

Treasury Sanctions Syria-based Transnational Human Smuggling Organization Involved in Smuggling Migrants to the United States

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WASHINGTON – Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Syrian national Nasif Barakat and the Barakat Transnational Criminal Organization (TCO) pursuant to Executive Order 13581, "Blocking Property of Transnational Criminal Organizations." The Barakat TCO is a human smuggling organization based in Homs, Syria, that facilitates the smuggling of Syrian and Lebanese nationals to the United States border using a variety of travel routes. Since 2013, the Barakat TCO has facilitated the smuggling of hundreds of individuals to the Southwest border of the United States. Nasif Barakat is being designated for materially assisting, sponsoring, or providing financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, the Barakat TCO, and for acting on behalf of the Barakat TCO.

"Treasury is designating a human smuggling organization as a significant Transnational Criminal Organization, which is an important step toward disrupting Barakat's prolific human smuggling operations in Syria and around the world," said Sigal Mandelker, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. "We will continue to work with our partners to take action against human smugglers who prey on the vulnerable, expose those involved in their reprehensible activities, and protect the U.S. financial system from abuse."

As a result of today's action, all assets of Nasif Barakat and the Barakat TCO that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons must be blocked and reported to OFAC. OFAC's regulations generally prohibit all dealings by U.S. persons or within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property of Barakat, the Barakat TCO, or any other blocked or designated persons.

Syrian national Nasif Barakat, the leader of the Barakat TCO, resides in Syria. Barakat and members of his TCO operate a global network of human smugglers that coordinate the smuggling of foreign nationals to the United States for an average cost of approximately \$20,000; this sum includes fees to obtain fraudulent and/or counterfeit documents. Nasif Barakat often provides travelers with fraudulently obtained passports from many different countries, including European Union countries, to facilitate his clients' global movement and smuggling to the United States. Barakat engages in bribery to facilitate human smuggling. The Barakat TCO often utilizes a common route of travel which begins in Syria and transits Lebanon, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, subsequently arriving in and transiting certain South and Central American countries

before arrival at the Southwest border of the United States. The Barakat TCO's smuggling activities are linked to other crimes including document fraud, which can significantly impair appropriate vetting processes.

Today's action was conducted in close coordination with Homeland Security Investigations' San Diego Field Office, the Department of Homeland Security Human Smuggling Cell, Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center, and the Department of Justice's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section.

"The day I was sworn in as Attorney General, President Trump sent me an Executive Order to dismantle transnational criminal organizations," said Attorney General Jeff Sessions. "Many of these organizations use human smugglers to bring people across our borders with little regard to their safety or our national sovereignty. I want to thank Secretary Mnuchin and Under Secretary Mandelker for today's designation, which will help us stop more crimes from being committed. We will continue to use every lawful tool we have to defend our borders, fight alien smuggling, restore legality to our immigration system, and to defund criminals of their ill-gotten gains."

Penalties for violations of E.O. 13581 range from civil penalties of up to \$295,141 or twice the amount of the underlying transaction per violation to more severe criminal penalties. Criminal penalties may include up to 20 years in prison and fines up to \$1 million pursuant to Title 18 of the United States Code.

Identifying information on the individual and entity designated today.

Chart relating to today's announcement.

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