

ARTICLE

U.S. Sanctions Imposed on Major Money Laundering Network

June 27, 2012

On June 27, 2012, the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated four individuals and three entities for their role in laundering narcotics trafficking proceeds for Ayman Joumaa, an international money launderer and drug trafficker actively operating throughout the Americas, Middle East, Europe, and Africa. [1] OFAC also designated a Columbia-based individual pursuant to Executive Order (EO) 13224, which blocks the property of and prohibits transactions with persons involved in terrorism, for his provision of support to Hizballah in the Americas. Hizballah was designated by the U.S. government as a Specially Designated Terrorist in 1995, a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997 and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in 2001.

In response to these designations, David S. Cohen, the U.S. Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, remarked that the "Joumaa network is a sophisticated multi-national money laundering ring, which launders the proceeds of drug-trafficking for the benefit of criminals and the terrorist group Hizballah." He further noted that "[w]e and our partners will continue to aggressively map, expose and disable this network, as we are doing with today's sanctions." As a result of these sanctions, U.S. persons are prohibited from conducting financial or commercial transactions with these designated individuals and entities. The sanctions also freeze any assets that these designated persons may have in the United States, thereby effectively denying these persons access to the U.S. financial and commercial sectors.

OFAC's designations reinforce the Treasury Department's heightened focus on targeting terrorists and their supporters, and the agency's ongoing commitment to denying such persons access to the U.S.

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financial system. These sanctions also underscore the agency's increased efforts to target the financial networks of significant drug traffickers, pursuant to the Kingpin Act. Indeed, since June 2000, the Treasury Department has designated well over 1,000 persons under its drug kingpin authority.

June 27, 2012 Designations

Specifically, OFAC's Kingpin Act and anti-terrorism designations target the following individuals and entities: [2]

- **Abbas Hussein Harb (dual Venezuelan/Lebanese citizen) and Ibrahim Chibli (Lebanese national):** OFAC designated both individuals under the Kingpin Act for their involvement in laundering millions of dollars of drug-related proceeds for Joumaa. Harb's South American-based organization laundered money for the Joumaa network through the Lebanese financial system. Chibli, the manager of a bank in Lebanon, facilitated the money laundering activities of both Harb and Joumaa.
- **Ali Mohamed Saleh (dual Lebanese/Columbian citizen):** Pursuant to EO 13224, OFAC designated Ali Mohamed Saleh as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist for his involvement with Hizballah and his provision of financial, material, or technological support to the terrorist organization. Among his sanctionable activities include coordinating the transfer of checks and U.S.-denominated currency by currency from Maicao, Colombia, to Hizballah in Lebanon.
- **Additional Designations:** OFAC also designated Ali Houssein Harb and Kassem Mohamad Saleh, the brothers of Abbas Hussein Harb and Ali Mohamad Saleh, respectively, pursuant to the Kingpin Act, for their involvement with the Joumaa network. In addition, OFAC imposed sanctions against three entities –Importadora Silvania (Colombia), Bodega Michigan (Colombia), and Importadora Silvania, C. A. (Venezuela) – under the same statute for being owned or controlled by Abbas Hussein Harb and/or Kassem Mohamad Saleh.

[1] See Treasury Targets Major Money Laundering Network Linked to Drug Trafficker Ayman Joumaa and a Key Hizballah Supporter in South America (June 27, 2012).

[2] See OFAC's Kingpin Act Designations; Anti-Terrorism Designations (June 27, 2012).