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## Former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Sentenced to 12 Years' House Arrest for Witness Tampering

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Former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe has been sentenced to 12 years of house arrest in a landmark witness-tampering and bribery case that has deeply divided the South American nation. The verdict, delivered on Friday, follows a months-long trial and has significant implications for one of Colombia's most prominent conservative figures and a long-time ally of the United States (U.S.).

Uribe, who governed Colombia from 2002 to 2010, was convicted earlier this week of attempting to manipulate testimony from former paramilitary members. These witnesses had linked Uribe to paramilitary groups during the 1990s, a period marked by violence and civil unrest. According to Judge Sandra Heredia, sufficient evidence showed that Uribe conspired with a lawyer to pressure three imprisoned former fighters into retracting or altering their statements, which had been initially provided to leftist Senator Iván Cepeda, who had launched an inquiry into Uribe's alleged ties to such groups.

After Friday's ruling, Uribe said, "Politics prevailed over the law in sentencing," and maintained his innocence. The 73-year-old conservative icon confirmed he will appeal the ruling, posting on the platform X that he was preparing arguments and reflecting that in personal crises, one must "think much more about the solution than the problem." His attorney had requested that he remain free while the appeal is underway, but the court denied the motion, citing concerns that Uribe could "easily" leave the country and avoid the imposed sanction. Alongside the house arrest, Uribe has been barred from holding public office for eight years and was fined approximately \$776,000.

The appeals court now has until early October to issue a decision. Any ruling can be further challenged before Colombia's Supreme Court, prolonging what has already been a high-profile and politically charged legal battle.

Uribe's legacy remains polarizing. Many Colombians remember him as a leader who helped rescue the country from near-collapse, leading military operations that forced the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) into remote regions and, ultimately, into peace negotiations. The resulting 2016 peace deal saw more than 13,000 guerrilla fighters disarmed. However, critics point to his administration's alleged ties to paramilitary groups and accuse him of turning a blind eye to human rights abuses.

The legal saga began in 2012 when Uribe filed a libel suit against Senator Cepeda. In a surprising turn, the Supreme Court not only dismissed the case against Cepeda in 2018 but instead opened an investigation into Uribe himself.

Public reaction has been deeply emotional. Martha Peñuela Rosales, a supporter of Uribe's party in Bogotá, expressed heartbreak, saying, "It's an unjust sentence. He deserves to be free." In contrast, Sergio Andrés Parra, who protested outside the courthouse, stated, "The 12-year sentence is enough," adding that, even if the appeal succeeds, "history has already condemned him."

As Colombia awaits the outcome of the appeal, Uribe's case continues to test the country's judicial independence and public trust in its political institutions. The decision is seen not just as a legal ruling but as a pivotal moment in Colombia's post-conflict political evolution.