

Guatemalan Judge Says Ex-President 'Linked' to Graft Scandal

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A judge has formally linked former President Otto Perez Molina of Guatemala to a mass government corruption scandal at a hearing taking place Tuesday, according to Guatemalan press.

El Universal and Prensa Libre both tweeted via reporters inside the court that he is “linked” with the corruption ring dubbed “La Linea.”

“This is the face of Perez Molina upon hearing that he is linked with the process”

As a result of this new statement by the judge, local press also report that Guatemala’s attorney general called for Perez Molina to continue to be held in remand while the hearings to determine his fate take place.

A judge ordered Perez Molina’s detention Thursday on charges of fraud, illicit association and receiving bribes, amid ongoing hearings for other government officials over the corruption allegations. Perez Molina was barred from leaving the country as a precautionary measure.

Dozens of wiretapped recordings constituted a large portion of the prosecution’s evidence against Perez Molina. One directly implicates the former president, who had allegedly ordered the creation of four bank accounts to hold funds diverted by the country’s customs service.

He has been accused of pocketing as much as US\$3.7 million from the scheme, which saw corrupt officials elicit bribes from businesses seeking to circumvent import duties.

Perez denies any wrongdoing; he has vowed to fight the charges against him.

“I deny those allegations,” he said on the second day of the hearing on Friday.

On the same day, Perez claimed the amount of money he is accused of stealing through the customs scheme was small change, compared to what he could have made if he had turned corrupt.

The hearing has already been welcomed by activists. When Thursday's proceedings came to a close, Perez was met with crowds of protesters outside the court. Unlike previous demonstrations, the protests were upbeat, after months of demands for Perez to step down.

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The political crisis generated by this scandal is considered the one of the worst faced by the Central American nation in recent years, and was a key issue in this year's general elections.

The tightly contested first round of voting Sunday was riddled with allegations of irregularities. According to the Guatemalan Election officials, voter turnout was higher than expected, with more than 70 percent of registered voters casting their vote. However, over 900 complaints of election fraud have been submitted to the Guatemalan attorney general.

A second round of voting is set to take place in late October.

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