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Washington Sanctions Brazilian Judge Over Bolsonaro Trial Allegations

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The United States Treasury Department has announced sanctions against Brazilian Supreme Federal Court (STF – *Supremo Tribunal Federal*) Justice Alexandre de Moraes, citing serious concerns about violations of civil liberties and political impartiality in connection with the prosecution of former President Jair Bolsonaro. The decision, part of a wider American response to Brazil's judicial conduct, places de Moraes under asset freezes and travel scrutiny.

Justice de Moraes is overseeing the high-profile case accusing Bolsonaro of plotting to retain power after his defeat in the 2022 presidential election. In a statement released Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent accused de Moraes of leading an “oppressive campaign of censorship,” including politically motivated detentions and prosecutions. “De Moraes is responsible for arbitrary actions that violate basic human rights, including against former President Jair Bolsonaro,” Bessent said.

The Treasury Department’s order freezes any property or assets held by de Moraes within U.S. jurisdiction. This measure follows a separate move by the U.S. State Department on 18 July, which imposed visa restrictions on several Brazilian judicial officials, including de Moraes. These steps reflect increasing transatlantic concern that Brazil’s judiciary may be undermining democratic norms and due process under the guise of legal oversight.

Former President Bolsonaro, a conservative political figure and close ally of Donald Trump, has consistently argued that the charges against him are politically driven. His critics believe the case is intended to weaken his influence and silence political opposition. De Moraes, already a divisive figure in Brazil, has drawn sharp criticism for what many view as a partisan approach to justice.

Adding further strain to relations, former U.S. President Donald Trump announced a 50% tariff on Brazilian imports, which is scheduled to take effect this Friday. In a letter dated 9 July, Trump explicitly tied the tariff to what he referred to as the “witch hunt” trial against Bolsonaro. This economic response underscores a broader political message that the United States is unwilling to turn a blind eye to judicial overreach in Brazil.

Neither the Brazilian Supreme Court nor the Presidential Palace has issued a formal response to the U.S. actions. Their silence only fuels international speculation that Brazil’s legal system is being used as a tool to reshape its political landscape.

With Washington’s response now involving both economic and diplomatic levers, Brazil faces growing scrutiny over the impartiality of its judiciary. Whether these sanctions will influence the proceedings or deepen political divides remains to be seen.