

US ANNOUNCES INTERNATIONAL CRACKDOWN ON DARKNET OPIOID TRAFFICKING

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An international operation targeting trafficking in opioids on a clandestine part of the internet called the DarkNet has led to about 150 arrests in the United States and Europe and the seizure of drugs, cash and guns, US and European authorities said on Tuesday.

The crackdown, called Operation Dark HunTor, was announced at a U.S. Justice Department news conference where Deputy U.S Attorney General Lisa Monaco warned cyberspace drug sellers: "There is no dark internet. We can and we will shed a light."

Jean-Philippe Lecouffe, deputy director of the international police agency Europol, hailed the results of Operation Dark HunTor as "spectacular." He said the operation sends a message that "no one is beyond the reach of law enforcement, even on the dark web." The DarkNet and dark web are related terms concerning a part of the internet accessible only using a specialized web browser and the assortment of internet sites residing there.

An opioid epidemic has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in the United States alone in the past two decades due to overdoses from prescription painkillers and illegal substances, constituting an enduring public health crisis.

The Dark HunTor operation produced arrests of 150 people accused of being drug traffickers and others accused of engaging in sales of illicit goods and services.

There were 65 arrests in the United States, 47 in Germany, 24 in the United Kingdom, four each in the Netherlands and Italy, three in France, two in Switzerland and one in Bulgaria, the Justice Department said.

The department added that the operation resulted in seizures of more than \$31.6 million in cash and virtual currencies as well as 45 firearms. It added that about 234 kilograms (515 pounds) of drugs including more than 200,000 ecstasy, fentanyl, oxycodone, hydrocodone and methamphetamine pills were seized, along with counterfeit medicines.

Kenneth Polite, head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, said such trafficking presents "a global threat and it requires a global response."

The Justice Department said the crackdown built on operations conducted in late 2020 and early 2021 to disrupt dark web trafficking. It said that in January, an international crackdown targeted DarkMarket, the world's largest dark web international marketplace.

(Reporting by Mark Hosenball; Editing by Will Dunham)

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