

Trafigura: Angola and the first public trial

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Trafigura, one of the largest oil trading companies in the world, operating from Geneva, was the first company to be tried in Switzerland, in a public trial, for the bribery of foreign public officials. The Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland had brought proceedings in December 2023 against the company, its former chief operating officer, the former head of a subsidiary of the Angolan national oil company and a Swiss intermediary.¹ The trial took place in December 2024, over ten days, before the Criminal Chamber of the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona.²

The verdict, handed down on 31 January 2025, found all the defendants guilty. Trafigura Beheer BV was accused of having failed to take the necessary internal measures to prevent illicit payments in favour of the head of a subsidiary of the Angolan national oil company between 2009 and 2011. It was ordered to pay a fine of CHF 3 million — the Office of the Attorney General had sought the statutory maximum of five million — together with a compensatory claim of USD 145 million, corresponding to the illicit profits made, payable to the Confederation.³ According to *Le Temps*, those profits derived from nine disputed chartering and bunkering contracts obtained between 2009 and 2011, the penalty being financially relatively painless for a company that had made more than USD 10 billion in profits between 2023 and 2024.⁴

The bribes amounted to close to USD 5 million, paid through complex structures including shell companies and intermediaries.⁵ Trafigura's former second-in-command, a British national resident in the canton of Geneva, was sentenced to thirty-two months' imprisonment, twelve of them to be served, for active bribery of a foreign public official, the Court having found that he could not have been unaware of the corrupt scheme set up within the company. The former Angolan official was sentenced to thirty-six months, fourteen of them to be served, and to a compensatory claim, and the Swiss intermediary to twenty-four months, fully

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suspended.⁶ The defence of the former executive challenged the judgment, arguing that it rested on general assumptions. With three of the four convicted parties having appealed, an appeal trial was in preparation at the end of 2025.⁷

The Trafigura affair differs from the previous ones in that a public trial was held, which, according to Public Eye, brought to light the workings of corruption in the commodities sector and the company's culture of silence. It also differs in the sentencing of a former executive to a custodial term to be served, presented as a first for that sector in Switzerland.⁸ It marks the determination of the Swiss courts to follow the chain of responsibility up to the natural persons involved, which the Gunvor affair had not made possible.

Company	Decision	Sanctions
Gunvor	summary penalty order of 14 October 2019; further order in 2024	CHF 94 million; CHF 86.7 million and USD 661 million in the United States
Glencore	summary penalty order of 5 August 2024	CHF 2 million fine and USD 150 million compensatory claim; USD 29.7 million in 2023
Trafigura	judgment of the Federal Criminal Court of 31 January 2025, under appeal	CHF 3 million fine and USD 145 million compensatory claim; prison sentences for the natural persons

Key points. Gunvor, Glencore and Trafigura were convicted in Switzerland on the basis of Article 102 of the Criminal Code for having failed to prevent the bribery of public officials in Africa and Latin America. The compensatory claims, of 90 to 150 million, absorb the profits of the disputed transactions. The Trafigura affair also led to the sentencing of a former executive to a custodial term to be served.

1 Notes

1. Agence Ecofin, "Condamnation historique de Trafigura pour corruption en Angola", 3 February 2025. ↩
2. Bilan, "Tribunal pénal fédéral : les accusés du procès Trafigura sont tous reconnus coupables", 31 January 2025. ↩
3. RTS, "L'entreprise Trafigura écope d'une amende et certains accusés de prison ferme pour corruption en Angola", 31 January 2025. ↩

4. Le Temps, “Pétrole en Angola : Trafigura est la première firme condamnée pour corruption à l’issue d’un procès en Suisse”, February 2025. ↩
5. Agence Ecofin, cited above. ↩
6. RTS, 31 January 2025, cited above; Bilan, 31 January 2025, cited above. ↩
7. Bilan, 31 January 2025, cited above; Le Temps, “Après la condamnation historique de Trafigura pour corruption en Angola, un procès en appel se prépare”, 30 December 2025. ↩
8. Public Eye, “La justice fédérale condamne les loups de Trafigura”, publiceye.ch (accessed September 2026). ↩

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