



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on February 27, 2016

UN Persecution of Whistleblowers Shocks U.S. Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The United Nations' persecution of whistle-blowers who expose wrongdoing at the international outfit and its agencies is a major threat, said shocked U.S. lawmakers and former UN officials during a [congressional hearing](#) this week investigating the issue. But despite the seriousness of the offenses, this is hardly the first time the UN has been [exposed engaging in severe retaliation against those who blow the whistle on UN crimes](#). The implications of the case are enormous: If left unaddressed, UN officials who know of wrongdoing and criminality will be unlikely to report it, knowing that their lives will be destroyed and nothing will change anyway. But lawmakers did pledge to act.



The whistle-blower scandal probed this week by Congress — one of many similar scandals at the UN — surrounds the UN's [World Intellectual Property Organization, or WIPO, and its director-general, Francis Gurry](#). According to current and former employees of the agency, which runs the international intellectual-property regime, the UN agency boss [sent sensitive U.S. technology to the dictatorships ruling Iran and North Korea](#), in defiance of U.S. law and international sanctions. The reason, whistle-blowers said, was to secure the votes of those regimes in Gurry's reelection contest. When WIPO officials found out, though, they realized something was wrong, and attempted to take action. In response, Gurry retaliated against them in what observers described as an "outrageous" and potentially criminal abuse of power.

Among those testifying was Miranda Brown (shown), who served as strategic advisor to WIPO boss Gurry. In her testimony, she described retaliation at the hands of the UN agency chief, as well as "an ongoing pattern of abuse of authority and impunity." When Brown found out about the scheme to transfer American technology to North Korea, at first she thought it was a joke, she told the committee. When she realized it was not, she tried to stop it, and advised Gurry that it was likely a violation of U.S. law and UN Security Council sanctions. The UN agency chief, who also came under fire for threatening a journalist with prosecution for doing his job in recent years, seemed "non-committal."

"Despite the fact that WIPO had no whistle-blower policy in place at the time I blew the whistle on the North Korea and Iran shipments, I felt confident that the U.S. Government would use its considerable influence to fully protect me," said Brown, one of at least three whistle-blowers at WIPO involved in the explosive scandals. "I felt I had a responsibility, as a UN staff member, to blow the whistle and report a UN agency that was supplying high-end American IT equipment to North Korea, in violation of U.S. domestic sanctions and without consulting the UN Security Council Sanctions Committees."

In response to blowing the whistle, the retaliation was "severe," Brown told lawmakers. Among other actions, Gurry accused her of "disloyalty" and of "leaking documents" to the U.S. government and the



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media. Then, in an apparent test of loyalty, he ordered her to help on a secret plot to establish WIPO offices in Beijing and Moscow without approval from agency member states. Gurry told other staffers to avoid Brown or face “consequences,” and finally told her that her contract would not be renewed. Finally, she was forced to resign under duress, she told the congressional committee.

“Mr. Gurry’s leadership of WIPO is characterized by secrecy and also an extraordinary vindictiveness towards whistle-blowers,” Brown told U.S. lawmakers, adding that the agency chief appears to see the outfit he leads and its resources as his “personal fiefdom.” He also “consistently undermined the internal accountability mechanisms,” she added, citing examples, including one senior official targeted by Gurry who went on to commit suicide. Brown said the suicide should be investigated. Gurry fired and destroyed virtually everyone who tried to stop his lawlessness and abuses, it seems.

And when people dare to continue exposing him, Gurry has the power to destroy them anyway, because it takes three years for whistle-blower cases to be resolved, during which time the whistle-blower would be unemployed and ruined. Brown also said that the retaliation can reach across the UN system, not just at the agency involved, making the prospect of whistle-blowing by those who know of wrongdoing both terrifying and unlikely. “Once the retaliation starts, it’s difficult,” she said.

Perhaps most outrageous of all was Gurry’s abuse of Swiss police to illegally seek out his critics. Beginning in 2007, several letters about Gurry were circulated alleging corruption and sexual harassment. In response, Gurry apparently ordered security officials to enter the offices of his suspected critics and steal personal effects for DNA testing. The behavior has now been investigated by the UN’s investigative agency, but the report on it has not been released, sparking widespread criticism and suspicion.

The implications are massive. Because of the secrecy, “the only way we will ever learn of misconduct within these international organizations is from whistle-blowers,” Brown continued, adding that would-be whistle-blowers from across the UN system are watching this case closely to see what happens. “In the event we don’t achieve something, you may be looking at the last UN whistle blowers to come forward.”

Others testifying at the hearing included attorney James Pooley, a fellow whistle-blower and former deputy director of Innovation and Technology at WIPO. He outlined similar concerns, and other, separate ones. He also provided further details, including Gurry’s hiring of a U.S. lobbying firm for \$200,000 to help him quash U.S. investigations. Pooley also described the retaliation he suffered for blowing the whistle on all of the behavior.

Geneva-based international lawyer Ed Flaherty, an American who represents international organizations’ staff members and whistle-blowers, told *The New American* that the testimony shows the UN whistle-blower protection system is “completely broken.” Calling WIPO leadership “rogue” and “arrogant,” he said that they felt secure in the fact that they receive near absolute immunity — even for criminal wrongdoing. “It seems we have gone back to the monarchy model when it comes to the governance of international organizations,” he said, adding that what was happening at WIPO was “absolutely” a systemic UN problem. And it is a big problem.

Also speaking at the hearing was attorney Matthew Parish with the Gentium Law Group, which is representing WIPO staffers. “If the evidence you’ve heard today is correct, it appears Gurry has committed very serious criminal offenses in both Switzerland and the United States,” said Parish, adding that, because of diplomatic immunity, the UN agency chief could not be held accountable.



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He also pointed out that individual whistle-blowers in the WIPO Staff Council, which he represents, were prohibited from testifying or exposing wrongdoing by their boss, Gurry. “I am advised that WIPO threatens staff who seek to expose wrongdoing in public fora and that its leadership has prohibited staff from testifying before Congress in the past,” Parish said. “My understanding is that WIPO tells its staff that they are forbidden from whistle-blowing to the media, due to their confidentiality obligations to their employer. But the organization’s own whistle-blowing procedure involves cover-ups and charades.”

All of the lawmakers at the hearing sounded shocked and appalled at what they were hearing. “I’m very concerned about Mr. Gurry’s ability to continue retaliating against you both,” said Representative Ileana Ros-Lethinen (R-Fla.), commending the whistle-blowers for their bravery. “I am shocked that Gurry remains in office.”

Representative Chris Smith (R-N.J.), who chaired the hearing, also sounded incredulous, vowing to do “a great deal of follow up” to ensure the future of whistle-blowing at UN. The UN is “not a sustainable organization” if this sort of behavior continues, he added, calling Gurry “a bureaucrat who, with impunity, is abusing his authority.” Whistle-blowers are some of the most noble people in an organization, he continued. “They are the canary in the coal mine,” he added.

In response to questions by *The New American* after the hearing ended, Smith praised another UN whistle-blower, Anders Kompass, who recently suffered extreme retaliation for exposing “peacekeeping” troops on a UN mission in Africa raping children. When asked about the “Turin e-mails” exposing top UN officials plotting to silence and destroy Kompass, Smith again expressed major concerns.

While Kompass and the WIPO whistle-blowers are the most recent whistle-blower scandals to surface, they are hardly unique. As *The New American* reported last year, the [UN’s war on whistle-blowers is massive, systemic, and extreme](#). According to the non-profit Government Accountability Project (GAP), which works to protect whistle-blowers around the world, between 2007 and 2010, the UN failed to protect more than 98 percent of whistle-blowers from retaliation. Countless more have declined to come forward.

Going back even further, the [story of UN whistle-blower Povl Bang-Jensen](#) would shock people to the core. The senior Danish diplomat, who worked in the UN Secretariat and served on an international committee examining Soviet terror and tyranny in Hungary, tried to expose sabotage of the committee by powerful forces. The entire machinery of the UN set out to crush him in sham “hearings” and “tribunals,” even attempting to paint him as mentally ill. Eventually, after warning multiple people that he was being targeted and that he would never commit suicide under any circumstances, Bang-Jensen “committed suicide.” Virtually every credible analyst realized the “suicide” happened under extremely suspicious circumstances.

Lawmakers vowed to take action about the persecution of those who expose the UN. In a follow-up article, *The New American* will highlight some of the measures proposed to deal with the ongoing war on whistle-blowers and to end the UN’s impunity.

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