



# Department of Justice

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## **DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE FACT SHEET ON MS-13**

While MS-13 is not the only transnational gang this administration will target, we believe the following background information attributed as “information provided by the Justice Department” will be helpful:

- MS-13, which is short for La Mara Salvatrucha, is a gang composed primarily of immigrants or descendants of immigrants from El Salvador. In the United States, MS-13 has been functioning since at least the 1980s. The name “Mara Salvatrucha” is a combination of several slang terms. The word “Mara” is the term used in El Salvador for “gang.” The phrase “Salvatrucha” is a combination of the words “Salva,” which is an abbreviation for “Salvadoran,” and “trucha,” which is a slang term for “alert,” “look out,” or “cunning.” The “13” refers to the thirteenth letter of the alphabet, or “M,” which denotes the gang’s allegiance to the Mexican Mafia, a prison gang. Their motto is “kill, rape, control.”
- In the United States, the MS-13 gang originated in Los Angeles, California, where MS-13 members engaged in turf wars for the control of drug distribution locations. MS-13 quickly spread to states across the country, with a large presence in New York, Virginia, and the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. According to the National Gang Intelligence center, MS-13 is a national and international criminal organization with more than 30,000 members in the world, and more than 10,000 in the United States. They regularly conduct gang activities in at least forty states and the District of Columbia. MS-13 is one of the largest street gangs in the United States. Gang members actively recruit members, including juveniles, from communities with a large number of immigrants from El Salvador.
- Through the combined efforts of federal, state, and local law enforcement, great progress was made diminishing or severely disrupted the gang within certain targeted areas of the US by 2009 and 2010.
- Recent investigations in some regions of the country have revealed that major leaders of MS-13 in El Salvador, many of whom are in prison there for murder, kidnapping or extortion, have been sending representatives to cross into the U.S. illegally, to gain control of local MS-13 cliques and reconstitute them. These emissaries then connect the local MS-13 cliques to their jailed leaders in El Salvador by cell phone. The gang leaders in El Salvador then institute what MS-13 has been calling “The Program”, or “La

Programma,” in which they direct the American MS-13 cliques to become more violent to control territory. They are attempting to accomplish this goal not only by killing rivals, but also by extorting legitimate businesses run by legal Central American immigrants and illegal businesses such as prostitution and gambling. The leaders demand that the local, U.S.-based MS-13 clique send a portion of the resultant profits to the leadership in El Salvador to enrich the gang and expand its activities.

- The United States cannot defeat MS-13 alone: this is a transnational criminal group, and the solution accordingly must also be transnational. In recognition of the critical role these international relationships play in attacking MS-13, one of Attorney General Sessions’ first Ministerials has been with the Attorneys General of the Northern Triangle. As a result of that Ministerial, the four Attorneys General – of the United States, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – have jointly pledged to target MS-13.

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