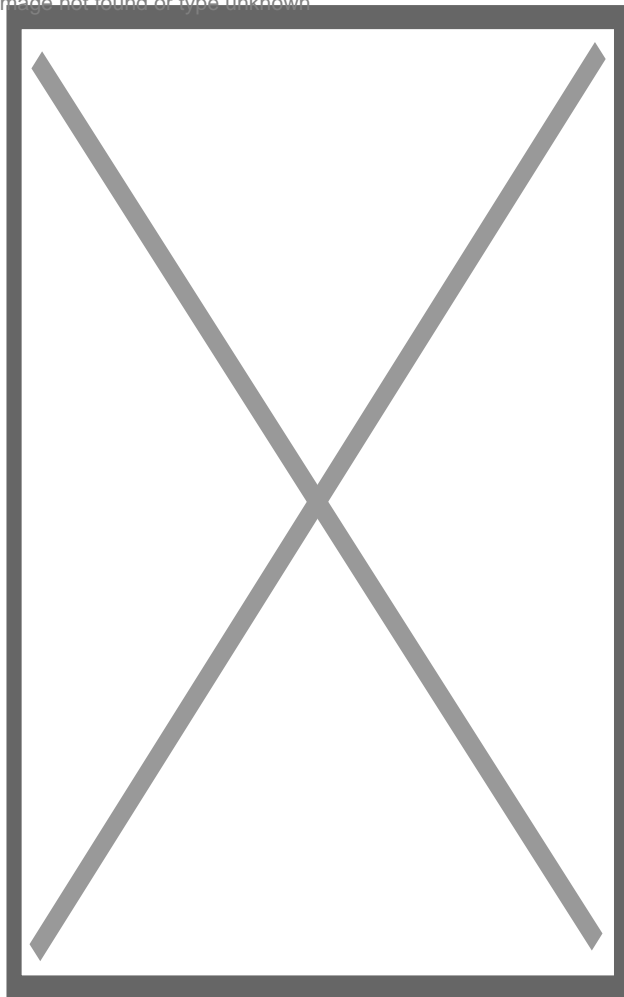


Colombia's former president Alvaro Uribe charged with witness tampering

Bogota, May 25 (RHC)-- Former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe has been charged with witness tampering and bribery, becoming the first head of the state to face a criminal trial in the Latin American nation.

The charges arise from an investigation into Uribe's alleged ties to right-wing paramilitary groups. The 71-year-old politician is accused of "offering cash or other benefits" to witnesses to discredit a political opponent who was digging into his family ties to the armed groups. If convicted, Uribe faces up to 12 years in prison.

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Alvaro Uribe, who was president from 2002 to 2010, faces up to 12 years in prison for witness tampering and bribing witnesses [File: Lina Gasca/AP Photo]

Uribe, who was president from 2002 to 2010, has denied any wrongdoing and has accused Colombia's chief prosecutor's office of "political vengeance".

There are wiretapped phone conversations in which the former president can be heard discussing with one of his lawyers efforts to flip two former paramilitary fighters who were set to testify against him. Uribe said his conversations were intercepted illegally.

"I never sought to look for witnesses. I wanted to defend my reputation," Uribe said during the virtual hearing. Judge Sandra Heredia rejected his request to have the case scrapped.

Uribe said on Friday he felt hurt for being the first former president to have to defend himself in court. The matter dates to 2012, when Uribe, then a senator, filed a complaint against left-wing senator Ivan Cepeda, whom he accused of hatching a plot to falsely link him to paramilitary groups.

But the Supreme Court decided against investigating Cepeda, instead turning its sights on Uribe. The investigation against Uribe began in 2018 and has had numerous twists and turns, with several attorneys general seeking to close the case.

It has gained new impetus under Attorney General Luz Camargo, who took over in March and was chosen by Colombia's first-ever left-wing president, Gustavo Petro – historically a foe of Uribe.

Uribe, who remains a prominent voice on Colombia's right, was known for being tough on the left-wing Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) fighters and strongly opposed the historic 2016 peace accord that saw the Marxist rebels disarm.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/355659-colombias-former-president-alvaro-uribe-charged-with-witness-tampering>



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