

Panama law firm says data hack was external, files complaint

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Elida Moreno & Enrique Pretel, Reuters

The Panamanian lawyer at the centre of a data leak scandal that has embarrassed a clutch of world leaders said yesterday his firm was a victim of a hack from outside the company, and has filed a complaint with state prosecutors.

Founding partner Ramon Fonseca said the firm, Mossack Fonseca, which specialises in setting up offshore companies, had broken no laws and that all its operations were legal. Nor had it ever destroyed any documents or helped anyone evade taxes or launder money, he added in an interview with *Reuters*.

Company emails, extracts of which were published in an investigation by the US-based International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and other media organisations, were "taken out of context" and misinterpreted, he added.

"We rule out an inside job. This is not a leak. This is a hack," Fonseca, 63, said at the company's headquarters in Panama City's business district. "We have a theory and we are following it," he added, without elaborating.

"We have already made the relevant complaints to the attorney-general's office, and there is a government institution studying the issue," he added, flanked by two press advisers.

Governments across the world have begun investigating possible financial wrongdoing by the rich and powerful after the leak of more than 11.5 million documents, dubbed the 'Panama Papers', from the law firm that span four decades.

The papers have revealed financial arrangements of prominent figures, including friends of Russian President Vladimir Putin, relatives of the prime ministers of Britain and Pakistan and Chinese President Xi Jinping, and the president of Ukraine.

Yesterday, [Iceland](#)'s prime minister, Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson, resigned, becoming the first casualty of the leak.

"The (emails) were taken out of context," Fonseca said.

He lamented what he called journalistic activism and sensationalism, extolling his own investigative research credentials as a published novelist in Panama.

"The only crime that has been proven is the hack," Fonseca said. "No one is talking about that. That is the story."

France announced yesterday it would put the Central American nation back on its blacklist of uncooperative tax jurisdictions.

Alvaro Aleman, chief of staff to President Juan Carlos Varela, told a news conference the government could respond with similar measures against France, or any other country that followed France's lead.

- *Reuters*

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