

ICE (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement)

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Prosecutors stunned as ICE lets suspect in \$100m jewelry heist leave US

Jeson Nelon Presilla Flores, charged with stalking armored truck in 2022, allowed to self-deport to South America



📷 A Brinks truck in Miami, Florida, on 13 October 2023. The heist involved a Brinks truck, like the one above. Photograph: Jeffrey Greenberg/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

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Federal immigration authorities allowed a suspect in a **\$100m jewelry heist** believed to be the largest in US history to deport himself to South America in December, a move that stunned and upset prosecutors who were planning to try the case and send him to prison.

Jeson Nelson Presilla Flores was one of seven people charged last year with stalking an armored truck to a rural freeway rest stop north of [Los Angeles](#) and stealing millions worth of diamonds, emeralds, gold, rubies and designer watches in 2022.

Flores faced up to 15 years in federal prison if convicted on charges of conspiracy to commit theft from interstate and foreign shipment and theft from interstate and foreign shipment. He pleaded not guilty to the charges.

[US Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\)](#) deported Flores in late December after he requested voluntary departure, prosecutors said in court filings.

ICE did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Flores's attorney, John D Robertson, motioned to dismiss the indictment against his client, asking for the charges to be permanently dropped and the case closed.

Federal prosecutors oppose the motion and say they still hope to bring Flores to trial, asking for charges to be dropped "without prejudice" to keep the door open for criminal prosecution in the future.

Despite Flores being a lawful permanent resident and released on bail, he was taken into ICE custody in September, according to court filings from his defense attorneys. Federal prosecutors say they were unaware Flores had an immigration detainer.

This was a violation of his criminal prosecution rights and warrants his case getting dismissed, Robertson said in his motion.

Flores opted for deportation to Chile during a 16 December immigration hearing, according to court documents. The judge denied his voluntary departure application but issued a final order of removal, and he was sent to Ecuador.

"Prosecutors are supposed to allow the civil immigration process to play out independently while criminal charges are pending," federal prosecutors wrote in their motion opposing the case dismissal. "That is exactly what they did in this case - unwittingly to defendant's benefit in that he will now avoid trial, and any potential conviction and sentence, unless and until he returns to the United States."

What happened to Flores is extremely unusual, especially in a case of this significance, former federal prosecutor Laurie Levenson said.

Ordinarily, if a criminal defendant had immigration proceedings against them - which is common - immigration officials would inform prosecutors what was happening. In minor cases, a defendant can sometimes choose to self-deport in lieu of prosecution.

“It’s just beyond me how they would deport him without the prosecutors ... being in on the conversation,” Levenson said. “This really was the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing.”

The jewelers who were stolen from are also demanding answers.

“When a defendant in a major federal theft case leaves the country before trial, victims are left without answers, without a verdict, and without closure,” Jerry Kroll, an attorney for some of the jewelry companies, told the Los Angeles Times.

The infamous jewelry heist unfolded in July 2022 after the suspects scouted the Brinks truck leaving an international jewelry show near San Francisco with dozens of bags of jewels, according to the indictment. While the victims reported more than \$100m in losses, Brink’s said the stolen items were worth less than \$10m.

A lawsuit filed by the Brinks security company said one of the drivers was asleep inside the big rig and the other was getting food inside the rest stop when the thieves broke in.
