

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024037499279 The federal agency tasked with distributing funds obtained via the sale of assets seized from organized crime and tax cheats is plagued by corruption, according to its outgoing chief. In his resignation letter to President López Obrador, Jaime Cárdenas of the Institute to Return Stolen Goods to the People (Indep) said that when he took over as director a range of “probable administrative irregularities” were detected. Cárdenas, who has led Indep for about 100 days and will step down on September 30, said officials stole jewelry in the agency’s possession and manipulated the auctions it held. Indep, an agency created by the López Obrador administration and one that has been held up as a beacon of honesty, has held several auctions to sell off assets the government has seized from organized crime. Assets that have been sold include jewelry, luxury vehicles and properties. Cárdenas also said that officials were found to have engaged in other improper conduct including the “mutilation of jewelry” and the drawing up of contracts that were unduly favorable to companies with which Indep had dealings. With regard to the theft of jewelry, the Indep chief said that criminal complaints have been filed with the Attorney General’s Office (FGR). He said that Indep legal officials are analyzing the possibility of filing complaints against those who allegedly manipulated auctions “in favor of a few people.” The outgoing director also said that a review of Indep’s IT systems with the aim of “eradicating manipulation” in future online auctions has been completed. Cárdenas, also an academic at the National Autonomous University’s Institute of Legal Research and a longtime supporter of López Obrador, said that 2 billion pesos transferred to Indep to pay the prizes in the “presidential plane” raffle has not yet been reconciled. “These resources are invested, they generate interest but they haven’t been used,” he said without clarifying when the money will be withdrawn to pay prizes to the winners of the raffle, which was drawn last week. On a positive note, Cárdenas outlined Indep’s achievements since he became its director. Among them: transferring millions of pesos to two indigenous municipalities in Oaxaca and Guerrero; providing financial support to the government-affiliated, non-profit publishing group Fondo de Cultura Económica; providing funds to the Ministry of Culture to purchase musical instruments for children’s bands in Oaxaca; and allocating almost 180 million pesos to Insabi, the agency tasked with managing the government’s universal healthcare scheme. Cárdenas also said that Indep under his leadership approved the transfer of more than 200 million pesos to the Ministry of Communications and Transportation for the construction of highways and that a further 500 million pesos will go to Insabi when the funds are available. All told Indep approved the transfer of more than 3.7 billion pesos (US \$167.4 million) to indigenous communities, the health system, cultural institutions, athletes and infrastructure projects. Cárdenas wrote that Indep has a “significant but not endless” chest of resources as well as “serious challenges,” noting that it has debts to suppliers and lacks the liquidity it requires to pay settlements to former government railway and electricity workers. Despite the corruption at Indep and the other problems it faces, the outgoing director said that he was leaving the federal government with a heavy heart. “I deeply regret not accompanying ... the project of transformation you are leading,” Cárdenas wrote in the opening to his resignation letter to the president. “I always wish the best for you and the country,” his letter concluded. Cárdenas, who has previously served as a lawmaker in Mexico City and a lawyer and legal adviser for López Obrador when he was a presidential candidate, will be replaced as Indep chief by Ernesto Prieto, the former director of the National Lottery.