



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 1, 2016

U.S. Lawmakers Vow to Protect UN Whistleblowers

WASHINGTON, D.C. — During and after an [explosive congressional hearing](#) into what was described as “outrageous” United Nations retaliation against whistleblowers, U.S. lawmakers vowed to protect UN officials who expose wrongdoing — even if securing reforms means slashing American funding to the international organization. Congress also heard a variety of suggestions last week from persecuted UN whistleblowers on how to improve the dire situation, and why action on the issue of whistleblowing is both urgent and critical.



The hearing, which brought together three subcommittees of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, dealt particularly with the UN World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), which runs the global intellectual property regime. According to the witnesses, the head of the agency, Director-General Francis Gurry, [shipped sensitive dual-use U.S. technology to the regimes ruling North Korea and Iran](#) in apparent violation of federal law and UN sanctions. The purpose was allegedly to buy votes for Gurry’s re-election.

When the senior WIPO staffers found out, though, they tried to put a stop to it, and eventually blew the whistle, sparking the latest whistleblowing scandal to rock the UN in recent years. As *The New American* [reported](#) last week, among those testifying were former strategic adviser to the WIPO boss Miranda Brown and former deputy director of innovation and technology James Pooley. They exposed what was characterized by U.S. lawmakers and others as flagrant lawlessness by the UN agency chief, part of a shocking international scandal that must be urgently addressed.

In response to testimony provided by UN whistleblowers and growing global scandals surrounding the issue, the American people’s elected representatives vowed to take action. “The State Department finally woke up to Gurry’s repulsive behavior last year when it decided to withhold a portion of U.S. contributions to WIPO for its violations of U.S. whistle-blower protections,” said Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), blasting the “corrupt officials” that run various UN agencies. “But that is not nearly enough to demonstrate a commitment to the whistle blowers.” She also said the administration should ensure that the UN whistleblowers are reinstated immediately.

The chairman of the joint committee hearing, Representative Chris Smith (R-N.J.), expressed outrage, and vowed that Congress would continue to use U.S. taxpayer funding as leverage to force accountability on the global body — potentially up to 100 percent if necessary. Smith emphasized that Congress was planning to do much more, noting that whistleblowers are the “canary in the coal mine” and must be protected when they expose wrongdoing or criminal activity.

In response to questions by *The New American* after the hearing ended, Smith also praised another UN whistleblower, human rights official Anders Kompass, who recently suffered extreme retaliation. In his case, the [retaliation from top UN officials was due to exposing “peacekeeping” troops on a UN mission in Africa raping children](#). When asked about the “Turin e-mails” [exposing top UN officials plotting to](#)



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[silence and destroy Kompas](#), Smith again expressed major concerns. “We’re going to be doing a lot more,” he pledged, adding again that funding would be used as leverage. He also said that more would be done to ensure that UN member governments prosecute UN peacekeeping troops involved in the horrifying crimes.

Smith emphasized again that not nearly enough was being done to protect whistleblowers at the UN, or to hold perpetrators — [including child-raping UN troops](#) — accountable for their crimes. And he pledged that Congress would continue working on the issues. Among other tactics, various “resolutions” are being considered, he said. However, noting that the UN was not “sustainable” under these circumstances, he acknowledged that funding might be the only avenue to get the UN’s attention and make progress on the scandals.

If whistleblowers are not urgently protected, UN abuses and serious criminality will continue to be covered up, the former officials and experts explained to lawmakers. Members of Congress indicated that they understood that and would be taking new measures to ensure accountability and transparency from the UN and its agencies, and protection for those who expose wrongdoing. American taxpayers pay the largest portion of the UN’s budget. WIPO is funded primarily by fees from inventors, though, with the bulk of those fees coming from Americans.

Former officials at the hearing expressed dismay at what happened when they tried to expose Gurry’s behavior. “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, the former advisor to Gurry who contacted U.S. authorities after learning of the illegal technology shipments to the regimes in North Korea and Iran. So far, the U.S. government has not properly done so, though lawmakers vowed to do what they could to change that.

“The Congress could play a very significant role here,” continued Brown, speaking of the troubles at the UN agency and beyond. “In the event we don’t achieve something, you may be looking at the last UN whistle blowers to come forward.” That was a common theme at the hearing: If Congress does not take serious action, others within the UN who know of crimes or wrongdoing may be too scared to come forward. Lawmakers suggested that they understood that and the importance of ensuring that whistleblowers will continue to come forward.

Among other ideas, attorney Pooley, the former WIPO deputy director, proposed a reconsideration of diplomatic immunity that protects abusive and corrupt UN officials from accountability. “Gurry knows he can’t be held accountable in some of the ways that would matter most,” Pooley told U.S. lawmakers. He also proposed an independent, external arbitration mechanism to protect UN whistleblowers. “Give whistle-blowers strong enough protections so you can get the information you need and engage in the sort of oversight you’re supposed to,” he concluded.

Geneva-based international lawyer Ed Flaherty, an American who represents international organizations’ staff members and whistleblowers, noted that the testimony shows the UN whistleblower protection system is “completely broken.” If serious action is not taken, “no more whistle-blowers will come forward from the UN, and the corruption and impunity, already rampant, will explode,” he told *The New American*, adding that the problems at the UN were systemic and not unique to WIPO.

Separately, Flaherty called for all UN agencies to have their U.S. funding slashed immediately if they refuse to set up proper mechanisms to protect whistleblowers — something that is already required



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under U.S. appropriations. The “feckless” U.S. State Department, though, continues to provide waivers to most UN agencies, added Flaherty, who was present at the hearing serving as counsel to witnesses Brown and Pooley. The U.S. State Department also allowed Gurry to be [re-elected WIPO chief in 2014](#) amid the avalanche of scandals.

To deal with the problems, Flaherty called on Congress to exercise its power of the purse, seek to implement a Freedom of Information Act for the UN, create a system in which whistleblowers can keep a part of the money recovered when they report proven fraud or financial abuse at the UN, and much more. “Finally, immunity equals impunity,” continued Flaherty. “The current system of absolute immunity afforded to the UN and international organizations clearly leads to abuses such as those found at WIPO, and oil for food, and the Ruud Lubbers scandal, peacekeeper sexual abuse, and so on. It must be changed. Sovereign states are no longer afforded absolute immunity, so neither should the UN.” He also called for the immediate release of the full UN report into the Gurry scandals by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Service (OIOS).

“Rogue UN officials beware,” warned Flaherty, adding that the latest hearings were simply a first step in all of this.

Speaking of the report on the WIPO-Gurry scandals issued by the OIOS, the UN’s investigative agency, attorney Matthew Parish, who testified representing the WIPO Staff Council, lambasted the fact that it was still being withheld, despite repeated demands for its release. “I can conceive of no imaginable legal or policy reason why the OIOS report should be withheld,” Parish said. “The sole reasonable inference I can draw from the foregoing extraordinary state of affairs is that the report is critical of Mr. Gurry in at least some substantial respect, and that therefore he is taking measures to suppress its distribution, cognizant of the detrimental consequences circulation of a critical report might have for his career, his reputation or his liberty.”

“The old adage that ‘sunlight is the best disinfectant’ is appropriate for the issues surrounding WIPO,” he said, adding that Congress was “well positioned” to get the report released and force greater transparency and accountability across the UN.

The former head of the OIOS, though, ex-UN Under-Secretary-General Inga-Britt Ahlenius, who led the agency until 2010, has also slammed the agency’s recent chief, Carman Lapointe, for her activities, including in relation to UN whistle blower Kompass. In an interview with *The New American* last year, Ahlenius, speaking of UN leadership’s behavior in the Kompass case, [said the responsibility for the scandal actually goes straight back to UN chief Ban Ki-moon](#). “The Central African Republic affair [[child-raping troops exposed by Kompass](#)] is a sign that shows how accountability will actually have to be demanded from the UN,” she said, calling on the media to properly supervise the UN as well. “It won’t come on its own.”

Lawmakers and sources close to the WIPO case said the hearings this week at the House Foreign Affairs Committee were just the first step — more hearings and probes are coming, along with action. Several pieces of legislation dealing with the UN are already in Congress, including one by Representative Ros-Lehtinen, the [United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act](#), that would implement some reforms by using funding as leverage. Among the reforms: shifting funding for the UN to a voluntary basis, prohibiting the use of funds for unauthorized purposes, and much more.

Legislation taking congressional action even further, the [American Sovereignty Restoration Act](#), would completely end U.S. membership in the UN and evict its headquarters from U.S. soil. The bill is



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currently sitting in the House Foreign Affairs Committee — the same committee that recently heard testimony from UN whistleblowers on the lawless activities at WIPO. As the burgeoning scandals illustrate, it is time for U.S. lawmakers to get serious.



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