

Credit Suisse revelations: The rot of the financial oligarchy and its banking system

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The leak of 30,000 bank accounts belonging to Credit Suisse has revealed the enormous wealth of dictators, criminals, officials and business tycoons involved in torture, drug trafficking, money laundering, corruption and other serious crimes. It confirms the financial parasitism, fraud and illegality that permeates the ruling elite in every capitalist country.

The revelations cover only a small proportion of the bank's 1.5 million private clients and includes personal, shared and corporate bank accounts worth \$108 billion. Nearly 200 accounts are worth more than \$108 million, with a dozen or more worth billions. Some were opened in the 1940s, but more than two-thirds were opened after 2000. Many have since closed.

The investigation, known as Suisse Secrets, began with a leak by an anonymous whistleblower to the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and was coordinated with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). It involved analyses by 160 journalists from media organisations around the world, including the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *NDR*, the *Miami Herald* and the *New York Times*.

Suisse Secrets shows that the bank allowed people to open accounts even after they had been convicted of serious crimes and failed to investigate or even ask about the source of many other clients' wealth. It alleges that the bank knowingly managed hundreds of millions of dollars for suspected war criminals, corrupt autocrats and drug dealers. Credit Suisse denied this, saying it "strongly rejects the allegations and inferences about the bank's purported business practices."

The world's best-known banks are little more than machines for laundering the ill-gotten gains of the filthy rich and protecting their owners from tax demands or accountability so they can salt their loot away for future use. They are accomplices to the rampant criminality of a parasitic ruling class that plunders and exploits the world's inhabitants to the tune of trillions of dollars a year, while dodging taxes—variously estimated at between \$400 billion and \$800 billion a year—on their income and wealth.

According to the *Guardian*, the bank's clients included a human trafficker in the Philippines, the former chair of the Hong Kong stock exchange who was jailed for bribery, a billionaire who ordered the murder of his Lebanese pop star

girlfriend, executives who helped themselves to the revenues of Venezuela's state-owned oil company, an Italian accused of laundering funds for the infamous 'Ndrangheta criminal group, corrupt politicians and their families around the world, including in Egypt and Ukraine, and a Vatican-owned investment company currently involved in a criminal tribunal over an allegedly fraudulent €350 million investment in a London property.

Others include the sons of an Azerbaijani strongman, who deposited millions of laundered dollars from shell companies, and key figures from Central Asia's elites, including oligarchs who made their wealth from natural resource extraction, ministers, and other top officials, some of whom have been convicted of massive corruption, as well as the children of two former presidents, Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbayev and Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov.

People named in the investigation include:

- Helen Rivilla, a lawyer convicted in 1992 for helping to launder money for former Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda, who creamed off \$10 billion during the decades of his presidency.
- King Abdullah of Jordan had six Swiss accounts, including one that held more than \$224 million in 2015, while his wife, Queen Rania, held more than \$40 million in an account in 2013, all of which were closed in 2015 and 2016.
- Saad Kheir, who headed Jordan's intelligence agency from 2000 to 2005 that worked with the US on covert operations and counterterrorism operations, interrogating terrorism suspects. He opened an account in 2003 that would hold \$21.6 million before his death in 2009.
- Close relatives of Omar Suleiman, the long-time head of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak's intelligence services that served as the CIA's regional bureau, opened a joint account in 2003 that mushroomed to \$52 million. Suleiman died in 2012 but the account wasn't closed until 2016.
- Mubarak's sons, Gamal and Alaa, held six accounts including a joint account that ballooned to about \$196 million in 2003, while their fathers-in-law and other businessmen linked to the Mubarak family had accounts worth millions of dollars.
- Pavlo Lazarenko, the thoroughly corrupt prime minister of

Ukraine between 1997 and 1998, is believed by Transparency International to have siphoned off \$200 million from the public purse, demonstrating that Ukrainian politicians were no less corrupt than their Russian counterparts. One of his accounts was later valued at almost \$8 million. In 2000, Lazarenko pleaded guilty to money laundering in Switzerland and was sentenced in 2006 to nine years in the US for bribery and corruption.

- Stephan Sederholm, a Swedish computer technician, was allowed to open an account in 2008 that was closed in 2013 after he was sentenced for life for human trafficking in the Philippines in 2011.

- Eduard Seidel, a German who headed Siemens's operations in Nigeria and was convicted of industrial-scale bribery of corrupt politicians in 2008. His accounts were left open for several years, with one holding \$54 million, after he had left Siemens. Credit Suisse has long been known for providing services for the sons of Nigeria's brutal dictator Sani Abacha, believed to have looted as much as \$5 billion from the country in just six years.

Credit Suisse, Switzerland's second largest bank, manages more than \$1.6 trillion in assets and employs almost 50,000 staff, including 3,500 "relationship managers" who recruit and serve the super-rich across the world. Its employees are rewarded with bonuses linked to how much "net new money" they bring in. The largest accounts are kept so secret that only a few senior executives know who owns them.

The OCCRP investigation confirms that the bank's activities are shielded by the country's notorious banking secrecy laws that have long made Switzerland a safe haven for kleptocrats' illicit wealth. Article 47 of the Swiss banking laws effectively silences insiders or journalists trying to expose criminality, to the extent that the Swiss media group Tamedia was unable to take part in the Credit Suisse investigation for fear of criminal prosecution.

The bank has been beset by numerous scandals. A leaked 2017 report by FINMA, the Swiss financial regulator, revealed a culture where senior managers were prepared to "whitewash" and "turn a blind eye" to compliance failures when a star banker defrauded lucrative clients. The bank was involved in the collapse of Greensill Capital, the supply chain finance corporation, and the US hedge fund Archegos capital. In 2019, eight bank staff pleaded guilty to charges of money laundering and defrauding US and UK investors in loans to Mozambique, resulting in \$475 million fines for the bank and \$200 million in debt forgiveness to Mozambique. The bank is currently facing trial in Switzerland's Federal Criminal Court over enabling Bulgarian cocaine smugglers to launder €146 million.

Suisse Secrets follows numerous other scandals in the wider banking sector, including the 2008-09 crash precipitated by the criminality of leading financial institutions, for which no top executives were ever sanctioned. It comes after a chain of International Consortium of Investigative Journalists' (ICIJ)

exposés: the LuxLeaks in 2014, Panama Papers in 2016, the Paradise Papers in 2017 and the Pandora Papers in 2021. These revealed the colossal extent of tax evasion and money laundering services provided by the world's most well-known financial services companies, lawyers, registration agents and lobbyists via secretive trusts and off-shore tax-havens.

Reports of financial criminality have become so routine that a day later Suisse Secrets was old news. They demonstrate that it is impossible to clean out the Augean filth of the global political, economic and financial system.

Like the ICIJ's previous exposés, the leaked accounts belong to the bank's international clients, mostly in the middle and low-income countries, rather than in the US and Europe. US President Joe Biden has said he is committed to "fighting corruption as a core national security interest," which is another way of saying that allegations of corruption will be used, like "fighting terror"—to justify political and economic intervention around the world, particularly in Central Asia, in pursuit of Washington's imperialist interests.

Switzerland, too, is in the frame, with demands from three of the largest groups in the European parliament and from the US, seeking to bolster the position of New York as the world's premier financial centre, for Switzerland to be placed on the list of high-risk countries for money laundering and financial crime.

The author of the Suisse Secrets investigation, the OCCRP—a consortium of NGOs, media organisations and journalists operating in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Central America—is funded by, among others, the United States Agency for International Development, the US State Department, the Ford Foundation, the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the US National Endowment for Democracy and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.



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