

# Argentine Leader Faults U.S. on Inquiry

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BUENOS AIRES — [Argentina](#)'s new president, [Cristina Fernández de Kirchner](#), lashed out at the United States on Thursday for meddling in Latin American affairs after American prosecutors in Miami alleged that a suitcase stuffed with \$800,000 was intended to be a secret contribution to her campaign.

“There is some garbage in international politics that holds back development and seriousness in international relationships,” Mrs. Kirchner said from the presidential palace here.

On Wednesday, just two days after Mrs. Kirchner was sworn in as Argentina's first elected female president, American officials arrested three Venezuelans and one Uruguayan on charges of acting and conspiring to act as agents of a foreign government within the United States, without prior notification to the attorney general.

According to the American criminal complaint, the four individuals, and a fifth who is still being sought, were acting on behalf of high-ranking officials in the government of President [Hugo Chávez](#) of [Venezuela](#), which an assistant United States attorney says was seeking to deliver the money to Mrs. Kirchner's campaign in August, two months before the Oct. 28 election.

The complaint, which was filed in federal court in Miami, also said the men had plotted to cover up the intent behind the delivery of the cash.

Mrs. Kirchner criticized the complaint while stressing the importance of the relationship between Argentina and Mr. Chávez's government.

“This president may be a woman, but she's not going to allow herself to be pressured,” Mrs. Kirchner said in a televised speech. She said she would “continue affirming our friendship with all Latin American countries and also with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.”

The charges brought by American prosecutors alleging Venezuela's involvement have buttressed suspicions among some in Latin America that Mr. Chávez has been trying to use his country's oil wealth to influence presidential campaigns in the region clandestinely.

In Argentina, the case has raised concerns about the tightening bond between the Kirchner government and Mr. Chávez, who has pushed for energy accords with Argentina and to refinance billions of dollars of Argentina's debt.

The case first came to light on Aug. 4, when Guido Alejandro Antonini Wilson, who holds American and Venezuelan citizenship and lives in south Florida, was stopped by Argentine officials after arriving in Buenos Aires with a cash-stuffed suitcase via a chartered flight from Caracas, Venezuela.

Mr. Antonini has not been charged in the case. Alicia Valle, special counsel to the United States attorney in Miami, would not comment on whether Mr. Antonini was cooperating with investigators.

Since prosecutors filed their criminal complaint on Wednesday, the case has exploded in the Argentine and Venezuelan press. The Buenos Aires daily La Nación devoted seven pages of articles to the case. In Venezuela, “Antoninigate” drew cries for more investigations.

On Thursday, aides to Mrs. Kirchner sought to redirect the focus from charges that foreigners were seeking to finance her campaign secretly, to possible motivations for the American investigation. Justice Minister Anibal Fernández called the American case “an enormous dirty trick” and a “reprisal” for the country’s ties with Mr. Chávez.

The Venezuelan information minister, William Lara, denied any link between the money and his government, saying the four men who were arrested were not its agents and calling the charges “U.S. propagandistic trash,” The Associated Press reported.

It is not against Argentine law for foreigners to contribute to a presidential campaign, but it is illegal to do so secretly, Argentine officials said. It also is illegal to bring undeclared cash into the country, the officials said.

The American complaint alleges that on Aug. 23, less than three weeks after the aborted delivery in Buenos Aires, Mr. Antonini met with three of the charged suspects in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. It was there that Franklin Durán, one of the suspects, told him that the intended recipient of the \$800,000 was Mrs. Kirchner’s campaign.

According to prosecutors, Carlos Kauffmann, another suspect, warned Mr. Antonini that “his future actions” might put the life of his children “at risk.” According to the complaint, Moisés Maionica, another suspect, sought to reassure Mr. Antonini at that meeting that Venezuela’s national oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, would cover any costs he incurred from the seizure of the suitcase in Buenos Aires.

At another meeting four days later in Fort Lauderdale, Mr. Durán told Mr. Antonini “in substance” that the disclosure of the intended recipient of the cash could result in the loss of the election by the recipient.

The money seizure in August led [Néstor Kirchner](#), the president at the time, to fire an Argentine official for allowing Mr. Antonini to carry the cash aboard the flight, which had been chartered by the Argentine national oil company. On board were three Argentine officials and four employees of Petróleos de Venezuela. The company’s top manager in Argentina also stepped down.