

Former Panamanian president denied bail again



Panama City, February 6 (RHC)-- Former Panamanian president Ricardo Martinelli was denied bail again after being held for 18 months on charges that he spied on opposition groups and journalists. Panama's justice department denied the bail request while an investigation of the ex-head of state for espionage continues.

Judge Justo Vargas who is presiding over the case said in a hearing that "the most prudent thing is to deny the bail request for release requested by the defense of the former president of the Republic." The judge says that the "situation ... has not changed."

Martinelli had requested a \$500,000 bail to leave prison where he has been held for the past 18 months. He had been extradited from the United States prior to his arrest in Panama.

The ex-president, who is accused of spying on and intercepting communications from over 150 journalists, opponents and activists during his term, said during the February 4th hearing to request bail that the court is denying him bail to exclude him from politics. "They have me imprisoned and excluded from everything," said Martinelli. He then likened his prison stay to a Nazi concentration camp saying he's being treated as "subhuman."

"They have never given me the privilege of defending myself and have violated all my rights," said the

former head of state. He added: "It seems that for Martinelli there is another law. ... I deserve this bond," he added.

This was the fourth time that Martinelli requested and was denied bond and he could face up to 21 years in prison if found guilty on all charges. The defense immediately appealed the judge's decision and another hearing is set for February 11th.

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