

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Specially Designated Global Terrorist Mohammad Bazzi Pleads Guilty to Sanctions Evasion**

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<https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/specially-designated-global-terrorist-mohammad-bazzi-pleads-guilty-sanctions-evasion>

Office of Public Affairs

Lebanese national Mohammad Ibrahim Bazzi, 60, pleaded guilty today to conspiracy to conduct and to cause U.S. persons to conduct unlawful transactions with a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.

In May 2018, the Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Bazzi as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist for assisting in, sponsoring and providing financial, material and technological support and financial services to Hizballah. Hizballah is a foreign terrorist organization that, since the 1980s, engaged in numerous terrorist activities, including attacks against American military members, government employees and civilians abroad.

According to the OFAC designation, Bazzi is a key Hizballah financier who has provided millions of dollars to Hizballah over the years, generated from his business activities in Belgium, Lebanon, Iraq and throughout West Africa. As a result of the designation, Bazzi's interest in any property in the United States were blocked, and all U.S. persons were generally prohibited from transacting business with, or for the benefit of, Bazzi.

Following Bazzi's designation and according to the court documents, Bazzi and his co-defendant, Talal Chanine, who remains at large in Lebanon, conspired to force or induce an individual located in the United States (U.S. Person) to liquidate their interests in certain real estate assets located in Michigan and covertly transfer hundreds of thousands of dollars in proceeds of the liquidation out of the United States to Bazzi and Chahine in Lebanon without the required OFAC licenses, in violation of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

During recorded communications, Bazzi and Chahine proposed numerous methods to conceal from OFAC and law enforcement officials that Bazzi was both the source and destination of the proceeds of the sale and to create the false appearance that the U.S. Person was conducting legitimate arms-length transactions unrelated to Bazzi and Chahine. For example, Bazzi and Chahine proposed that the funds be transferred through:

- A third party in China as part of a fictitious purchase of restaurant equipment from a Chinese manufacturer;
- A third party in Lebanon as part of a fictitious real estate purchase;
- Chahine's family members in Kuwait as part of fictitious intra-family loans; and
- As part of a fictitious franchising agreement as payment for the rights to operate a Lebanese-based restaurant chain throughout the United States.

Bazzi was arrested in February 2023 by Romanian law enforcement authorities and subsequently extradited to the Eastern District of New York. The Justice Department thanks the Romanian authorities for their assistance in this matter.

A sentencing hearing will be scheduled at a later date. Bazzi faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. He has also agreed to forfeit the nearly \$830,000 that was involved in the illegal transaction, and to be removed from the United States upon completion of his sentence. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the National Security Division, U.S. Attorney Breon Peace for the Eastern District of New York and Executive Assistant Director Robert Wells of the FBI's National Security Branch made the announcement.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Francisco J. Navarro, Jonathan P. Lax, Nomi D. Berenson, Claire Kedeshian and Robert M. Pollack for the Eastern District of New York are prosecuting the case with assistance provided by Trial Attorney Charles Kovats of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section and Scott Claffee of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Section. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs assisted with the extradition in this case.

This effort is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found at [www.justice.gov/OCDETF](http://www.justice.gov/OCDETF).

*Updated February 6, 2025*