
Colombia: A Blow to Impunity

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At 7:23 p.m. this Monday, former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez was found guilty of procedural fraud and witness bribery, as confirmed by Judge Sandra Liliana Heredia, after announcing the verdict, which began at 8:30 a.m. this Monday, July 28.

"I proceed to announce the verdict for the crimes of procedural fraud and witness bribery in criminal proceedings," Judge Sandra Heredia stated during the hearing.

What Heredia concluded is that Uribe Vélez did seek to manipulate at least three witnesses: Juan Guillermo Monsalve, Carlos Enrique Vélez, a.k.a. "Víctor," and Euridice Cortés, a.k.a. "Diana."

Furthermore, the judge found him guilty of procedural fraud, a charge based on the case of drug trafficker Juan Carlos "El Tuso" Sierra, extradited to the United States. In 2018 and 2019, through the former president's defense, he submitted two letters to the Supreme Court of Justice in which he accused a congressional committee of allegedly promising him bribes after a visit to a Washington prison in exchange for his testimony against the now-imprisoned Senator Uribe.

NO TO EXTERNAL PRESSURE

The hearing had begun on time and with a call from the judge to protect the justice system from external pressure. "The eyes of the country and many parts of the world are on this courtroom. This trial has stirred passions and emotions, but we know that the law cannot tremble in the face of noise and justice does not kneel to power," she stated. Uribe did not attend the hearing in person and heard the verdict virtually.

The official expressed her annoyance at a defense that, according to her, sought to "instrumentalize justice" with various maneuvers. "All to transform the role of victimizer into victim," she stated. "We are witnessing the best example of magical realism, where characters, miracles, and coincidences are created," she commented. "Bribery in criminal proceedings has been proven," she declared after nearly eight hours of hearings. She then said that procedural fraud had also been proven.

Judge Heredia referred to some letters that former President Uribe submitted to the Supreme Court containing testimony from another paramilitary, alias "Tuso" Sierra. In these, "Tuso" accused Senator Iván Cepeda of having offered him legal benefits in exchange for testifying against former President Uribe. However, the letter was later revoked. He regretted what he had said and added, although he met with Cepeda in a US prison, he had never offered him any benefits. Despite his regrets, the judge said, procedural fraud was proven, as Uribe insisted on bringing false letters to court. In an audio recording, the prosecution alleged, Uribe sent a message to "Tuso" Sierra to "subtract or add" whatever he wanted to his testimony against Cepeda.

At the hearing this Monday, July 28, the sentence that former President Álvaro Uribe will have to serve was not established. However, the prosecution, Uribe Vélez's defense team, and Judge Sandra Liliana Heredia agreed that the reading of the sentence—that is, the determination of how and when he will serve his sentence—will take place next Friday, August 1, 2025, at 2:00 p.m.

Thus concluded the hearing in which the first former president of Colombia was tried.

The impending conviction for witness tampering is only the first step in a much more complex plot. Only the statements of the witnesses manipulated by the former president allow progress in the in-depth investigation into the allegations made for decades about the role of the Uribe Vélez family in the formation of the Bloque Metro paramilitary group, the El Aro and La Granja massacres, and the murder of Jesús María Valle, among hundreds of other grave human rights violations.

TURMOIL

While members of grassroots organizations celebrated the results of Uribe's trial, the local right and the motley crew based primarily in Miami lamented the incident.

Republican Representative María Elvira Salazar, a Florida congresswoman of unfortunate Cuban origin, considered that justice had not been done in Colombia because "an infamy was committed against Álvaro Uribe, the man who rescued the country from terrorism and confronted the FARC when no one else dared." Not to mention that the trial is about bribery of witnesses. He said that "they condemn him because he refused to make a pact with criminals, because he is an obstacle to the radical left that wants to seize power and turn Colombia into another Venezuela."

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff