

Guatemala Arrests 17 in Graft Probe, Including Former U.S. Ambassador



Guatemala City, July 17 (RHC)-- Guatemalan police have arrested 17 people in connection to a wide-ranging graft investigation, including a former ambassador to the United States and another top ex-official. The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, CICIG, a U.N.-backed anti-corruption body, alleged that former U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala Julio Ligorria and former Communications Minister Alejandro Sinibaldi misused more than \$10 million in government funds.

Prosecutors called the case “Construction and Corruption” and divided it into two parts. In the first, Sinibaldi created a series of shell companies to launder money he collected in kickbacks for public works contracts, Ivan Velasquez, head of the CICIG, told a news conference. In the second, Ligorria used his influence to resolve litigation between phone companies in exchange for money paid through Sinibaldi’s shell companies.

Velasquez said that during the probe, investigators found evidence of payments from Telecomunicaciones de Guatemala S.A., Telgua -- a subsidiary of America Movil, which is owned by Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim -- in Sinibaldi’s account. Some of the money was allegedly laundered in nearby Nicaragua and was intended to finance former President Otto Perez Molina’s right-wing Patriot

Party, Velasquez added.

Perez Molina resigned in 2015 amid revelations of a corruption and fraud network. He is currently in prison and denies the accusations. Sinibaldi faces charges of conspiracy, bribery, money laundering and illegal campaign financing, while Ligorria faces charges of illegal campaign financing.

Authorities identified ranches, yachts, helicopters, works of art and estates that Sinibaldi allegedly obtained with the ill-gotten gains. Police also raided 42 properties related to the investigation Friday.

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