

LATIN AMERICA

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ODEBRECHT CORRUPTION SCHEME EXTENDS TO PANAMA

Luis Enrique Martinelli, 38, and Ricardo Alberto Martinelli, 40, were arrested in connection with a multinational corruption scheme on July 6 as they attempted to board a flight to Panama in Guatemala City. The Martinelli brothers are linked to Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht, which is at the centre of a widespread corruption scandal that was uncovered in 2014. The construction giant paid more than \$700 million in bribes to government officials in various countries in exchange for favourable contracts.

The brothers are accused of having been intermediaries for the payment of nearly \$28 million in bribes from Odebrecht to a high-ranking Panama official between 2009 and 2014, the period in which their father was in office. Their father, Ricardo Martinelli, former President of Panama, and his successor, Juan Carlos Varelais, are currently banned from leaving Panama while



Ricardo Martinelli [cropped] – United Nations Photo (flickr.com)

under investigation for money laundering in separate corruption cases.

The criminal complaint, filed on June 27 in Brooklyn, New York also alleges that the brothers managed secret bank accounts – many in US banks – to facilitate the bribe payments. The brothers face extradition to the United States on charges of bribery and money laundering. The Martinelli family is working to get legal assistance in Guatemala and transfer the proceedings to Panama.

HAITIAN EX-PARAMILITARY LEADER EMMANUEL "TOTO" CONSTANT COULD BE FREE

Emmanuel "Toto" Constant, accused of crimes against humanity between 1991 and 1994, could soon be released from Haitian jail.

After the 1991 coup that overthrew Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Constant set up a CIA-backed paramilitary group known as Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haïti (FRAPH). FRAPH, widely known as a death squad, was responsible for terrorising supporters of the exiled President.

In 1995, when a US and UN-led multinational occupation restored Aristide's power, Constant fled to the United States, where he remained free after threatening to speak about his relationship with the CIA and due to the instability in Haiti.

Arrested in New York in 2008 on separate charges,

Constant was sentenced to serve 12 to 37 years in prison. In May 2020, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced its intention to deport Constant to Haiti.

Constant was deported on June 23 and arrested immediately upon arrival in Haiti. Constant is being held in jail, where he faces charges for his alleged crimes. Haiti's chief prosecutor says that he has no information on Constant's alleged crimes or his 2000 murder conviction in absentia for the 1994 massacre in Raboteau.

Human rights advocates call the deportation "dangerously irresponsible" as impunity is not uncommon in Haiti. With a weak judicial system and no plan to prosecute Constant, many fear he will walk free. Some believe that the US has a direct responsibility to ensure justice due to its involvement in Haiti in the 1990s. Without evidence, Constant could soon be a free man.