

Two more indicted in sprawling Venezuela bribe case

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Richard L. Cassin in *Petroleos de Venezuela, Venezuela, money laundering*



A federal indictment unsealed Tuesday charged the president of a Miami-based company and its former sales rep with bribing officials at Venezuela's state energy company to win work and receive payment of past due invoices.

Rafael Enrique Pinto Franceschi (Pinto), 40, of Miami, and Franz Herman Muller Huber (Muller), 68, of Weston, Florida, a former sales rep for the same company, were charged in a five-count indictment returned in the Southern District of Texas on February 21.

They were each charged with one count of conspiracy to violate the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, two counts of wire fraud, and one count of conspiracy to launder money.

They're accused of bribing three officials of Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. or PDVSA.

Two of the three officials they allegedly bribed -- Jose Camacho and Ivan Guedez, both of Houston -- have already pleaded guilty in the case and are waiting to be sentenced.

According to the DOJ, 21 individuals have now been charged in the PDVSA bribery case and 15 have pleaded guilty.

In addition to allegedly bribing PDVSA officials, Pinto and Muller took kickbacks -- \$985,000 went to Pinto and more than \$258,000 to Muller, according to the indictment.

In exchange for bribes, the PDVSA officials allegedly helped the Miami company win PDVSA contracts. The officials also allegedly revealed inside information to Pinto and Muller and helped them obtain payment on past due invoices.

The DOJ said when the Miami company received a payment from PDVSA, three percent would be sent to a Swiss bank account.

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