

# *Panama: Former People's Defender Arrested Accused of Embezzlement*

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Havana, June 21 (RHC) The main Panamanian press outlets reflect this Wednesday the arrest of the former Ombudsperson, Patria Portugal (2011-2013), convicted in 2022 for the crime against the Public Administration.

Some news outlets in Panama specify that the former official will serve eight years in prison for aggravated embezzlement, to the detriment of the institution she directed, which occurred in 2012.

The order became effective the day before in the Accusatory Criminal System, after completing a hearing requested by the Prosecutor's Office.

Other news reports recall that Patria Portugal was dismissed by the National Assembly in August 2013 after being accused of alleged cost overruns and irregularities in the direct contracting of two companies to redesign the institution's website and a makeover consultancy.

According to the investigations, in April 2011, Portugal signed as Ombudsperson a contract with the company Imaginarium Studio, S.A., for an amount of \$249,845 for the redesign of the entity's website, and the other in July 2013 in favor of En Avant, S.A., for 199 thousand 983 dollars, for personnel training.

The Public Prosecutor's Office demonstrated that the former official made direct contracts with these companies without justified cause, indicating "Obvious Urgency" which led to the embezzlement of funds from the public entity that she directed and that had suitable personnel for that study.

After a criminal process that lasted until August 2020, the former official was found guilty of the crime of embezzlement and in September 2022, the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) confirmed the sentence to 96 months in prison.

In December 2022, the Criminal Chamber of the CSJ rejected a request for clarification of the sentence after determining that the appeal was inadmissible. (Source: PL)

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