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Loretta Lynch

Press Conference Announcing FIFA Officials Corruption Charges

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I am honored to be joined today by Director James Comey of the FBI, by Acting U.S. Attorney Kelly Currie here in the Eastern District of New York, and Chief of Investigation Richard Weber of the IRS's Criminal Investigation Division.

We are here to announce the unsealing of charges and the arrests of individuals as part of our long-running investigation into bribery and corruption in the world of organized soccer.

Now, many of the individuals and organizations we will describe today were entrusted with keeping soccer open and accessible to all. They held important responsibilities at every level, from building soccer fields for children in developing countries, to organizing the World Cup. They were expected to uphold the rules that keep soccer honest, and to protect the integrity of the game. Instead, they corrupted the business of worldwide soccer to serve their interests and to enrich themselves. This Department of Justice is determined to end these practices, to root out corruption, and to bring wrongdoers to justice.

Now, the 14 defendants charged in the indictment we are unsealing today include high-ranking officials of FIFA, the international organization responsible for regulating and promoting soccer; leaders of regional and other governing bodies under the FIFA umbrella; and sports marketing executives who, according to the indictment, paid millions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks to obtain lucrative media and marketing rights to international soccer tournaments. The 47-count indictment against these individuals includes charges of racketeering, wire fraud and money laundering conspiracies spanning two decades.



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FIFA and the regional bodies under its umbrella make money, in part, by selling commercial rights to their soccer tournaments to sports marketing companies, often through multi-year contracts covering multiple editions of the tournaments. Now, the sports marketing companies, in turn, sell those rights downstream -- that is, to other TV and -- and broadcast networks, to corporate sponsors and to other entities, for significant sums of money.

Beginning in 1991, two generations of soccer officials, including the then-presidents of two regional soccer confederations under FIFA -- one being the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football, known as CONCACAF, which includes the U.S., and the South American Football Confederation, or CONMEBOL, which represents organized soccer in South America -- used their positions of trust within their respective organizations to solicit bribes from sports marketers in exchange for the commercial rights to their soccer tournaments. They did this over and over, year after year, tournament after tournament.

In just one example, in 2016 here in the United States we are scheduled to host the centennial edition of the Copa America -- the first time that tournament will be held in cities outside of South America. Our investigation revealed that what should have been an expression of international sportsmanship was used as a vehicle in this broader scheme to line executives' pockets with bribes totaling 110 million dollars -- nearly a third of the legitimate costs of the rights to the tournaments involved.

Now, the criminal activity that we've identified did not solely involve sports marketing. Around 2004, bidding began for the opportunity to host the 2010 World Cup, which was ultimately awarded to South Africa -- the first time the tournament would be held on the African continent. But even for this historic event, FIFA executives and others corrupted the process by using bribes to influence the hosting decision. The indictment also alleges that corruption and bribery extended to the 2011 presidential FIFA election, and to agreements regarding sponsorship of the Brazilian national soccer team by a major U.S. sportswear company.

In short, these individuals through these organizations engaged in bribery to decide who would televise games, where the games would be held, and who would run the organization overseeing organized soccer worldwide, one of the most popular sports around the globe.

And while at least one FIFA executive served as CONCACAF president without pay, there was little altruism involved, as he alone is alleged to have taken more than 10 million dollars in bribes over a 19-year period and amassed a personal fortune from his ill-gotten gains.

Now, in many instances, defendants and their co-conspirators planned aspects of this long-running scheme during meetings held here in the United States; they used the banking and the wire facilities of the U.S. to distribute their bribe payments; and they planned to profit from their scheme in large part through promotional efforts directed at the growing U.S. market for soccer.



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In addition to the indictment, we are also unsealing today the charging instruments of four individual and two corporate defendants who have already pleaded guilty to their involvement in racketeering activity and other criminal conduct. Among these defendants are a U.S. sports marketing company, a Brazilian sports marketing executive, and a U.S. citizen who, in addition to being the former general secretary of CONCACAF and a member of the FIFA executive committee, was a beneficiary of the 2010 World Cup bribery scheme. All told, these defendants have agreed to forfeit over 150 million dollars in illegal profits that they've made from these crimes.

And finally, we are also announcing that agents this morning have begun executing a search warrant at CONCACAF headquarters in Miami, Florida. CONCACAF, plainly an organization in crisis, we have already reached out to its representatives this morning to ensure that the people of integrity who work there know that we stand ready to work with them to reform their practices in the wake of the actions that we are taking today.

Earlier today, Swiss authorities in Zurich arrested seven of the defendants charged in this indictment, including the current president of CONCACAF. We are also in the process of seeking the apprehension of additional defendants. All of these defendants abused the U.S. financial system and violated U.S. law, and we intend to hold them accountable. Going forward, we welcome the opportunity to work with our partners around the world to bring additional co-conspirators and other corrupt individuals to justice.

Today's action is a testament to the tireless efforts of federal prosecutors here in the Eastern District of New York, as well as the New York Field Office of the FBI and the Los Angeles Field Office of the IRS Criminal Investigation Division.

I want to thank all of the agents, prosecutors, law enforcement officials and analysts who contributed their time and their talents to this extensive investigation.

I also want to recognize Acting U.S. Attorney Kelly Currie for his leadership of this U.S. Attorney's Office.

And I want to express my appreciation for the cooperation and the assistance that we have received from our international partners -- particularly the Swiss authorities. I want to make clear that the defendants arrested in Zurich this morning have the right to a fair and impartial extradition process, and they will receive a fair trial if they are brought to this country.