

Honduran Drug Lord Sent 20 Tons of Cocaine to U.S. Before Arrest



Tegucigalpa, April 10 (RHC)-- Jailed Honduran drug lord Devis Leonel Rivera shipped 20 tons of cocaine to the U.S. before his January 2015 arrest, AFP reports, citing recently-released court documents.

The cocaine shipments were made during a period spanning more than 10 years, raising questions about how they were able to make their way past U.S. customs officials.

The documents also revealed that Maradiaga, leader of Los Cachiros drug cartel, admitted to killing 78 people throughout his criminal career.

"This is what makes the Cachiros case so interesting, because it's a little window into the way organized crime and elites intersect in places like Honduras," Steven Dudley, co-director of think tank Insight Crime, told AFP.

Rivera's drug shipment confession comes as new reports show that cocaine use in the U.S. has increased for the first time in 10 years. In fact, the number of U.S. overdose deaths in 2015 that involved cocaine was the highest since 2006, the Substance

Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reports.

The U.S. government attributes rising cocaine use in the country to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC, allegedly encouraging farmers under their control to grow coca as possible ahead of disarmament. These unsubstantiated claims, however, entirely leave out the role of the right-wing Honduran government in supporting drug lords like Rivera.

Last month, while testifying in court, Rivera said that he paid large sums of money to former Honduran President Porfirio Lobo, beginning during his 2009 election campaign in the wake of a U.S.-backed coup. Honduran Security Minister Julian Pacheco is also being investigated for charging bribes in exchange for

shielding cartels and their criminal operations.

The U.S.-backed 2009 coup in Honduras helped pave the way for the expansion of drug trafficking thanks to a breakdown in the rule of law, a corrupt and complicit government and the widespread militarization of Indigenous and campesino areas.

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