

**Department of Justice**

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Texas Businessman Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Obstruct Justice in Connection with Venezuela Bribery Scheme**

A former procurement officer of Venezuela's state-owned and state-controlled energy company, Petroleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), pleaded guilty today for his role in a scheme to obstruct an investigation relating to bribes paid by the owner of U.S.-based companies to Venezuelan government officials in exchange for securing additional business with PDVSA and payment priority on outstanding invoices.

Assistant Attorney General Brian A. Benczkowski of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Ryan K. Patrick of the Southern District of Texas and Special Agent in Charge Mark Dawson of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Houston made the announcement.

Alfonso Eliezer Gravina Munoz (Gravina), 56, of Katy, Texas, who previously worked for PDVSA in Houston, Texas, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Kenneth M. Hoyt of the Southern District of Texas in Houston to one count of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding. Gravina is scheduled to be sentenced on Feb. 19, 2019 before Judge Gary H. Miller. He was charged by indictment on Nov. 15.

Gravina pleaded guilty on Dec. 10, 2015 to one count of conspiracy to launder money and one count of making false statements on his federal income tax return. Gravina's plea agreement in that case was a cooperation plea agreement, and it contemplated the possibility that the United States would make a motion to reduce his sentence based on his cooperation. Under the terms of the plea agreement, Gravina agreed to participate in interviews as requested by the United States, and to provide "truthful, complete and accurate information" to government agents and attorneys.

According to admissions made in connection with Gravina's plea in this case, after his plea in December 2015, Gravina met periodically with HSI special agents to provide information regarding corruption at PDVSA. Despite knowing that U.S. government authorities were investigating corruption at PDVSA, and, specifically, that at the beginning of 2018 the government was focusing on bribes paid by companies controlled by an individual referred to as Co-Conspirator 1 in the indictment in this case, Gravina concealed facts about Co-Conspirator 1's bribe payments to PDVSA officials in his interviews with the government. In addition, Gravina informed Co-Conspirator 1 that U.S. government authorities were investigating Co-Conspirator 1, and provided Co-Conspirator 1 with information about the investigation, including the topics discussed in Gravina's meetings with the government. This passing of information led to the destruction of evidence by Co-Conspirator 1 and others, and to Co-Conspirator 1's attempt to flee the country in July 2018.

Gravina becomes the latest individual to plead guilty as part of a larger, ongoing investigation by the U.S. government into bribery at PDVSA. Including Gravina, the Justice Department has announced the guilty pleas of a total of 15 individuals in connection with the investigation.

HSI Houston is conducting the ongoing investigation with assistance from HSI in Boston and Madrid, as well as from IRS Criminal Investigation. Trial Attorneys Sarah E. Edwards and Sonali D. Patel of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorneys John P. Pearson and Robert S. Johnson of the Southern District of Texas are prosecuting the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Kristine Rollinson of the Southern District of Texas is handling the forfeiture aspects of the case.

The Fraud Section is responsible for investigating and prosecuting all FCPA matters. Additional information about the Justice Department's FCPA enforcement efforts can be found at [www.justice.gov/criminal/fraud/fcpa](http://www.justice.gov/criminal/fraud/fcpa).

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