

# *Former Panamanian President to Be Tried for Corruption*

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Panama City, April 23 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Panama's former President Ricardo Martinelli has lost his immunity, the Panamanian Electoral Tribunal announced on Wednesday, paving the way for prosecution on pending corruption charges.

Martinelli, who was elected to the Central American Parliament (Parlacen) in May last year, is currently exiled in the U.S. state of Florida. Charges against him are based on the purchase of \$45 million dollars worth of dehydrated food bought after a direct order of Martinelli by the National Help Program (PAN). The last two directors of the PAN, who are also being investigated, testified that the former president forced them to make the purchase and also ordered a specific company to be benefited. The former Minister of the Presidency, Jimmy Papadimitru, who now heads the PAN, confirmed the claims.

The country's Supreme Court requested the Electoral Tribunal to lift Martinelli's immunity — granted due to his position as parliament member — to open an investigation against him regarding this case. Martinelli's defense team, however, argues that this case is political persecution and have sued the Panamanian state at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IHCHR).

Authorities will now investigate links between Martinelli and Lerkshore International Limited, the company that sold the dry food to PAN. Several former ministers and high-ranking officials from Martinelli's government and businessmen close to the former head of State are being investigated for different

corruption scandals occurred during his time in office.

The case of the PAN dehydrated food supplies is one of several cases of corruption in which Martinelli is involved.

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