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Treasury Marks International Human Rights Day and Designates Perpetrators and Supporters of Serious Human Rights Abuse

WASHINGTON — In recognition of International Human Rights Day (IHRD), the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is announcing new designations and highlighting other human rights-related sanctions actions taken over the last year. IHRD is observed annually on December 10 in commemoration of the United Nations' adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on that day in 1948.

Today's actions sanction one individual and one entity involved in abuses against prisoners held in Houthi-run prisons in Yemen and one individual providing support to Bashar al-Assad. State also announced steps to impose visa restrictions on dozens of individuals pursuant to Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and designated one official under Section 7031(c) of the annual Appropriations Act for involvement in a gross violation of human rights. For more information about State's actions, please see their fact sheet.

"The United States is strongly committed to promoting respect for human rights, and Treasury is proud of its longstanding use of our tools for this purpose," said Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen. "The Office of Foreign Funds Control, as OFAC was formerly known, was established during World War II to prevent the Nazi regime from leveraging the assets of occupied countries to expand the war and further its systematic campaign of atrocities. We are proud to continue to build on this important legacy of shining a light on instances of serious human rights abuse."

Treasury's 2024 Human rights-related actions

Since January 2024, OFAC has leveraged multiple sanctions programs to designate more than 100 individuals and entities associated with human rights abuse across more than 20 jurisdictions. These actions have targeted an array of activities, including national and transnational repression, forced disappearances and hostage taking, gender-based violence, human trafficking, including forced labor, and human rights abuse perpetrated by terrorist and criminal organizations. Since 2021, Treasury has designated more than 500 individuals and entities for human rights abuse and related activities, drawing on numerous Treasury tools and authorities, including Executive Order (E.O.) 13818, which builds upon and implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.

Targeting political repression was a key theme for OFAC in 2024, with related actions in Burma, the country of Georgia, Iran, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. OFAC began the year with the designations of an international assassination network led by a narcotrafficker operating at the direction of the Iranian government in January and, in March, the designation of a commercial spyware consortium that distributed spyware technology that was used to target Americans. This latter action aligned with President Biden's issuance of an Executive Order in March in part to ensure that technology is developed, deployed, and governed in accordance with universal human rights, the rule of law, and appropriate legal authorization, safeguards, and oversight, such that it supports, and does not undermine, democracy, civil rights and civil liberties, and public safety.

Promoting accountability for gender-based violence is another priority. President Biden issued a Memorandum on Promoting Accountability for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in November 2022 that directs the U.S. government to strengthen our exercise of financial, diplomatic, and legal tools against these types of abuses. This year OFAC fulfilled the intent of this memorandum with designations of: armed groups and their leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo implicated in conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV); a gang leader in Haiti responsible for horrific gang violence including gender-based attacks; and a Rapid Support Forces commander in Sudan who was responsible for attacks resulting in CRSV. Last week, OFAC also designated three former government of Uzbekistan officials who engaged in the sex trafficking and sexual abuse of minors at a state-run orphanage.

OFAC also focused on actions to disrupt human trafficking, including forced labor. Throughout 2024, OFAC designated: Venezuela-based criminal organization Tren de Aragua, which kidnapped and trafficked victims across borders for sex trafficking and debt bondage; a Syria-based narco-trafficker also under legal prosecution for human trafficking; and the Uzbekistan action mentioned above. In September, OFAC designated a Cambodian businessman and his four companies for their role in a major scheme to lure workers with promises of employment, only to capture and subject them to forced labor in online virtual currency investment scam centers that have defrauded thousands of victims, including Americans.

GLOBAL MAGNITSKY

Building upon the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, E.O. 13818 was issued on December 20, 2017, in recognition that the prevalence of human rights abuse and corruption that have their source, in whole or in substantial part, outside the United States, had reached such scope and gravity as to threaten the stability of international political and economic systems. Human rights abuse and corruption undermine the values that form an essential foundation of stable, secure, and functioning societies; have devastating impacts on individuals; weaken democratic institutions; degrade the rule of law; perpetuate violent conflicts; facilitate the activities of

dangerous persons; and undermine economic markets. The United States seeks to impose tangible and significant consequences on those who commit serious human rights abuse or engage in corruption, as well as to protect the financial system of the United States from abuse by these same persons.

YEMEN

Today, OFAC designated the Houthi National Committee for Prisoners' Affairs (HNCPA) and its leader,** Abdulqader Al-Murtadha**,pursuant to E.O. 13818 for being foreign persons who are responsible for or complicit in, or have directly or indirectly engaged in, serious human rights abuse. Al-Murtadha was also designated for being a foreign person who is a leader or official of an entity, including any government entity, that has engaged in, or whose members have engaged in serious human rights abuse relating to the leader's or official's tenure.

The HNCPA operates Houthi prisons in Yemen. According to the United Nations (UN), at one of the prisons, known as the Exchange House in Sana'a, prisoners are systematically subjected to torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the prison's staff. Additionally, multiple reports indicate members of the prison's management personally participate in crimes against prisoners, including Al-Murtadha. Detainees include former locally employed U.S. Embassy staff, UN staff, humanitarian workers, and journalists; many are reported to be arbitrarily detained, and some of the prisoners are minors. Prison officials engage in systematic psychological and physical cruelty and punishment, including mock executions, beatings, and electrocution, among other abuses. Prison officials have denied prisoners adequate medical care; as a result, some prisoners have permanent disabilities, and some have reportedly died.

SYRIA

Fawaz al-Akhras is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13894 for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, Bashar al-Assad. Fawaz al-Akhras has provided support and facilitation to Bashar al-Assad related to financial matters, sanctions evasion, and attempts byBashar al-Assadto achieve international political engagement. The United States designated Bashar al-Assad pursuant to E.O.s 13572 and 13894 in 2011 and 2020, respectively, in relation to the Government of Syria's perpetration of serious human rights abuses against the Syrian people and Bashar al-Assad's actions obstructing, disrupting, or preventing a ceasefire or a political solution to the Syrian conflict. As has been documented by the U.S. Department of State and non-governmental organizations throughout the duration of the Syrian conflict, Bashar al-Assad's government continued to perpetrate serious human rights abuses in Syria, including failing to investigate extrajudicial killings by regime security forces, use of torture and sexual violence in detention facilities, use of enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrest of political dissidents, withholding

of medical attention in detention facilities, denying international monitors access to detention facilities, denying detainees access to a fair or timely trial, seizure of land or property, disrupting humanitarian access to opposition areas, and transnational repression of political activists abroad.

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. 13818. Non-U.S. persons are also prohibited from causing or conspiring to cause U.S. persons to wittingly or unwittingly violate U.S. sanctions, as well as engaging in conduct that evades U.S. sanctions. OFAC's Economic Sanctions Enforcement Guidelines provide more information regarding OFAC's enforcement of U.S. sanctions, including the factors that OFAC generally considers when determining an appropriate response to an apparent violation.

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 Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons (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.

Click here for more information on the individuals and entities designated today.

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