

Impugning DR Anti-Corruption Efforts Is an Affront to Justice

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The people of the Dominican Republic have a right to be proud of the progress they are making to build a more modern economy and just society, including anti-corruption efforts that are holding officials accountable for betraying their public trust. *It's no wonder that Dominican **civil society leaders** are indignant that a wealthy former finance minister – who is accused of leading embezzlement and bribery schemes diverting at least \$750 million for partisan and personal use – hired Washington **lobbyists** in May to discredit the independent prosecutors and judges who are **risking** their lives to bring criminals to justice.*

Holding public officials accountable is just one of the things changing for the better in the DR. New leadership in that Caribbean nation has helped jumpstart a robust **recovery** from the COVID pandemic. A projected annual growth rate in excess of 4% this year is fueled by record-breaking revenue from **tourism** and **exports**. New foreign investment in the first quarter of this year reached a **record** \$926 million, as investors seek the security of a country committed to democracy and the rule of law.

President Luis Abinader, elected three years ago, has outlined a **vision** for a modern, diverse, and sustainable economy: investing in roads, mass transit, and ports. He also has increased the minimum wage, funded universal health care, launched the reform and modernization of public education, and expanded subsidies to help the most vulnerable Dominicans cope with the shocks of the COVID and Ukraine crises.

The DR is committed to **building** secure and stable supply chains with the United States, just as Dominicans have markedly improved their performance against shared security threats. In just the last three years, counter-narcotics operations have **seized** more illegal drugs from city streets than in the previous decade. Last year, President Abinader **explained** bluntly why drug seizures surged under his government compared to his predecessors, saying, “In this government, there is no complicity with narco-trafficking.”

*Upon taking office, Abinader designated an **independent** attorney general and a team of anti-corruption prosecutors. Along with courageous judges, these **autonomous** authorities have brought charges against officials of current and prior administrations.* The Dominican Republic demonstrated the most improvement in Latin America in the tools and policies needed to fight corruption, according to a 2023 **study** published in June. In terms of “judicial independence and efficiency,” “anti-corruption agencies’ independence and efficiency,” and “government transparency,” the study rated the DR well above the regional average.

This anti-corruption crusade is unwelcome news to those accused of embezzling public resources. One such accused, former finance minister Donald Guerrero Ortiz Lope, took the unusual step of hiring Washington lobbyists to try to convince American officials that the

Dominican judicial system is detaining defendants for too long, based on little or no evidence. That same line is being peddled online, including [on this site](#), by a group calling itself, ironically, the “Dominican Justice Initiative.”

Publicly available court records tell a very different story: Ex-Minister Guerrero has been accused of fraud, embezzlement, and conversion of state funds that “were used in the financing of candidate Gonzalo Castillo Terrero in the primary elections of the Dominican Liberation Party, PLD.” According to a 2,100-page formal accusation submitted by the anti-corruption prosecutor, Guerrero abused his authority as minister of finance during the administration of President Danilo Medina (PLD), along with more than a dozen other public officials who formed this alleged “criminal structure.” (The entire **document** – the equivalent of an indictment – is readily accessible.) Remarkably, ***10 of Guerrero’s 20 co-defendants already have admitted their participation in this criminal conspiracy.***

Guerrero’s D.C. lobbyists have circulated convoluted arguments and falsehoods to portray their client as a victim of a partisan witch hunt. One document shared with U.S. officials asserted recklessly that President Abinader is rounding up and detaining partisan opponents from Mr. Guerrero’s political party. However, the independent, nonpartisan investigation and prosecution of Guerrero and his alleged co-conspirators are being led by a woman whose first appointment came under a PLD government. ***Under Dominican law, Mr. Guerrero’s pre-trial detention must be periodically justified and approved by fully independent prosecutors and judges – depending in part on whether the accused is a flight risk.*** Furthermore, the 1999 human rights report cited by Guerrero’s advocates regarding excessive pre-trial detention criticized conduct that occurred during a PLD administration.

One prominent civil society leader **observed** that Guerrero, after he has been caught violating the public trust, is using his economic power to undermine the judicial process. Of course, outside observers are not in a position to speculate on the guilt or innocence of Guerrero or of the others accused. However, ***his efforts to impugn and impede the work of Dominican anti-corruption professionals threaten the significant progress the country is making toward a more just society, committed to the rule of law and the well-being of all Dominicans.***

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