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TAXES

IRS Finds 79 Criminal Fugitives in Central America in First Year of New Program

Eight of those fugitives have been apprehended to face criminal proceedings or sentences.

Oct. 10, 2022



IRS Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) Mexico City located 79 criminal fugitives in Mexico, Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras as part of a new initiative.

“We are going after anyone who thinks they can cheat the government and simply flee to the south,” said IRS-CI Mexico City Attaché Jaushua Brewer. “Now with so much help from our host country partners, it is even harder for criminals to escape justice.”

In June 2021, IRS-CI Mexico City launched the program to analyze fugitive files, collaborate with U.S. agencies and foreign partners to locate criminals who absconded abroad, and conduct trainings on the extradition process. Through the initiative, in fiscal year 2022, IRS-CI Mexico City located 79 individuals for possible extradition. Eight fugitives have been apprehended to face criminal proceedings or sentences, and include:

Jose L. Echeverria, formerly of Chelan Falls, WA. Echeverria was extradited from Mexico in February to serve a 30-month prison sentence for filing a fraudulent tax return. He had been a fugitive for nearly five years until Mexican authorities arrested him. Echeverria had operated a produce sales business and underreported income by more than \$500,000 between 2009 and 2012. He wired hundreds of thousands of dollars in unreported income to Mexico to purchase land, vacation homes, and vehicles for personal use.

Thomas Johnson, formerly of Tampa, FL. Belizean authorities arrested Johnson in January and deported him to the United States. He faces charges for aiding in the preparation and filing of false tax returns. Johnson allegedly prepared and filed false tax returns on behalf of his clients, and they, in turn, split large refunds they were not entitled to with him.

“Our hope is to improve efficiencies and expand this program to target fugitives who have absconded to countries across the globe in an effort to evade justice in the United States. This means the number of successful extraditions will continue to grow,” said Willie Rondon, director of IRS-CI International Field Operations Branch B.

IRS-CI is the criminal investigative arm of the IRS, responsible for conducting financial crime investigations, including tax fraud, narcotics trafficking, money-laundering, public corruption, healthcare fraud, identity theft, and more. IRS-CI special agents are the only federal law enforcement agents with investigative jurisdiction over violations of the Internal Revenue Code, boasting a nearly 90

percent federal conviction rate. The agency has 20 field offices across the U.S. and 12 attaché posts abroad.

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