



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on April 6, 2017

UN Seeks Criminal Charges Against Editor for His Reporting

The United Nations [war on the free press](#) and [whistleblowers](#) continues to escalate. After [a UN “court” tried to put a journalist in jail](#), among [other brazen attacks on media freedom](#), a UN agency is now abusing the Italian legal system to pursue criminal charges and crippling damages against a local newspaper and its editor. The supposed “crime”: allegedly damaging the reputation of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) through articles exposing corruption, lawlessness, cronyism, and nepotism within the Rome-based UN agency. It is hardly the first time the [UN has sought to silence the press](#).



The scandal-plagued UN “food” bureaucracy, though, is already under fire from top U.S. officials and lawmakers. And the bizarre scheme to silence critics and journalists using taxpayer money is likely to pour fuel on the fire — especially as the UN comes under growing criticism for [its anti-press freedom antics](#). Making matters worse for UN agency bosses is the fact that the additional international scrutiny on this case may lead to exposing further corruption. Most alarming, perhaps, are the increasingly obvious links between the UN agency boss in question and [a totalitarian Latin American network of criminals and communists](#).

The controversial case, which could end up shutting down the English-language *Italian Insider* publication, has been in the courts since 2015. Under archaic Italian laws, criminal charges can be sought in defamation cases, and truth is not necessarily a defense. And so, a collection of top UN FAO bureaucrats, apparently sensing an opportunity to shut down critics and investigative journalists, abused the fascist-era statute to accuse the newspaper and its chief editor John Phillips of carrying out a “criminal design” to defame the UN FAO and its leadership. The accusations stem from a series of articles exposing malfeasance, apparent corruption, and other scandals at the UN agency.

“We absolutely stand by all our stories,” *Italian Insider* chief editor Phillips told *The New American* in one of a series of phone interviews about the case. “We don’t have anything to be ashamed of or to roll back in our reporting. I’m absolutely confident that our stories are all accurate. This will be our defense, that the articles are all true. Some of the information we reported is from whistleblowers who naturally want to remain anonymous, although some of our sources have agreed to testify for us in court.” As *The New American* has documented for years, the UN has a [long history of illegally and systematically persecuting whistleblowers who expose wrongdoing](#).

However, Phillips also warned that, in Italy, truth may not necessarily be a valid defense against some of the charges. “It’s a sort of gray area in Italian law,” Phillips said, acknowledging that he was not an expert on the Italian legal system. “In the United States or Britain, truth is a defense, and if the



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published material is true, that is the end of the story. But in Italy, it's not quite so simple — if something is considered insulting, it could get you in trouble, but we're still hoping the truth will be a sufficient defense to ensure that justice is done."

If not, though, the consequences could be severe. "We could be fined heavily, or, in theory, the editor could be jailed, although in practice it's usually a deferred sentence," *Italian Insider* chief editor Phillips explained. "It's kind of an antiquated law that's been around since the fascist times. There have been cases where people have been jailed under this statute, although we don't think there is an immediate risk of that for us, but we could end up with a criminal record." The UN FAO bosses are demanding massive damages and criminal charges in the case, which could eventually force the newspaper to shut down.

Among other [scandals exposed by the Italian newspaper](#) was the rigging of an important job appointment, in violation of UN rules, as a favor to the [Chilean Socialist Party, a member of the shadowy totalitarian alliance in Latin America](#) connected to the FAO boss. The FAO official involved disputes that, but *Italian Insider* said the evidence was clear and the paper has sources willing to testify. Another major FAO scandal exposed by the paper involved Romanian UN FAO executive Florentin Albu and orders by UN FAO boss José Graziano da Silva (shown above) to "earmark" new positions for agency staffers previously laid off due to budget cuts. Since it was founded, the *Insider* has been at the forefront of exposing wrongdoing in various Rome-based UN agencies, including FAO, the World Food Programme, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, UN FAO Director General Graziano, the man at the center of the effort to quash the paper, is a former cabinet official in the socialist regime of disgraced former Brazilian President Luis Inacio "Lula" da Silva, [who is currently being prosecuted for massive corruption in the "Operation Car Wash" \(Operação Lava Jato\) scandal](#). Lula, of course, was also a close ally of the brutal communist dictatorship in Cuba. Along with Fidel Castro, the Sandinistas, and various Marxist narco-terror groups such as the FARC in Colombia, [Lula was one of the founders of the Foro de Sao Paulo, a shadowy Latin American alliance of communists, criminals, terrorists, and other forces working to spread communism and tyranny across the region](#). Graziano is, or at least was, a member of [Lula's Marxist-Leninist "Workers' Party," or PT](#), according to the party.

As Lula was frantically seeking a way to avoid prosecution, and court officials [blocked his hand-picked Marxist-Leninist successor \(who has since been impeached\) from appointing him to the imploding Brazilian cabinet](#), *Italian Insider*, citing FAO sources, reported that Graziano was plotting to offer Lula a job as a "special adviser" at FAO. That would have granted him diplomatic immunity, making it more difficult for Brazilian prosecutors to bring him to justice for what they say was a massive criminal conspiracy to loot millions of dollars from Brazil and its state-owned oil company Petrobras. Much of the stolen money was used to advance the FSP mission of spreading communism and tyranny across Latin America. Much was also used to benefit Lula personally, prosecutors say.

It was not immediately clear whether Graziano had any knowledge or complicity in Lula's alleged conspiracy while serving as a minister in his cabinet — and with his UN diplomatic immunity, prosecutors may not be able to find out, for now. After Lula's fall from grace amid the criminal conspiracy scheme, Graziano has downplayed his links to Lula, when he mentions Lula at all. Under Graziano's leadership, though, the FAO began a "partnership" with the disgraced former Brazilian president's "Lula Institute" to supposedly "end hunger" in Africa. If convicted, Lula may spend the rest of his life behind bars. Some of his co-conspirators, already convicted and sentenced to long jail terms,



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are [reportedly cooperating with authorities](#).

As if to add insult to injury, the FAO under Graziano's leadership gave an award to the socialist regime in Venezuela — [also part of the Lula and Castro's communist FSP network](#) — for allegedly fighting “hunger.” Meanwhile, in the real world, [the Venezuelan people oppressed by the Maduro regime were dealing with crushing food shortages](#). The situation has become so dire that starving Venezuelans have reportedly turned to eating their pets and zoo animals. In February, Venezuela's “Living Conditions Survey” [reported that](#) about three out of four people lost an average of almost 20 pounds of body weight due to severe food shortages. Still, despite the crushing economic situation, the Venezuelan regime, with its vast oil wealth, [has been a key financier of the FSP network and its scheming](#).

One of the explosive FAO scandals highlighted by the *Italian Insider* and other publications surrounds a scheme by FAO boss Graziano to help former Peruvian First Lady Nadine Heredia escape justice by giving her a senior UN FAO job, complete with diplomatic immunity. Heredia was charged by prosecutors in Peru with major corruption, usurpation of power, and money laundering for helping to funnel some \$150 million stolen from Brazilian taxpayers by the Lula regime into her totalitarian husband's political campaign for president.

Her husband, former President Ollanta Humala, was with the socialist “Peruvian Nationalist Party,” which Heredia helped create and now leads. The party is, unsurprisingly, also a member of the [Marxist-Leninist Foro de Sao Paulo founded by Lula, Castro, the terrorist group FARC](#), and others. After Graziano appointed her to the UN post with diplomatic immunity, it sparked an international scandal that eventually forced her out. Graziano and the FAO [insist everything was above board](#). But the stench of corruption has still not cleared.

U.S. lawmakers have expressed serious concerns about the scheme. “Sadly we have indications that the FAO has sought to silence truth tellers in that organization, while offering a plush diplomatic post to shield a former first lady under investigation in her own country for receiving bribes in a corruption scandal that touched certain Latin American countries,” Representative Chris Smith (R-N.J.), who chairs key congressional subcommittees dealing with international organizations, said in a subcommittee hearing. Multiple sources have confirmed that the administration of President Donald Trump is aware of the scandals and [has UN FAO in the crosshairs as the president works to implement his promises to cut the UN down to size](#). Some [UN agencies may lose all U.S. funding](#).

Insider editor Phillips said American and European policymakers must take note. “There's a lot of skulduggery going on at the top of FAO, it's really bad,” he told *The New American*, specifically mentioning Graziano and his ties to Lula, among a wide range of other concerns. “It's funny because the UN claims diplomatic immunity and never gets held accountable, but here they are taking a media organization to court and using donor [taxpayer] money to silence journalists who report on this. It really is something.”

“There has long been discussion about whether the FAO should be abolished since it has proven so difficult to reform, while in the past the U.S., Britain and Canada withdrew funding for a period of years to pressure the UN agency to make reforms that have been implemented only at a snail's pace,” Phillips said. “One problem has been that U.S. and other ambassadors to the food agencies become uncritical of the food agencies in Rome because they hope to use the ambassador's job as a springboard to heading one of the agencies, so for instance ambassador Ertharin Cousin became head of the World Food Programme, sister agency to the FAO, and next week finishes her term before the Trump administration appointee David Beasley takes over the post.”



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He also hopes that, under Trump and his administration's appointees, the UN agency will quit trying to quash media freedom. "It is to be hoped that the new US ambassador, expected to be Sam Brownback, will take a more resolute line, including persuading FAO Director General José Graziano da Silva to respect freedom of the press rather than trying to silence legitimate reporting and comment by our newspaper," the chief editor continued, adding that Graziano is well aware of the fact that top U.S. officials are unhappy with his record.

"The number of Americans and people from most other OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] countries in professional jobs has tumbled at FAO as Graziano favored Latin American and Hispanic cronies for top jobs," Phillips continued. "Graziano has turned FAO into his personal fiefdom for his cronies from Latin America, and he has systematically sidelined professional staff from America, Britain, and other OECD countries even though those are the biggest donors to the organization. Obviously he doesn't like us reporting that because it makes donors realize they aren't getting a good deal for their money."

And so, Graziano and his minions are abusing arcane laws — laws that do not apply to the UN due to its increasingly dubious claim to diplomatic immunity — in a desperate bid to silence the truth. Graziano is the key FAO figure, demanding massive damages from the *Insider* for allegedly "damaging the reputation" of the UN bureaucracy, which purports to "fight hunger." Its motto is "Let there be bread." There are four other current and former UN officials suing the paper in a private capacity, with all but one demanding monetary damages.

One of the plaintiffs, UN FAO chief of staff Mario Lubetkin, is demanding at least 100,000 euros. "He says we affronted his honor, and his translations of our articles into Italian for court are not accurate, so we're challenging those and asking the judge to check the translations using a court-appointed translator," Phillips explained. "They've slanted what we've written in many cases, to try to support their case." The other plaintiffs are former IT division chief Florentin Albu, who since has departed the organization, former media relations chief Mehdi Drissi, currently FAO representative in the Gulf states, and Spanish coordinator for Expo Clara Velez Fraga.

"There's a whole raft of articles that they claim were untrue," Phillips explained. "Graziano, in his deposition, cites various things he suggests are wild reporting that couldn't possibly be true, for example a story about him smashing up the elevator in his apartment block and then getting FAO resources to fix it. We have it from a good source that it actually happened, and that he gets these fits of rage. We also wrote an article saying that the Catholic organization Opus Dei had a lot of influence within FAO. But that doesn't bring the FAO into disrepute, it's a respectable organization recognized by the Catholic Church and it is well known it tries to recruit professionals."

But even defending against the bogus charges in the face of a UN agency with huge taxpayer resources is putting a serious strain on the paper, he said. "Naturally the cost of legal defense against the FAO, which uses donor [taxpayer] funds to sue us, is very high for us and could eventually drive us out of business, as Graziano evidently hopes will happen," Phillips said. "In addition to the allegations under trial, I received notification from Italian police last week that Graziano has filed suit to sue us again in a second round of proceedings for 37 more recent articles we published, many of them about his decision to hire former Peruvian first lady Nadine Heredia to the FAO and give her diplomatic immunity despite — or rather because of — her being under investigation for alleged massive money laundering linked to the Oderbrecht scandal that engulfed Graziano's old boss Brazilian former president Lula da Silva, in whose government Graziano was a minister. An Italian judge will now decide whether to indict me



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again and start a second trial.”

The UN agency’s media relations office did not respond to e-mailed questions before press time. A follow up phone call to the FAO office confirmed that the questions were, in fact, received, but there was no information on whether a response would be issued, or when. The trial resumes on April 12.

Photo of FAO boss José Graziano da Silva: AP Images

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