

Guatemalan Scandal Deepens as Corruption Chief Resigns for Fraud



Guatemala City, June 19 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The string of massive corruption scandals gripping Guatemala has deepened, as the head of the congressional commission investigating President Otto Perez Molina for corruption charges resigned on Thursday after allegations of conspiracy and fraud were leveled against the lawmaker.

The U.N. anti-impunity body in Guatemala known as CICIG presented evidence linking Congressional commission chief Baudilio Hichos to the country's \$14.5 million social security scandal Wednesday, calling for an impeachment process against the official for charges of fraud, conspiracy and influence peddling.

While Hichos initially vowed to continue working in his capacity leading the congressional probe into President Perez Molina, which is considering stripping his immunity from facing a trial, he stepped down Thursday, as Perez Molina's testimony was expected in Congress.

Hichos headed a congressional commission investigating Perez Molina for corruption, after the Supreme Court ruled that Congress would determine whether to strip the president of his immunity from

prosecution enjoyed by elected officials.

Prosecutors have leveled allegations against Perez Molina related to massive scandals in the country's customs agency and Social Security Institute, known as IGSS, which have already forced top government officials and presidential allies to resign from office amid ongoing popular calls for Perez Molina's resignation.

Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina said he will not attend an audience in Congress on Thursday despite being summoned to testify to the commission probing his involvement in the series of major corruption scandals.

Presidential Press Secretary Karla Herrera explained the presidential absence is due to conflicting commitments. Instead of testifying in person, Perez Molina will send a document stating his position in response to the corruption charges. But a lawmaker rejected Perez Molina's written testimony Thursday, saying he should have come to be held accountable, even though Guatemalan law allows submission of testimony in writing.

The congressional probe marks the first time a Guatemalan president in office has been investigated since 1985. Legislators were expected to rule on whether Perez Molina will face trial after the president's testimony, but it remains unclear if the ruling will be delayed if the written testimony is not accepted.

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