

Former Argentinean President Mauricio Macri charged in spying case

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Buenos Aires, December 4 (RHC)-- Argentina's former president Mauricio Macri has been charged with ordering the surveillance of family members of 44 sailors who died in a 2017 navy submarine sinking. The charge carries a sentence of three to 10 years in prison and comes after Macri was subpoenaed and testified in a federal court in October.

The indictment, issued by Judge Martin Bava in Buenos Aires, charged the former president and current right-wing opposition leader with "the offence of carrying out prohibited intelligence actions." He was also charged with "creating conditions for data of persons to be collected, stored and used," according to the 174-page ruling.

Macri had previously submitted a written statement to the court saying: “I did not spy on anyone, I never ordered (anyone) in my government to spy on anyone.” On Wednesday, he dismissed the charges as “political persecution.”

Families of the sailors who died on the ARA San Juan have long maintained they were followed, wiretapped, and filmed in an alleged campaign to discourage any legal claims related to the submarine’s sinking.

The ARA San Juan submarine disappeared in November 2017. It was found just over a year later, at a depth of more than 900 metres (2,950 feet) in a remote area of the South Atlantic, some 400 kilometres (248 miles) off the coast of Argentina. The vessel had been crushed from an implosion apparently caused by a technical fault. Authorities decided against attempting to re-float it.

“The significance of the information gathered, the intention behind it, and the systematic nature of the documents analysed in this case allow us to state that this illegal intelligence was put together for one person: Mauricio Macri,” Judge Bava wrote in the indictment.

The judge granted Macri bail at 100 million pesos (\$990,000). The former president, who was in office from 2015 to 2019, when he was defeated by centre-left opposition candidate Alberto Fernandez, is banned from leaving the country.

A judge had earlier ordered the prosecution of secret service heads Gustavo Arribas and Silvia Majdalani in the case. Both had reported to Macri at the time of the alleged wrongdoing. Twelve people have been charged in connection with the case so far.

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