



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on July 23, 2012

Lawmakers Blast UN for Handing U.S. Technology to North Korea, Iran

Outraged U.S. members of Congress on both sides of the aisle are speaking out against the United Nations “World Intellectual Property Organization” (WIPO) after it was caught providing potentially dangerous American technology to the regimes ruling Iran and North Korea. The UN agency reluctantly promised to “review” the issue, but GOP and Democrat lawmakers on Capitol Hill say that is simply not enough.



“We have written to WIPO demanding an independent, external investigation of how WIPO could have provided sophisticated U.S.-origin technology to rogue regimes like North Korea and Iran,” explained Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) and Rep. Howard L. Berman (D-Calif.), the top Republican and Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. “Instead, the WIPO leadership has announced that it will institute a mere ‘review,’ which falls far short.”

“What’s needed is an immediate and credible investigation,” the lawmakers said in the joint statement.

The latest UN scandal began as far back as 2010 when, over the course of at least a year, WIPO offered computers, servers, firewalls, equipment, and other technology to the two dictatorships — both of which are currently under international sanctions by the UN itself. Details first began to surface earlier this year.

The global organization’s decision sparked an outcry, especially after it originally refused a U.S. State Department demand for an investigation. However, following the growing public scandal, WIPO agreed to take a few tepid measures including a change in some internal policies and a “review” of its activities.

WIPO Director General Francis Gurry “reiterated that the Secretariat is treating concerns relating to the Organization’s technical assistance programs to countries that are the subject of UN sanctions with the utmost seriousness,” the global intellectual-property outfit claimed in a [press release](#). The statement also alleged that WIPO had received legal advice approving the technology transfers despite international sanctions.

Among the measures announced by the entity following the uproar were new measures to verify the legality of proposed deals with regimes under UN sanctions, referral of the recent transfers to international “committees” for “guidance,” and initial steps toward an “independent review” of the controversial programs. WIPO will also stop offering IT hardware to governments, it said in the statement.

But for concerned U.S. lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, that is not nearly enough. “We will accept nothing less than an independent investigation, full cooperation, and complete accountability,” said Rep. Ros-Lehtinen and Rep. Berman after the WIPO announcement.

Instead of the UN’s half-hearted measures and alleged probes, the two lawmakers apparently plan to



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get to the bottom of the scandal themselves. “WIPO also must fully cooperate with investigations by the Department of State and by our Committee, including by providing immediate, unfettered access to all documents and personnel,” they added.

And somebody needs to be held to account. “Those responsible for this outrageous misuse of U.S. technology and U.S. taxpayer dollars must be held fully accountable, and meaningful safeguards must be put in place to prevent these kinds of technology transfers in the future,” the House Foreign Affairs Committee leaders said.

The lawmakers also reiterated previous concerns that the UN outfit might try to punish the individuals who exposed WIPO wrongdoings in the first place. “We remain deeply concerned that WIPO may retaliate against the whistleblowers who helped bring these allegations to light,” they said in the statement.

Last week, the two lawmakers sent a [letter](#) to WIPO boss Gurry expressing serious concerns that suggested a cover-up might even be underway. “Even more troubling are allegations that your primary focus on this issue has not been full disclosure of all relevant information on these projects in Iran and North Korea, but rather discovering and punishing whistleblowers who initially alerted outside bodies about these transactions,” they wrote.

The letter also blasted WIPO’s refusal to cooperate with State Department requests. “There is no rational basis for this refusal,” the letter stated, adding that if Gurry had nothing to hide, he should be happy to work with investigators on the matter.

Officials at the U.S. State Department said they were concerned about the UN programs as well. However, a spokesperson [told](#) Fox News that even though they share lawmakers’ concerns, WIPO’s recently announced changes were a “positive” development.

Even analysts in the intellectual-property field seemed alarmed by recent developments and acknowledged that the UN would probably have to do more to clear the cloud of scandal. “The United Nations seems to coddle dictators, tyrants and oppressive (and genocidal) regimes of various types,” [wrote](#) President Gene Quinn of IPWatchdog, which focuses on issues related to intellectual property. “It was, however, a shock to learn that WIPO was at the center of the controversy.”

While he thought WIPO’s recent response was a “good first step,” Quinn suggested that the global outfit probably did violate UN sanctions by transferring the technology. “The lawyer in me understands why WIPO is saying that they don’t believe it violated UN sanctions, but the human in me just wishes they could step up and acknowledge that they screwed up, there were good but severely misguided intentions and promise that it will never happen again,” he added.

One of the main concerns about the controversial WIPO program is that it provided what lawmakers said was potentially “dual use” technology — it could be used for military purposes — to the rogue regimes in charge of North Korea and Iran. It was also not clear how the effort helped advance WIPO’s mission either, which is described on its website as promoting “innovation and creativity for the economic, social and cultural development of all countries, through a balanced and effective international intellectual property system.”

The beginnings of the scandal first surfaced months ago when Fox News [reported](#) in April that the UN, working through China, may have offered the communist dictatorship enslaving the North Korean people technology that was being used by the tyrant’s armed forces. According to the news agency’s findings, WIPO used a complicated scheme that seemed designed to bypass the UN sanctions.



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Rather than seeking yet another investigation and apology, American critics of the UN have seized on the latest scandal to renew their calls to defund and oust the controversial institution from the United States altogether. Earlier this month, lawmakers also [slammed](#) the UN for using U.S. tax dollars for forced abortions in China. [Sex scandals](#) and allegations of [fraud](#) — not to mention its attempts to [foist assorted schemes on the world](#) — have plagued the UN for decades, too.

Opponents of the global outfit have long believed that the U.S. government should completely withdraw from the UN, known to critics as a “dictators club.” But in the wake of seemingly [never-ending scandals](#) surrounding the UN and its increasingly brazen [power grabs](#), American opposition to the global entity and its scheming [continues to build](#).

Whether the mounting outrage will actually deal with the problems or even end the UN altogether remains to be seen. With so many scandals in the headlines, however, critics of the UN seem increasingly optimistic.

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Photo: Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.



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