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Corruption in Quebec construction sector included gangs, mafia: report

Reuters Staff

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MONTREAL (Reuters) - Corruption in the construction industry in the Canadian province of Quebec was far more widespread than originally feared, with organized crime, including biker gangs and the Mafia, infiltrating much of the sector, a long-awaited report said on Tuesday.

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The inquiry on corruption, bribes, kickbacks and violence in the mostly French-speaking province, Canada's largest, also found links between political donations and awards of public construction projects by Montreal and other cities.

Charbonneau said organized crime, including the Mafia and Hells Angels motorcycle gang, had infiltrated so deeply into the industry that they had become "untouchable," wielding influence through "intimidation, threats, vandalism, racketeering, prostitution and pimping."

While Quebec's Liberal government indicated it would adopt the recommendations, the inquiry's mandate did not include assigning guilt or recommending criminal charges. Several pages of the chapter on the Hells Angels have been blacked out because they deal with ongoing criminal cases.

In response to the report, Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard told reporters the recent lowering of the maximum party contribution to C\$100 from C\$3,000 has eliminated problems with party financing.

"There is no significant part of my time that is spent on party financing," Couillard, who took office in 2014, told reporters.

Charbonneau and her team heard some 300 witnesses in more than 260 days of hearings since 2012 before concluding that organized crime had gained influence in the Quebec Federation of Labour and its construction wing, as well as its investment arm and real estate subsidiary.

Former Quebec Premier Jean Charest created the commission in 2011, two years after the first allegations of corruption

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The report called for creation of a body independent of the political process for the awarding of road works and other public contracts “without political considerations.”

Charbonneau said that while the vast majority of Quebec public servants are blameless, officials of Quebec’s transport department did take bribes.

The report included a dissenting opinion from Renaud Lachance, Charbonneau’s co-commissioner and former Quebec auditor general, who said testimony had not proven a link between political contributions and the awarding of public contracts.

Reporting by Kevin Dougherty; Writing by Andrea Hopkins; Editing by Dan Grebler and Alan Crosby

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