

U.S. arrests four suspects linked to 2021 assassination of Haiti's president

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Miami, February 15 (RHC)-- U.S. authorities have arrested and charged four people in Florida in connection to the 2021 assassination of former Haitian President Jovenel Moise. U.S. Justice Department officials announced on Tuesday charges of “conspiracy to kidnap or kill outside the United States, resulting in death” against Florida residents Antonio “Tony” Intriago, Arcangel Pretel Ortiz and Walter Veintemilla.

A fourth suspect, Frederick Bergmann, is accused of conspiring to smuggle ballistic vests for former Colombian soldiers who allegedly carried out the fatal shooting.

Intriago is the owner of CTU Security, a Florida-based company that allegedly helped recruit the assassins. Ortiz is also a “principal” representative of the firm, according to the Justice Department.

Veintemilla, meanwhile, is accused of funding the operation through his company Worldwide Capital Lending Group, which allegedly extended a \$175,000 line of credit to CTU and sent money for ammunition.

Intriago’s lawyer told the New York Times he “intends to enter a not guilty plea.” The Associated Press news agency also cited Veintemilla’s lawyer as saying he will plead not guilty.

In July 2021, armed men claiming to be U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents entered Moise’s compound in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince and shot him 12 times. The late former president’s wife was also injured in the attack.

One of the poorest countries in the world, Haiti has suffered from natural disasters, rampant gang violence and a longstanding political deadlock made worse by the assassination.

“While the murder of President Moise occurred in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, most of the planning, funding and direction of the plot to violently overthrow the president occurred right here in the United States,” Markenzky Lapointe, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, told reporters on Tuesday.

Tuesday’s arrests bring the total number of defendants in U.S. custody to 11, including key players like James Solages and Joseph Vincent, both Haitian Americans.

“If you’re from this neck of the woods, you know that Haiti is no stranger to hardship and suffering,” Lapointe said. “Both in its early and modern history Haiti has experienced devastating earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, epidemics, economic hardship and instability.” He added that some people saw “opportunities” in the country’s crises.

“It appears that money and power — with an emphasis on money — were the opportunities that fuelled the plot to overthrow Haitian President Jovenel Moise,” Lapointe said. The initial plan was to overthrow Moise and install a president who would advance his killers’ interests, Lapointe said, but the plot later changed to killing the Haitian president.

“A central tenet of every democracy in the world is that those who want to change their government must do so peacefully — through ballots, not bullets,” said Matt Olsen, assistant attorney general for national security at the U.S. Justice Department. “These defendants thought they could secure Haitian immunity for their crime, and we will now deliver justice in a U.S. courtroom.”

Moise’s killing has aggravated an already dire situation in Haiti, where the government has been struggling to secure the country against powerful gangs.

Acting Prime Minister Ariel Henry appealed to the international community last year to set up a “specialised armed force” to quell gang violence in the country, but some civil society groups have rejected the prospect of foreign intervention.

Rights advocates have also questioned Henry’s legitimacy and blamed him for the political turmoil after he indefinitely postponed presidential and legislative elections previously set for 2021.

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