

WIPO Boss Seeks to Silence Press Critics and Whistleblowers

Bea Edwards, May 09, 2017

On January 25, 2017 the Staff Association of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) headquartered in Geneva, [demonstrated](#) to protest the recent actions of Francis Gurry, the agency's Director General. Unhappy with the duly-elected Staff Association Council, Gurry organized his own elections and simply replaced the legitimate Staff Council with his preferred slate of officers.

Besides the obvious problem of management selecting candidates for Staff Association elections, there were apparently numerous irregularities manifest in this process, and the duly-elected Council of the Staff Association is pursuing legal remedies. These take time, however, and in the meantime, Gurry's preferred slate has taken over the offices and functions of the legitimate officials.

Although this is a familiar anti-union technique, the fact that a dummy election and a stooge Council were put in place at a United Nations agency was a new low, even for Gurry, who has behaved oddly in recent years. He has been the source of conflict since [he dismissed Moncef Kateb](#), the previous head of WIPO's Staff Council. Kateb blew the whistle on the autocratic Director General after he authorized the shipment of sophisticated American computer equipment to Iran and North Korea in an apparent breach of UN Security Council sanctions.

The US Congress has [registered its disapproval of WIPO's](#) treatment of whistleblowers under Gurry by withholding 15 percent of its annual contribution to the international patent agency for each of the past two years. To date, WIPO is the only UN agency sanctioned for inadequate whistleblower protections.

The problems facing WIPO staff and allies deepened when Gurry filed a criminal defamation lawsuit against the journalist who covered the WIPO demonstration. No one expected that from a UN agency director, especially given that the United Nations has developed a policy and practice of opposing the criminalization of defamation charges. The UN sees criminal charges in defamation cases as a technique used by repressive governments to silence journalists.

As the attached analysis shows, the UN opposes legal actions taken for the purpose of closing down investigations or shutting up journalists. Nonetheless, Francis Gurry at WIPO seems to be allowed the latitude to do this, despite its obvious clash with UN norms and principles.

At the Government Accountability Project, where we defend whistleblowers from the United Nations, we are asking WIPO Member States to [consider the questions attached](#), as they apply to the Director General's actions.