

U.S. arrests former Bolivian coup minister in Miami

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Arturo Murillo served in the interim government of Bolivian ex-president Jeanine Anez and is also wanted on sedition charges in Bolivia (Photo: AFP)?

Miami, May 27 (RHC)-- U.S. authorities have arrested a former cabinet minister in the interim government of Bolivia's ex-president Jeanine Añez on bribery and money laundering charges.

In a statement on Wednesday, the U.S. Justice Department accused former Interior Minister Arturo Murillo and his ex-chief of staff, Sergio Mendez, “of receiving bribes paid by a U.S. company and individuals to secure a Bolivian government contract.”

Three U.S. citizens were also charged in relation to the alleged bribery scheme, which took place between November 2019 and April 2020. The Americans are accused of paying \$602,000 to the Bolivian officials, the Justice Department said, in order to secure a \$5.6 million contract to provide Bolivia’s defense ministry with tear gas and other non-lethal equipment. The five men are charged with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering. If convicted, they face up to 20 years in prison.

Arrested in Miami, where he had fled following the fall of the coup regime, Murillo is also wanted in Bolivia on sedition charges for his role in Anez’s interim administration. Anez came to power in a military-supported coup after Evo Morales, Bolivia’s first Indigenous president, was overthrown and replaced by a right-wing regime.

Evo Morales returned from exile in Argentina in November of last year after the candidate from his Movement for Socialism (MAS) Party won long-awaited presidential polls.

Anez and other ex-officials were arrested in March and accused of carrying out a coup attempt. She was ordered to four months of pre-trial detention shortly after her arrest.

But Arturo Murillo left Bolivia ahead of his arrest warrant. He played a central role in going after Evo Morales and his key supporters with charges of alleged sedition and terrorism and came under fire for heavy-handed military and police responses to protests, which saw dozens killed

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