
INTERPOL, CHINA AND THE EU

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Interpol has made the headlines this week as the (now) ex-president of the organisation Meng Hongwei was initially reported as missing, and later confirmed by the Chinese authorities to be under investigation.

For most China's audacity to detain a figurehead of a major intergovernmental organisation is nothing short of astonishing, especially when that organisation happens to be the world's largest policing organisation.

But for Fair Trials, this is not entirely unexpected.

We have long highlighted the ways in which various countries, including China, have been misusing Interpol as a tool for repression, showing total disregard for the organisation's constitution and its rules.

Far too often, they have selfishly undermined Interpol legitimacy and its ability to tackle threats to global security by issuing alerts to seek the arrest of political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists, and others who are in need of international protection.

For years, China used an Interpol 'Red Notice' to harass, intimidate, and smear Dolkun Isa, an Uyghur activist.

Isa had been granted asylum in Germany due to his political activities, but this did not prevent China from using Interpol channels to request the police of some 190 countries to arrest him and send him back to China.

Isa faced numerous harrowing arrests because of the Red Notice, which often took place on his way to speak and raise international awareness about the dire human rights situation in northwest China.

Interpol is alert to the fact that China and other countries often attempt to use its systems as a way of exporting human rights abuses, and in the past five years it has adopted several reforms, many in line with Fair Trials' recommendations, to ensure that it is better protected from abuse.

In a new report last week, we applaud Interpol for doing the right thing □ by taking steps to make sure that countries do not use international police cooperation as an excuse to target dissidents.

Interpol reforms mean that now, countries are no longer permitted to issue Red Notices against refugees, and individuals who wish to challenge Red Notices for human rights reasons have access

to a more efficient and effective complaints procedure.

Interpol has also dedicated more staff and introduced new procedures in an effort to make sure that it is able to identify requests for Red Notices that are politically motivated, or that go against Interpol commitment to respect human rights.

But there is still so much room for improvement. Even with better procedures and more staff to review Red Notices, certain countries, including Turkey, have succeeded in disseminating Red Notices against high-profile critics of the government.

In 2017, Angela Merkel publicly condemned the misuse of Interpol by Turkey, which issued a Red Notice against the German-Turkish writer Dogan Akhanli.

And even though Interpol now has procedures for checking all Red Notices before they reach the databases of police across the world, this is not happening for 'Diffusions', a less formal equivalent that can have equally devastating consequences, as the British-American activist Bill Browder, as well as the Russian activist Nikita Kulachenkov know only too well.

Interpol handling of Meng's 'resignation' also suggests that there is some way to go before it can show that it is genuinely committed to fair and impartial justice.

Interpol seems to have accepted Meng's resignation only too readily, notwithstanding the fact that (as reports suggest) he is being detained incommunicado, and his wife is under police protection due to threats made against her.

Surely, as a policing organisation, Interpol is aware that without effective safeguards, individuals held in incommunicado detention are especially vulnerable to coercion. It would be interesting to find out what efforts Interpol made to make sure that Meng had indeed resigned on his own free will, instead of relying solely on the mere assertions from the Chinese authorities about the resignation.

According to Interpol Twitter feed, it was back to business as usual by Monday.

Less than 24 hours after announcing Meng's resignation, the Secretary-General of the organisation was photographed shaking hands with Qatar's Chief of Police at the Interpol Headquarters in Lyon.

Interpol seems to be able to move swiftly on from major challenges to the organisation. We hope it does not give its human rights challenges and commitment to reform the same swift treatment.

Kaynak/Source: