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By Michael Wayland

CNBC (08.01.2020) - <https://cnb.cx/3a7gM9x> - Following a secretive escape last week from Japan to Lebanon, former Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn publicly defended himself Wednesday — for the first time since his initial arrest in November 2018 — against accusations of financial misconduct and misuse of corporate resources.

Ghoshn adamantly denied all charges against him and defended his decision to become an international fugitive by fleeing Japan as a necessity to receive a fair trial and “escape injustice.”

'It's about confession'

“I want to be able to speak, I want to be able to defend myself,” Ghoshn told CNBC's Michelle Caruso-Cabrera following a more than two-hour press conference in Lebanon. “I want a justice system where attack and defense have the same rights, and it's balanced and let the truth happen. I was in the system where it's not about the truth, it's about winning. It's about confession.”

Regarding his escape from Japan, Ghoshn declined to provide specifics, saying he did not want to get anyone who helped him in trouble. The plan reportedly included a former U.S. Army Green Beret and the ex-executive hiding in a music equipment case.

“I'm not going to confirm or say anything,” he said. “But I can tell you that it is obviously, you know, you have a lot of anxiety when you are in a period where you are transitioning out of the country but you're not still out of reach.”

Ghoshn said some reports of the cost of his escape have been “very, very generous,” adding you “don't need that kind of money to be able to organize.”

“Obviously, the simpler it is, the better it is, the more chance you have to be successful,” Ghoshn said. “And the more discreet you will be.”

'Reborn'

Since arriving in Lebanon, Ghoshn said he has been “reborn” and the anxiety and emotions he felt during his escape have diminished by the joy of seeing his family, specifically his wife: “I'm a different man today,” he said.

Ghoshn, who simultaneously led three automakers as part of the Nissan-Renault-Mitsubishi alliance, said he did not attempt to contact Greg Kelly, a former colleague and alleged co-conspirator who remains in Japan awaiting trial, about escaping with him.

Calling Kelly a “great person,” Ghosn said contact between the two was “forbidden” as a condition of his bail.

Ghosn described his captivity in Japan to reporters earlier Wednesday as a “nightmare” that included intense interrogations of up to eight hours a day, without access to a lawyer, and threats that his family would suffer if he didn’t confess. “The feeling of hopelessness was profound,” he said. He later added, “I left Japan because I wanted justice. It is the only way to reestablish my reputation. If I don’t get it in Japan, I will get it somewhere else.”

Nissan conspiracy?

Ghosn reiterated to CNBC that he believes the charges against him were part of a conspiracy by Nissan executives to stop the well-known executive from further integrating Nissan with Renault. He said “without any doubt” the company was willing to destroy his reputation to retain the automaker’s Japanese roots.

During the Wednesday press conference, Ghosn accused former Nissan CEO Hiroto Saikawa, who resigned in September, and Hari Nada, a former senior vice president of the automaker, among those involved in the alleged conspiracy.

Hitoshi Kawaguchi, who previously handled government affairs for Nissan; Hidetoshi Imazu, the auto firm’s statutory auditor; and board member Masakazu Toyoda were also identified by Ghosn as the three main people behind a plot to topple him.

A spokesperson for Nissan, Japan’s second-largest automaker behind Toyota Motor, did not respond for comment. The company earlier this week said it would “continue to take appropriate legal action to hold Ghosn accountable for the harm that his misconduct has caused.”

In the coming weeks, Ghosn said, he will continue to release details in an attempt to clear his name and restore his reputation.

“I am here to clear my name. These allegations are untrue and I should never have been arrested in the first place,” he said.

Ghosn, during the media event, also discussed how he regrets not accepting an offer from the Obama administration to become CEO of GM in 2009.

CNBC’s David Reid contributed to this article