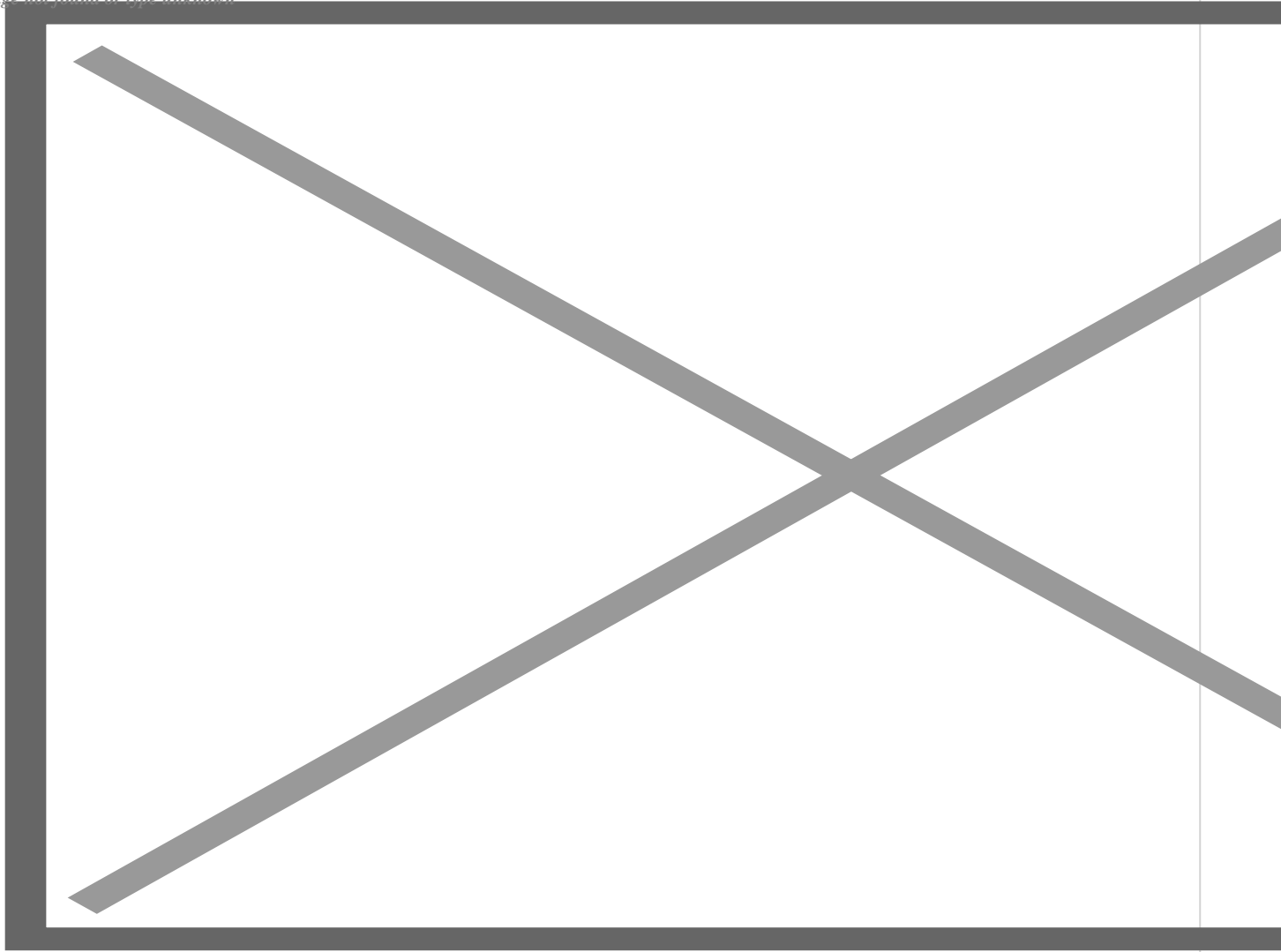


Bolivian court closes election fraud case against Morales

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La Paz, December 17 (RHC)-- A court in Bolivia has closed the October 2019 election fraud case against former president and party leader Evo Morales due to a lack of evidence.

Jorge Cino, a spokesman for the court in La Paz, said Wednesday "neither the election commission summaries nor the Organization of American States (OAS) report attached to the complaint contain any elements of evidence regarding the alleged fraud." Speaking to reporters, Cino said there have been no appeals against the court's decision.

In February, the La Paz prosecutor's office opened new criminal proceedings against Morales in connection with alleged fraud in the elections in October 2019. Alvaro Garcia Linera, the former vice president, and three ex-ministers were also suspected of fraud.

Evo Morales, Bolivia's first Indigenous president, held office for 14 years and ushered in an era of unprecedented stability and growth in the South American country. He was seeking to nationalize the extraction of Bolivia's lithium reserves but was forced to resign last November under pressure from the military and following the opposition's challenging the victory that he had secured in the presidential election a month earlier.

The former president, who believes that he was the victim of an orchestrated coup, sought exile first in Mexico and then Argentina. However, after his ally Luis Arce won the country's elections and was sworn in last month, Evo Morales returned to Bolivia from the self-imposed exile. He then headed to his rural stronghold in El Chapare, where he has strong support among the peasant population.

The return of the former leader, who is still a dominant figure in the Movement for Socialism (MAS), has now become a major challenge for Arce, with politicians saying that he has to prove that Morales is not the true power behind the new government.

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