

Chiquita Papers expose executives

By **Marina Wang** - May 12, 2017



The Chiquita papers, as exposed by The National Archive and VerdadAbierta, show the multinational banana company made payments to armed groups in Colombia.

Top officials named in newly released Chiquita Papers from the US multinational which paid both guerrilla and paramilitary groups, funding terrorism.

After seven years of legal battles, award winning investigative journalism website *VerdadAbierta* along with the *National Security Archive*, an American institution dedicated to freedom of information, have published the first three of a series of articles from the so called Chiquita Papers, naming and detailing the involvement of Chiquita executives in funding armed groups in Colombia.

One of the shocking revelations was the direct involvement of Robert Kisting, former president of Chiquita Brands International in creating corporate policies that would oversee payments to terrorist groups. In testimony given in 2000, Kisting said the payments were alarming at first but then became business as usual: "You have to view this as being a normal expenditure of running this operation. We're not going to stop doing business in Colombia because of USD\$25,000. That's not realistic. Right?"

Related – Fiscalía: Financing paramilitaries is crime against humanity

Back in 2007 the multinational banana company was fined USD\$25 million for transferring around USD\$1.7 million to the right-wing paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) during the 90s and early 2000s. Chiquita Brands International also fueled the armed conflict by paying off leftist guerrilla groups FARC, ELN, and EPL to protect the company's interests in banana-growing regions.

However, until now, the names of key executives involved had been protected.

The process of uncovering Chiquita Brands International's involvement with armed groups began when the American Securities and Exchange Commission subpoenaed the company's internal records following an unrelated bribery scandal.

An excerpt from one of the Chiquita papers.

The *National Security Archive* filed a freedom of information request in 2008 to gain access to Chiquita's company records, which the company tried to block through a lawsuit. After a long legal battle, a federal appeals court finally rejected the claim in 2015, allowing for more than 9,000 pages of the company's internal records to be released.

This allowed the teams at *VerdadAbierta* and the *The Archive* to painstakingly cross reference the massive troves of information from three different sources and identify the key individuals.

The reports also outlined the role of Colombia-based staff and middle men who devised payment procedures to ensure money reached the intended recipients, even while some showed concern over the company's ethics. One of the individuals identified is Jorge Forton, accountant and finance supervisor at the time. In his testimony he revealed that he designed the accounting system Chiquita was using to pay armed groups. "My role was to see how we could standardise and have good control over those payments," said Forton in his 1999 testimony.

Thus far, together *VerdadAbierta* and The Archive have published over 5,500 pages of Chiquita's files and have more articles scheduled to be released in upcoming weeks.