



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 5, 2014

## UN Agency May Reappoint Boss Despite Scandals, Helping Tyrants

Despite [non-stop mega-scandals](#) swirling around World Intellectual Property Organization Director General Francis Gurry (shown), member governments and dictatorships of the powerful United Nations agency may vote to reappoint the disgraced WIPO chief this week for another six-year term. The UN outfit, charged with managing the planetary intellectual-property regime, has been under heavy fire for years, largely as a result of Gurry's machinations — [supporting dictators](#), corruption and abuse of power allegations, and, most recently, charges by a high-ranking whistleblower that the UN agency chief stole employees' DNA in a fiendish effort to identify his critics.



The embattled WIPO chief, who leads one of the most important and well-funded UN outfits, has also attracted bipartisan fury in the U.S. Congress. Among other scandals decried by American lawmakers was the agency's bizarre decision to [send sensitive American technology to the barbaric communist regime ruling North Korea and the Islamic autocracy in Iran](#) — potentially in violation of U.S. law. After a global uproar about the allegedly unlawful tech transfers to despots, WIPO refused to cooperate with U.S. investigators and was accused of a cover-up.

"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 bipartisan leadership of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee [said](#) in a letter about the scandal. "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."

Incredibly, even after being exposed, Gurry's outfit continued to collaborate with the murderous regimes, even [deploying a "technical assistance" mission to Pyongyang last summer](#). According to formal allegations filed by a WIPO whistleblower and covered widely in the global press, the UN aid to murderous regimes was actually part of a broader corruption scandal, with Gurry allegedly pledging the sensitive equipment in exchange for the dictatorships' votes. "The evidence suggests that the director general has a track record of manipulating appointments to WIPO professional posts in exchange for votes," added the brief filed with the International Labour Organization's Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT). Gurry, who denies the allegations, won his appointment by one vote.

Despite promising to seek permission first, the director general also opened WIPO offices in Beijing and



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Moscow without approval from member states, again sparking an international outcry that rocked the UN agency. Even senior officials at WIPO learned about the new offices from the media, according to multiple reports. The out-of-control behavior was considered so serious that WIPO member governments and dictatorships failed to adopt a budget at the 2013 WIPO General Assembly, requiring a special session. The furor has not yet died down even as the list of scandals surrounding Gurry continues to grow.

More recently, the UN outfit's boss became embroiled in yet another mega-scandal when one of his key advisors, fellow Australian Miranda Brown, filed a lawsuit against him making extremely serious allegations. That particular saga began before Gurry even seized power at the disgraced UN agency. While serving as deputy director general, anonymous letters surfaced accusing him of "financial improprieties" and "sexual harassment." In an effort to identify the employee or employees responsible for the allegations, Gurry allegedly orchestrated a plot to steal personal effects from WIPO staff with a goal of obtaining DNA samples and fingerprints.

When the victims found out about the outrageous behavior and sought justice, Gurry, who has diplomatic immunity, attempted to retaliate, even threatening whistleblowers with termination or relocation. According to Brown's high-profile suit against the director general, the alleged abuses of power in the DNA scandal were hardly an isolated incident. In her complaint, the former advisor to the director general accused Gurry of running the agency in a way that revealed "a pattern of degrading treatment, discrimination and abusive behavior towards staff." Other senior figures at WIPO have made similar accusations.

Edward Flaherty, a Geneva-based international lawyer representing Gurry's former advisor in the case alleging gross abuse of power and corruption at WIPO, pointed to what he called "the double standard apparently at play." Gurry's predecessor as director general, Kamil Idris, a black African from Sudan, was pushed out of his position by the U.S. government and other member states for "lack of integrity" because he misstated his date of birth on his employment application. "This seems to pale against the current allegations, and smacks of a racist double standard," Flaherty told *The New American*.

The international attorney also pointed to broader problems with international organizations highlighted by the wave of scandals at WIPO. "My view is that working in organizations of the UN that enjoy immunity from all national laws, which effectively means all law, breeds contempt for the rule of law, which the UN is supposed to stand for first and foremost," Flaherty said, adding that immunity should be drastically limited and that outsiders with the highest standards of integrity ought to lead such organizations rather than insiders. "With the immunity of international organizations, there are no guards for the guardians!"

International watchdog organizations have also been extraordinarily critical of WIPO in recent years — and especially the potential reappointment of Gurry. "This organization, more than most UN agencies, requires trustworthy leadership," said Hillel Neuer, executive director of the Geneva-based monitoring group UN Watch. "This was exactly the point that the U.S. made back in 2007, when Gurry's predecessor, Kamil Idris of Sudan, was found to have lied about his age, and we trust that America would not apply a different standard to an Australian than was applied to his African predecessor."

"The sense of *déjà vu* is palpable, only this time it's not someone who merely fibbed about his age," Neuer continued in a recent statement about the escalating scandals at WIPO, pointing out that U.S. officials in 2007 had demanded the "highest professional and ethical standards" at the agency shortly before Gurry took the helm. "By any account, Gurry's conduct falls far short of the 'highest professional



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and ethical standards' set by the United States in 2007."

WIPO is considered an extremely important and powerful UN agency — especially in the United States — mostly because it manages the global patent regime. According to reports, the outfit processes over 200,000 confidential applications each year while generating over \$300 million annually in fees, much of it from American inventors. The potential for abuses is, of course, enormous — especially, critics say, when the agency is under the leadership of a scandal-plagued figure whose biggest claim to fame is transferring potential "dual-use" U.S. technology to some of the most brutal dictatorships on earth.

In a rare show of bipartisanship, U.S. lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have been up in arms about Gurry and his potential reappointment as WIPO director general. Members of Congress are still urging Secretary of State John Kerry to oppose Gurry's bid because his tenure would damage "the interests of the United States and its large community of innovators." There are currently several other contenders for the WIPO post including current deputy director general Geoffrey Onyeama of Nigeria, Ambassador Jüri Seilenthal of Estonia, and Ambassador Alfredo Suescum from Panama.

On March 6 and 7, the WIPO Coordination Committee, which includes the regimes ruling North Korea and Iran, will hold a meeting to pick its nominee for director general. After that, the selection will go to the full membership of the General Assembly for approval. The next WIPO chief will take the reins in October. Whether the agency and the UN more broadly can ever recover from the perpetual cloud of scandal, though, remains unclear. For American critics of the planetary outfit, widely viewed as the "[dictators' club](#)," it is past time to get the U.S. government out of the UN altogether.

*Photo of Francis Gurry: AP Images*

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