

Ex-Apollo CEO Leon Black raped and harassed Russian model, lawsuit alleges

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Leon Black, the former chief executive of Apollo Global Management, has been hit with a lawsuit claiming that he raped and harassed a young Russian model before manipulating her with promises of money and sham job interviews at Goldman Sachs.

The claims, which come weeks after Black stepped down from Apollo following scrutiny of his ties to the late paedophile Jeffrey Epstein, contradict Black's account of what he has characterised as a "consensual affair" with a woman who he claims later extorted him.

Guzel Ganieva was in her early 20s when she says Black picked her out of a crowd at a New York event marking International Women's Day, and invited her to discuss her future over dinner at the upscale restaurant La Grenouille.

She alleges that soon after that 2008 encounter, the Apollo Global Management founder took her to a bare studio apartment where, on a mattress on the floor, he subjected her to "forced sadistic sexual acts".

Black "derived pleasure from humiliating and debasing" Ganieva and intentionally caused her physical pain, according to a civil complaint filed in New York state supreme court on Tuesday.

But when Ganieva indicated she was cutting off contact, she says Black turned conciliatory — offering to finance a movie that she could produce, and to use his contacts to facilitate an application at Harvard Business School.

"This frivolous lawsuit is riddled with lies, and is nothing more than a wholesale fiction," a spokesperson for Black said on Tuesday, adding that Ganieva "had a wholly consensual relationship with [Black] for six years" and that her allegations of "harassment and other inappropriate behaviour" were "categorically untrue".

Black resigned from Apollo in March, citing "relentless public attention and media scrutiny" of his professional ties to Epstein, to whom he paid \$158m for tax advice and art transaction services. An investigation by Dechert, the international law firm, found no evidence that Black had done anything wrong.

Ganieva's lawsuit claims that Black harmed her reputation by making false and malicious statements in response to news reports detailing some of her allegations of sexual harassment.

“The truth is that I have been extorted by Ms Ganieva for many years,” Black said in an April statement that Ganieva’s lawyers say was “false and defamatory”.

“I made substantial monetary payments to her, based on her threats to go public concerning our relationship, in an attempt to spare my family from public embarrassment,” the statement added.

Ganieva’s lawsuit offers a different version of events surrounding the money she received from Black, beginning with a \$480,000 loan that she says he offered in June 2011 to help her resume her college studies.

A photograph of a one-page “loan agreement” attached to the lawsuit appears to bear Black’s flowing signature alongside Ganieva’s, and arranges for her to receive \$60,000 every three months for the subsequent two years.

“The principal loan will be repaid in full on June 1 2016 and will carry a simple interest rate of 5 per cent per annum,” the document states, without calculating the amount to be repaid. Ganieva says she signed another, nearly identical “loan agreement” in 2013.

With her mathematics degree finished, Ganieva began looking for work, and she says Black offered help, arranging for her to meet top executives at Goldman Sachs. Among them was Alison Mass, who now chairs the investment banking division.

A person familiar with the 2014 meetings said the bank had not interviewed Ganieva for any specific position, and that it was not uncommon to enter into open-ended conversations about potential job openings at the request of a client. Goldman declined to comment.

In the end, no job materialised. “Given the macro environment, there are no open jobs at Goldman Sachs right now that work for/are a fit for you,” a Goldman banker wrote to Ganieva in an email, adding that a colleague “would keep his eyes open” for job openings with clients in Moscow.

“In hindsight Ms Ganieva knows that none of these arranged interviews were meant to be legitimate,” her lawyers wrote in a court filing.

A year after the meetings at Goldman Sachs, Ganieva says she asked Black “to leave her and her child alone, for good”.

At a meeting at New York’s Four Seasons hotel, she says Black agreed to forgive her loans, and ordered her to sign two documents without allowing her to keep a copy. She says she now understands that she signed a non-disclosure agreement.

Afterwards, Ganieva says she began receiving regular payments from Black, but that the money stopped arriving in April. Weeks earlier Ganieva posted on Twitter that Black was a “predator” who had “sexually harassed and abused” her for many years.

Through a spokesperson, Black has acknowledged making payments to Ganieva and said he had “advised the criminal authorities” of her activities.

In Tuesday’s legal filing, Ganieva’s lawyers contended that Black was making a “pre-emptive claim of extortion” to make it harder for her to pursue legal action.

They wrote: “He said many times to her, ‘If you do not take the money, I will put you in prison.’”