

Leon Black Accused of Defamation and Sexual Violence in Lawsuit

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By Miriam Gottfried

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A woman on Tuesday filed a lawsuit against Leon Black, the former chief executive of Apollo Global Management Inc., accusing him of defamation and alleging he raped and harassed her.

The woman, Guzel Ganieva, with whom Mr. Black has said he had a consensual affair, claimed in the lawsuit that Mr. Black had mischaracterized their relationship and falsely accused her in media reports of trying to extort him after she initially posted her allegations in a series of tweets on March 17.

A spokesman for Mr. Black said he denies the claims.

Mr. Black stepped down earlier this year as CEO of Apollo and handed the reins to fellow co-founder Marc Rowan after revelations of Mr. Black's ties to the late disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein. The credit and private-equity investment giant announced the leadership transition in January, saying Mr. Black would step down on or before his 70th birthday in July.

On March 22, Apollo made the unexpected announcement that Mr. Rowan would formally assume the CEO role and that Mr. Black would also cede the chairman role, handing it off to the firm's lead independent director, former Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Jay Clayton.

A review conducted by law firm Dechert LLP found no evidence of any involvement on the part of Mr. Black in the criminal activities of Epstein, who was indicted in 2019 on federal sex-trafficking charges involving underage girls.

In the lawsuit filed in a New York state court, Ms. Ganieva, a Russian immigrant who was in her early 20s and working as a model when she met Mr. Black at an International Women's Day event in New York in 2008, alleges the billionaire "forced sadistic sexual acts on her without her consent," lent her money as a way of exerting control over her and promised to help her get work beyond modeling that never materialized.

She was prompted to go public with her accusations after Mr. Black stated publicly last fall that no one had ever alleged he had engaged in wrongdoing, according to the lawsuit.

"This frivolous lawsuit is riddled with lies, and is nothing more than a wholesale fiction," the spokesman for Mr. Black said in a statement. The spokesman said Mr. Black, who is married, had a consensual relationship with Ms. Ganieva for six years and then paid her substantial

sums over many years after she threatened to go public about their relationship, potentially damaging his reputation and harming his family.

Ms. Ganieva's March 17 tweets stated that she was sexually harassed and abused by Mr. Black for years and that he forced her to sign a nondisclosure agreement in 2015. The tweets went little noticed for weeks, until the New York Post wrote an article about them in which Mr. Black denied having acted inappropriately toward Ms. Ganieva, and said she had been extorting him.