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Colombia to set up anti-graft task force – report (Colombia creará grupo de acción anti-corrupción – reporte)

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Resumen: artículo de la agencia de noticias inglesa, Thomson Reuters, con cobertura global, sobre la creación de un futuro grupo de acción contra la corrupción y el lavado de activos, conformado por investigadores de la policía, agencias estatales de inteligencia y fiscales. El artículo cita a Rafael Merchán, el zar anti corrupción de Colombia, y al Director de la UIAF, Luis Edmundo Suárez, con base en la información publicada por El Tiempo en un artículo del domingo 11 de agosto de 2013.

BOGOTA (Thomson Reuters Foundation) – Colombia plans to create a task force made up of police investigators, state intelligence agencies and prosecutors to fight corruption and multi-billion-dollar money laundering, El Tiempo newspaper reported.

The special task force would aim to crack down on graft involving lawmakers, businessmen and government officials who have siphoned off and misused public funds and drug traffickers who have laundered money.

“We’re going after white-collar criminals,” Rafael Merchan, Colombia’s anti-corruption czar said in the report in El Tiempo.

In recent years, Colombia has been rocked by a series of graft scandals on a scale of hundreds of millions of dollars.

These include irregularities in awarding contracts for major infrastructure projects, corrupt practices involving public officials working in the national tax agency, a wire-tapping scandal at the state intelligence agency, fraud among public healthcare providers and alleged corruption involving public officials at the National Narcotics Directorate – the government agency that manages assets seized from drug traffickers.

Bogota’s former mayor Samuel Moreno is in jail accused of fraudulently granting multi-million-dollar public works contracts to companies and local businessmen in exchange for kickbacks.

The government’s special task force, which is set to start work early next year and is funded by the European Union, aims to raise the number of convictions of high-profile lawmakers and businessmen involved in corruption by following the money trail and seizing their assets and properties, El Tiempo said.

“Going after the criminals is not enough. We have to go after their fortunes,” said Luis Edmundo Suarez, head of Colombia’s Information and Financial Analysis unit (UIAF), El Tiempo reported. The government body looks into suspicious money movements and sends any cases to state prosecutors for investigation.

There are no reliable figures on how much corruption costs Colombia each year or how much money drug traffickers launder. But local experts estimate drug traffickers launder \$10 billion a year, El Tiempo said.

The government of Juan Manuel Santos has declared fighting corruption, particularly in local government, a major priority in the country.

But after three years in office, few Colombians believe president Santos has made significant progress in



tackling rampant vice.

Santos, who is widely believed to want to run for a second term in 2014, is keen to claim some big scalps and put behind bars prominent politicians and business leaders accused of graft.

According to Transparency International's 2013 global corruption barometer published in July, 56 percent of Colombians surveyed said they believed corruption had got worse in the country over the last two years, while 62 percent said corruption in the public sector was "very serious".

<http://www.trust.org/item/20130812161113-bpam1>