

Bribery and Corruption: Highest ranking tribal chief indicted in USA

The chairman of the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians has been indicted on federal charges of accepting a quarter million dollars in bribes from tribal vendors and concealing income from the Inland Revenue Service.

Robert Salgado Sr., 67, was arrested by special agents with the Federal Bureau of Investigation when he arrived at United States District Court in Riverside on 26th October. Salgado agreed to surrender after being informed that he had been charged in a 36-count indictment returned last week by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles.

The indictment charges Salgado with conspiring to solicit and accept tens of thousands of dollars in bribes from four vendors in exchange for them obtaining contracts with the tribe or being allowed to keep existing contracts. According to the indictment, the four vendors paid bribes to Salgado in the form of cash, payments made to his creditors and cheques payable to a company that Salgado had established.

As the elected chairman of the Tribal Council of the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians, Salgado exercised substantial influence over the business dealings of the tribe, and he had the authority to sign contracts on behalf of the Soboba Band. The indictment alleges that the four vendors who paid bribes were involved in real estate purchases made by the tribe, had construction projects at the Soboba Casino and on the reservation, and provided services at the casino. The indictment includes 29 counts of bribery that outline payments totaling just over USD250,000.

Salgado is also charged with six counts of filing false tax returns for the years 2001 through 2006, with each count alleging that his true income was "substantially in excess" of the figures reported to the Internal Revenue Service.

The conspiracy charge in the indictment carries a statutory maximum penalty of five years in federal prison. Each bribery count has a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. Each of the tax charges has a statutory maximum penalty of three years in prison.

One of the vendors, Abbas Shilleh, the owner of California Parking Services, Inc., which provides valet parking at the Soboba Casino, is named in two of the bribery counts in the indictment.

Shilleh, 46, of Diamond Bar, has agreed to surrender to authorities next week.

Neither defendant has yet pleaded to the charges.