South Florida man suing Venezuelan television executive in attempt to clear his name

By
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A South Florida man accused of criminal charges in Venezuela is trying to clear his name by suing a Venezuelan television executive.

Celestino Diaz Fernandez owned a chain of arepas restaurants that failed. Then, he claims an investor burned him with libel. So, Diaz Fernandez filed a libel lawsuit against Omar Camero Jr. and Televen International in Miami-Dade County.

"I thought of him like a media tycoon from Venezuela, like a Rupert Murdoch there," Diaz Fernandez said. "He said he could help tremendously in marketing because he had his television network of his family and he could help us grow."

Camero invested more than $1 million in the arepas restaurants in New York City, according to the lawsuit. All investors signed an operating agreement that stated no investor had a right to a refund of his capital contribution, according to the lawsuit.

The chain opened three restaurants by the fall of 2019. Months later, the COVID-19 pandemic kept customers away and business fell by 90%, Diaz Fernandez said. Then, Camero asked for his investment back, according to the lawsuit.

"He simply didn't care if the world was shut down," Diaz Fernandez said. "He wanted his money back plus ten times his money back. He was sending me threats, calling me, ' Give me my money. I'm going to destroy you."

The dispute went to arbitration where Camero lowered his demands, but both sides dismissed the proceedings without resolution, according to the lawsuit.

Diaz Fernandez claims Camero, Jr. then used his influence in Venezuela to ruin Diaz Fernandez's reputation.

Prosecutors in Venezuela issued a warrant for Diaz Fernandez's arrest on fraud charges, the lawsuit claims. However, a Venezuelan appeals court overturned a ruling against Diaz Fernandez, finding insufficient evidence and that the case was filed in the wrong jurisdiction, according to the lawsuit filed in Miami-Dade County.

Venezuelan authorities also applied to Interpol for a "Red Notice," a worldwide request to arrest Diaz Fernandez, the lawsuit claims.

Televen broadcasted allegations about the Red Notice and fraud case to thousands of people, according to the lawsuit.

Interpol's website does not show a Red Notice for Diaz Fernandez. It has been removed, he said. However, his lawyer said Diaz Fernandez fears traveling abroad.

"So this has affected Mr. Diaz's business opportunities, his travel in ways that we will eventually show in the case," Gabor Gazso von Klingspor, Diaz Fernandez's attorney, said.

Attorneys for Camero and Televen did not respond to CBS News Miami requests for comment.

However, they filed to dismiss the case on Nov. 10, "… because a satisfactory remedy may be more conveniently sought in Venezuela," according to court records.

"The proof that matters is in Venezuela, in Spanish, and beyond this court's subpoena power," the motion to dismiss the lawsuit said.

One week later, Diaz Fernandez continues to push the court for a judgment awarding him damages in excess of $50,000.

"You have someone come in trying to destroy your name and reputation," Diaz Fernandez said. "It's pretty hard but we don't comply with bullies."