

Lula da Silva defends 2016 Rio Olympics, asserts his commitment to truth



Brasilia, June 7 (RHC)-- In his first video appearance since being imprisoned nearly 60 days ago, former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has given a deposition to Brazil's Federal Court to determine if the South American country gave bribes to host the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, stressing his commitment "is to the truth, because I doubt there is a Brazilian who seeks the truth more than me."

Speaking via video-conference, Lula recalled the moment when the president of the International Olympic Committee, or COI, opened the letter and announced "Rio de Janeiro" as the host city for the 2016 Olympics. He said it was one of the most emotional moments of his life. "I don't know what is the criteria for this citizen who said that it was cheating (selecting Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 Olympics). This citizen doesn't know anything. The COI was very serious."

Lula noted that Brazil, at the time, was a consequential country, one that "was big enough and capable to host the Olympics. The Brazilian government had the obligation to defend Rio de Janeiro. Until then, except for Mexico, (the Olympic games) were only hosted in rich countries."

When questioned by Judge Marcelo Bretas of the 7th Federal Court in Rio de Janeiro about the strong

support Brazil received for hosting the Olympics by African countries, Lula said it came naturally. He affirmed that during his presidency he “traveled 34 times to Africa, visited 29 countries and opened 19 embassies in Africa. It was like saying Africans had a fellowship with Brazil.”

During Lula's testimony, Judge Bretas noted that the former head of state “is an important figure in our country. His history is important to us all.” He also recalled that when he was 18 years old he attended a mass Lula rally in Rio and was “wearing a hat and T-shirt with his name.” Lula responded: “You can wear it now. When I hold another rally I'll call, sir, to attend.”

Lula also showed good humor even before his deposition. When viewing his image on the video-conference teleprompter he said: “I look good, huh? This tie is an Olympic winner.” The former Brazilian football star Pele was invited to give testimony as a witness in the same case. He denied having discussed a bribe payment in order for Senegal to vote in favor of Brazil hosting the 2016 Olympics.

Lula, Brazil's most popular politician and a poll favorite for upcoming presidential elections, was imprisoned in March after Brazil's Supreme Court rejected his habeas corpus appeal against a 12-year prison sentence previously issued over corruption and money-laundering charges. His two terms in office were marked by a slew of social programs, lifting millions of Brazilians out of poverty and removing the country from the United Nations World Hunger Map. He left office with a record approval rating of 83 percent in 2011, according to Datafolha.

Legal experts and observers, however, argue that his sentencing stems from a carefully orchestrated 'lawfare' and media campaign to sideline one of Brazil's most popular politicians from participating in this year's presidential election.

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