



The United States Department of Justice

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FORMER MEMBER OF VENEZUELAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CHARGED WITH NARCO-TERRORISM, DRUG TRAFFICKING, AND WEAPONS OFFENSES

***Adel El Zabayar Allegedly Worked with the Former President of
Venezuela Nicolás Maduro Moros and Other Prominent Venezuelan
Officials to Distribute Cocaine and Weapons In Coordination with
Terrorist Organizations***

NEW YORK – U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman for the Southern District of New York and Acting Administrator Timothy J. Shea of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), announced today that Adel El Zabayar was charged in Manhattan federal court with participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy, a cocaine importation conspiracy, and related weapons offenses involving the use and possession of machineguns and destructive devices, all based on his support of the Venezuelan *Cártel de Los Soles* and designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Hizballah, and Hamas.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman said: “As alleged, Adel El Zabayar was part of the unholy alliance of government, military, and FARC members using violence and corruption to further their narco-terrorist aims. El Zabayar was allegedly a key part of the apparatus that conspired to export literally tons of cocaine

into the United States. We further allege today, for the first time, that the *Cártel de Los Soles* sought to recruit terrorists from Hizballah and Hamas to assist in planning and carrying out attacks on the United States, and that El Zabayar was instrumental as a go-between. Allegedly, El Zabayar obtained from the Middle East a cargo planeload of military-grade weaponry. With today's charges, El Zabayar joins the rogues' gallery of defendants we charged two months ago, and he faces the possibility of life in a U.S. prison if and when he is apprehended."

DEA Acting Administrator Timothy J. Shea said: "Today's criminal complaint of Adel El Zabayar for trading arms for cocaine, and recruiting extremists, further demonstrates the corruption inside the Maduro regime. The actions charged in the indictment show that Maduro's administration operates with no regard for its own citizens, instead choosing to flood the United States with cocaine and other drugs while enriching itself. As the layers of the Maduro regime are exposed, so is its immoral, unethical, and dangerous actions."

El Zabayar is a member of the *Cártel de Los Soles*, or "Cartel of the Suns." The Cartel's name refers to the sun insignias affixed to the uniforms of high-ranking Venezuelan military officials. For more than two decades, Cartel members, including El Zabayar and Maduro Moros, have abused the Venezuelan people and corrupted the legitimate institutions of Venezuela – including parts of the military, intelligence apparatus, legislature, and the judiciary – to facilitate the importation of tons of cocaine into the United States. The Cartel sought not only to enrich its members and enhance their power, but also to "flood" the United States with cocaine and inflict the drug's harmful and addictive effects on users in the United States.

The *Cártel de Los Soles* has worked in coordination with designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, including the FARC, Hizballah, and Hamas. El Zabayar, in particular, has, among other things, participated in weapons-for-cocaine negotiations with the FARC, obtained anti-tank rocket launchers from the Middle East for the FARC as partial payment for cocaine, and recruited terrorists from Hizballah and Hamas for the purpose of helping to plan and organize attacks against United States interests.

For example, in or about 2014, El Zabayar participated in several meetings with Diosdado Cabello Rondón, the president of Venezuela's National Constituent Assembly and a member of the *Cártel de Los Soles*, at a military base in Caracas, Venezuela. During the meetings, Cabello Rondón directed El Zabayar to travel to the Middle East to obtain weapons and recruit members of Hizballah and Hamas to train at clandestine training camps located in Venezuela. Cabello Rondón explained during the meeting, among other things, that the purpose of recruiting members of Hizballah and Hamas to train in Venezuela was to create a large terrorist cell capable of attacking U.S. interests on behalf of the *Cártel de Los Soles*. El Zabayar agreed. Several months later, after El Zabayar returned to Venezuela from the Middle East, El Zabayar, Cabello Rondón, and others traveled together to a hangar controlled by Maduro Moros at the Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía, Venezuela, where El Zabayar received a Lebanese cargo plane full of weapons, including rocket-

propelled grenade launchers, AK-103s, and sniper rifles, that El Zabayar had obtained while he was in the Middle East, as Cabello Rondón had directed.

During the course of El Zabayar's activities on behalf of the *Cártel de Los Soles*, El Zabayar also acted as a liaison between the Venezuelan government and Syrian president Bashar Hafez al-Assad, fought in Syria on behalf of Assad's Hizballah-backed forces in or about 2013, and appeared in at least two interviews released by Al Manar, Hizballah's terrorist-designated propaganda arm, in or about 2013 and 2014.

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The complaint charges El Zabayar, 56, with: (1) participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy, which carries a 20-year mandatory minimum sentence and a maximum of life; (2) conspiring to import cocaine into the United States, which carries a 10-year mandatory minimum sentence and a maximum of life; (3) using and carrying machine guns and destructive devices during and in relation to, and possessing machine guns and destructive devices in furtherance of, the narco-terrorism and cocaine importation conspiracies, which carries a 30-year mandatory minimum sentence and a maximum of life; and (4) conspiring to use and carry machine guns and destructive devices during and in relation to, and to possess machine guns and destructive devices in furtherance of, the narco-terrorism and cocaine importation conspiracies, which carries a maximum sentence of life. The potential mandatory minimum and maximum sentences in this case are prescribed by Congress and provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the judge.

Mr. Berman praised the outstanding investigative work of the DEA's Special Operations Division Bilateral Investigations Unit and New York Strike Force.

This case is being handled by the Office's Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Amanda L. Houle, Matthew J. Laroche, Jason A. Richman, and Kyle Wirshba of the Southern District of New York are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges in the complaint and superseding indictment, S2 11 Cr. 205, are merely accusations, and El Zabayar and the defendants named in the superseding indictment are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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