



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 17, 2016

UN Attacks U.S. Journalist Known for Exposing UN Corruption

The United Nations, which styles itself a champion of [what it calls “human rights,”](#) is once again under fire for brazenly trampling fundamental rights — this time on freedom of the press, [yet again](#). After sparking a global scandal last year with its [bizarre efforts to imprison a TV journalist for her reporting](#), UN leadership has decided to go after another reporter, Matthew Lee of Inner City Press (ICP). Lee (shown) suspects it has to do with his exposure of widespread and systemic UN corruption. And he is probably right, according to observers, whistleblower advocates, and an international attorney who is taking up Lee’s defense pro-bono.



The UN’s attacks on Lee last month almost sound too ridiculous to be real — at least for somebody unfamiliar with the global body, often ridiculed by Americans as the “dictators club.” After more than a decade of reporting on the UN, the muckraking journalist was unceremoniously evicted from his office at UN headquarters in New York City as if he were a crime boss. UN officials ripped off his UN journalism badge and even seized his personal phone. He was not even given access to his files or his coat before being forcibly ejected from the building by a phalanx of eight UN security guards.

“You are a trespasser on UN property,” one of the UN guards told Lee as he was being ordered off the premises shortly after receiving his expulsion notice. They also searched his office and even threw his laptop on the ground, Lee said.

So what did Lee do to merit being treated like some sort of criminal? According to both Lee and the UN, he tried to report on a meeting of the UN Correspondents Association in the UN Press Briefing Room without official permission. The UN’s chief propagandist, “Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information” Christina Gallach, wrote [a letter](#) to Lee on February 19 purporting to justify the decision. “After reviewing the facts, the Department of Public Information has determined that your actions were a violation of the United Nations Media Guidelines,” Gallach explained in the letter. She pointed to a rule that says journalists must not “abuse the privileges” extended to them or “act in a way not consistent with the principles of the [UN] Organization.”

Lee and his supporters, though, see the matter quite differently. The day of the incident, Lee told *The New American*, he went to cover an event at the UN Press Briefing Room. It was not listed as “closed” anywhere, he said. And either way, “I believe that events in the UN Press Briefing Room must be open to all journalists, not just some,” added Lee, who is also an attorney. This particular event was a meeting of the UN Correspondents Association (UNCA), which the UN describes as its “partner” on media issues but which Lee, despite having served on the board, now blasts as the UN “Censorship Alliance.” Lee quit the outfit in 2012, “having concluded the group was and is too close to the UN, and



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also corrupt, or a vehicle through which corruption enters the UN.” And so, Lee was not welcome, apparently.

But the real issue, Lee believes, was his reporting. “Key to all this: I have been covering the current UN bribery scandal, where it leads,” he explained. Lee noted that the UNCA took money from Communist Chinese billionaire Ng Lap Seng, who [was charged last year by the U.S. Justice Department with bribing top UN officials, including the president of the UN General Assembly](#). And then, the UN association for “journalists” organized a photo-op for the Chinese operative with UN boss Ban Ki-moon.

Gallach, meanwhile, the top UN propagandist, attended the “South-South Awards” with UN diplomat Frank Lorenzo shortly before the latter was also [indicted by U.S. authorities in the corruption scandal](#). Separately, Ban’s spouse, and his adviser Vijay Nambiar, attended the founding of the “Global Sustainability Foundation,” an alleged front involved in the mushrooming corruption scandal that is being torn open by U.S. prosecutors.

“Amid this coverage, Inner City Press was thrown out,” said Lee, adding that there are many figures within the UN who would like to throw him out. “It speaks for itself.”

Lee was hardly the only one concerned about the development, however. “The action targeted Matthew Lee alone and appears to be retaliatory in response to independent, critical journalism,” explained International Program Director Beatrice Edwards with the Government Accountability Project (GAP) in [a letter](#) to Ambassador Isobel Coleman with the U.S. Permanent Mission to the UN. “Matthew should be restored to his status prior to this incident ... and there ought to be a review of this incident. The fact that an accredited journalist can be summarily expelled from the premises without review or recourse is a problem at an institution that purports to defend human rights around the world.”

International attorney Edward Flaherty, who represents whistleblowers and others involved in disputes with the UN and other international organizations, was so shocked that he decided to take on Lee’s case pro-bono. The two met nearly 10 years ago amid the Ruud Lubbers sex-assault scandal. “Lee was one of the few journalists covering the UN at the time willing to ask hard, uncomfortable questions to [then-UN boss] Kofi Annan and his sycophants in the UN hierarchy as to why they continued to defend Lubbers and his depredations,” Flaherty said, noting that Lee’s journalistic efforts ended up playing a role in Lubbers’ “tardy” departure as UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

“Matthew is an unbiased journalist, and while his politics may be different from mine, he deserves to be defended against the jack-boot tactics of the UN in New York City,” Flaherty continued. “Journalists are the front-line whistleblowers of society, and allowing the UN to cut off Matthew’s access to its premises on specious grounds is a serious hindrance for all whistleblowers. I am disgusted by the UN’s trampling of the U.S. First Amendment, in America! Where is the State Department in this? Why are they not demanding Matthew’s press freedom?”

It also highlights the problem of UN officials having “immunity,” the international attorney said. “This is just another example of many as to why the UN should no longer be able to claim blanket, absolute immunity for their egregious actions, particularly in places like New York City, Geneva and Vienna,” he argued. “If the UN continues to abuse its immunity, its needs to be drastically cut back so that victims like Matthew — and the victims of the UN’s introduction of the deadly cholera epidemic into Haiti — can use the U.S. courts to vindicate their own rights, as the feckless U.S. State Department does nothing, twiddling its thumbs.” He called on Americans to take action, and contact their elected officials, to demand accountability and transparency at the UN.



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Lee also expressed concerns about the broader implications of the attacks on him and his ability to report on the UN. “The UN has in place no actual protection for journalists: no due process, no appeal,” he explained. “And when a journalist is physically thrown out, laptop thrown on sidewalk, as happened to me on Feb 19, 2016, the UN doesn’t say it’s sorry, nothing. It tried to silence the journalist it threw out.... The message is, don’t come to the UN and ask a lot of questions, as an independent journalist, or you’ll be thrown in the street.”

Beyond attacks on journalism, Lee highlighted numerous other concerns he has surrounding the UN. Among others, he mentioned the [spreading of cholera in Haiti by UN troops](#), the [rape of women and children by peacekeepers in Africa](#), covering up war crimes, “weak one-sided diplomacy,” and more. If things do not improve at the organization under the next secretary-general, he said, it is “on the way to the dustbin of history.” That the situation might improve, though, appears unlikely, [considering developments in the race to find the next leader of the UN](#).

In conversations with *The New American*, multiple UN officials and insiders, current and former, have acknowledged that Lee is among a tiny group of real journalists who take their job as watchdogs seriously. For years, Lee has been asking the hard questions that establishment-minded “journalists” working for the establishment press refuse to ask. He leans left politically, but he is honest, persistent, and dedicated to keeping his readers informed about what really happens within the UN — rather than parroting the propaganda narrative put out by the UN’s public relations operatives and their lackeys in much of what passes for the press. Lee has also broken important stories, including exposing the UN Development Program’s funding of forcible disarmament schemes in Uganda that included the detention of children and other abuses.

Unsurprisingly, very few establishment media outlets even reported on the UN attacks against Lee. In fact, many of them are probably delighted to no longer have to be consistently embarrassed by the presence of a real reporter asking real questions in their midst. Lee calls them UN “lapdogs.” For the public, though, which pays the bloated salaries of the UN’s armies of bureaucrats and its oftentimes corrupt and autocratic member regimes, Lee’s expulsion should be a major concern. It appears to highlight, among other problems, the lengths to which the UN will go to silence critics, and its lack of concern for even the most fundamental liberties such as freedom of the press. Hopefully the U.S. Congress is paying attention.

Photo: Matthew Lee

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