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Jamaica Seeks Help From FBI in Massive Fraud That Wiped Out Usain Bolt's \$10 Million Fortune

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The J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building in Washington, D.C. By. GETTY IMAGES

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations has been called in to assist with uncovering who perpetrated what is being described as Jamaica's biggest fraud — the disappearance of over JM\$1 billion from client accounts — most belonging to retired sprinter Usain Bolt — at Stocks & Securities Ltd.

Jamaica's Finance Minister Dr. Nigel Clarke made the announcement on Monday afternoon, saying that the country's Financial Investigations Division and the Jamaica Constabulary Force Fraud Squad had last week sought help from the "FBI and other international partners."

The request for help comes as authorities try to identify the players in the massive fraud, how they pulled off the heist — possibly over more than a decade — and how the siphoning of funds from Bolt and almost 40 other clients who had invested life savings and retirement funds went unnoticed for so long.

Part of the investigation, Mr. Clarke said, would be to identify any assets that may have been purchased with the stolen money. He promised to use "all legal steps" in order to effect the seizure and eventual forfeiture of those assets, whether in Jamaica or elsewhere.

Whether the victims of this fraud can be made whole may depend on the success of any eventual asset forfeiture efforts. At Monday's press conference, Dr. Clarke also disclosed that SSL sent a letter to FSC indicating knowledge of fraud on Jan 10th. In the letter, the company claimed to have fraud insurance of up to US\$ 1 million, although Mr. Clarke says he has not yet independently verified that information.

With the quantum of money stolen from SSL clients estimated to be in the region of US\$12 - 15 million, any insurance payout is likely to be woefully inadequate when it comes to compensating clients for the losses suffered.

"I feel the full range of emotions — anger, disgust — and like many Jamaicans, I am deeply pained by these events," Mr. Clarke said. Calling the fraud "a body blow to Jamaica," Mr. Clarke noted the negative impact it has had on the country's international reputation.

"Coverage of this fraud in every major media outlet across the globe is a source of great embarrassment to Jamaicans here and in the diaspora," the finance minister lamented.

At the press conference, Mr. Clarke also addressed the question of the country's regulatory oversight of its financial sector. Responding to a question about the reason for the departure of Everton McFarlane, the outgoing executive director of Jamaica's Financial Services Commission (FSC), the minister did not mince words.

"The FSC needs to move in a new direction...it's abundantly clear that change needs to take place," Mr. Clarke said, noting that the oversight agency had had five chairs and four executive directors during the 13 years over which the fraud is thought to have been perpetrated.

Mr. McFarlane announced that he would resign from his post effective January 31st, following a press conference in which local journalists described him as evasive.

"McFarlane wasn't left covered in glory," Mr. Clarke said, adding that a review of current events left no doubt that a "change in executive director was absolutely necessary" at the regulatory agency.

The finance minister also announced that increased penalties for financial crimes were coming soon. "If you rob depositors or you defraud investors ...the Jamaican Society wants you put away for a long time," he said.