solo que lo dudas* (only that you doubt it)—and logo, a sun-shaped emblem with a soldier in the center. The group includes *sicarios* (hitmen) working for Malas Mañas leadership.



Malas Mañas logo and slogan, as seen on merchandise.

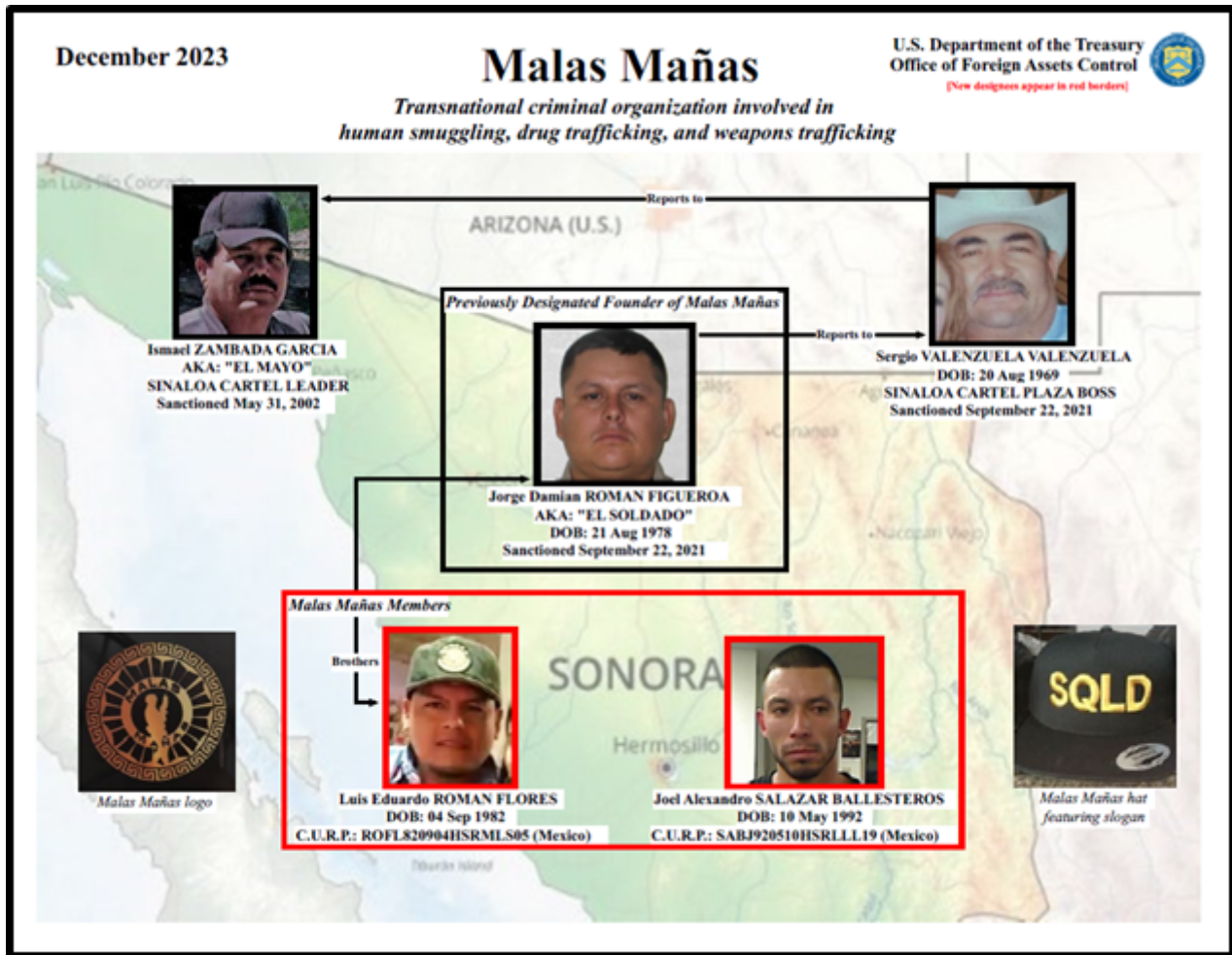
Malas Mañas' founder, Roman Figueroa, works closely with Sinaloa Cartel leader Sergio Valenzuela Valenzuela (a.k.a. "Gigio"). On September 22, 2021, [OFAC designated both Roman Figueroa and Sergio Valenzuela Valenzuela](#), among other Sinaloa Cartel members, pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act. The following month, Mexican authorities arrested Roman Figueroa in Nogales, Sonora.

Today, OFAC designated Malas Mañas pursuant to Executive Order 13581, as amended by E.O. 13863 (hereafter, "E.O. 13581, as amended"), for being a foreign person that constitutes a significant TCO.


In addition to Malas Mañas, OFAC also sanctioned two Mexico-based human smugglers, **Luis Eduardo Roman Flores (Roman Flores)** and **Joel Alejandro Salazar Ballesteros (Salazar Ballesteros)**, pursuant to E.O. 13581, as amended, for being owned or controlled by, or for having acted or purported to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, Malas Mañas.

Specifically, Roman Flores works for his imprisoned brother, Roman Figueroa, to facilitate the crossing of undocumented non-citizens into the United States on behalf of Malas Mañas. Roman Flores oversees the gathering of non-citizens, sets smuggling prices, and receives payments on behalf of the organization. Roman Flores uses social media websites to coordinate smuggling arrangements with non-citizens.

In addition to distributing illicit fentanyl and attempting to distribute cocaine and methamphetamine in the United States, Salazar Ballesteros participates in human smuggling operations on behalf of Malas Mañas. Additionally, Salazar Ballesteros manages Malas Mañas' finances and communicates with human smuggling stash house caretakers.



PREVIOUS TREASURY ACTIONS AGAINST HUMAN SMUGGLING

Today’s action builds upon Treasury’s previous efforts not only to disrupt human smuggling networks but also to aid financial institutions in the detection of financial activity related to human smuggling, particularly along the U.S. southwest border. On January 13, 2023, Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) issued an [alert providing trends, typologies, and red flag indicators](#)  to help financial institutions better identify and report transactions potentially related to human smuggling. This alert followed an increase in attempted illegal border crossings in 2021 and 2022.

Additionally, on June 16, 2023, OFAC sanctioned the [Hernandez Salas TCO](#) and its leader, as well as four individuals and two entities, pursuant to E.O. 13581, as amended. The Hernandez Salas TCO is a human smuggling organization based in Mexicali, Mexico, that has been responsible for thousands of individuals illegally entering the United States since at least 2018.

Furthermore, on April 7, 2021, OFAC designated the [Abid Ali Khan TCO](#) and its leader, as well as two individuals and one entity, pursuant to E.O. 13581, as amended. The Abid Ali Khan TCO is a prolific human smuggling organization based in Nowshera, Pakistan. Since at least 2015, the TCO has facilitated the unlawful smuggling of foreign nationals into the United States using various travel routes through Latin America.

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. 13581, as amended, and the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act.

In addition, financial institutions and other persons that engage in certain transactions or activities with the sanctioned entities and individuals may expose themselves to sanctions or be subject to an enforcement action. The prohibitions include the making of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services by, to, or for the benefit of any designated person, or the receipt of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services from any such person.

The power and integrity of OFAC sanctions derive not only from OFAC's ability to designate and add persons to the 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](#).

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

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

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