

Defending Human Rights, Strengthening INTERPOL

INTERPOL IS BEING USED AS A WEAPON AGAINST JOURNALISTS, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND REFUGEES.

INTERPOL is the world's largest international policing organisation, with around 190 member countries. It plays an important role in fighting crime, but its systems are being abused by countries around the world. INTERPOL's own authority is being undermined, while innocent people are being detained for months on end – separated from their families, reputations destroyed and lives ruined.

Fair

Trials

What is INTERPOL?

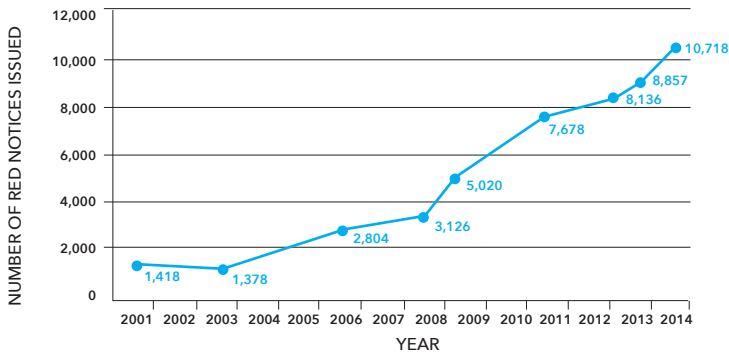
INTERPOL is the world's largest international police organisation, with around 190 member countries and an annual budget of €78 million. One of INTERPOL's key functions is the circulation of 'wanted person alerts' including 'Red Notices' and 'Diffusions', which countries can use to seek a person's arrest with a view to extradition.

These 'wanted person alerts' show up on police databases all over the world, identifying the person as a 'wanted criminal' and asking for them to be arrested. Some are also published on INTERPOL's website.

Over the past decade, these alerts have continued to rise. At the end of 2013 there were over 120,000 alerts in global circulation. In 2014 alone, 10,718 new Red Notices were issued.

A fast-track system, introduced in 2009, allows countries to quickly circulate information about wanted people – a useful mechanism when used properly. The introduction of this fast track system coincided with a huge jump in the number of requests (see graph below).

Rise in the number of Red Notices issued between 2001 and 2014



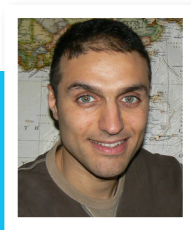
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Wanted through INTERPOL



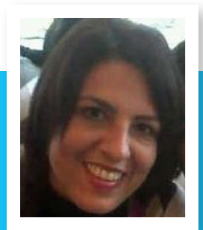
Benny Wenda

Due to his work leading an international campaign for the rights of the West Papuan people, Benny was subjected to torture, death threats and a politically-motivated prosecution by the Indonesian government. He escaped to Europe and was given asylum, only to be targeted through INTERPOL.



Bahar Kimyongür

A Belgian activist, Bahar has been arrested and detained for over six months in the Netherlands, Spain and Italy, all because of an abusive Red Notice issued by Turkey, which followed a peaceful protest which took place at the European Parliament.



Patricia Poleo

An award-winning anti-corruption journalist and vocal critic of Hugo Chavez, Patricia has faced many threats in Venezuela because of her work. She found herself subject to a Red Notice after she left the country to claim political asylum in the US.

What is the problem?

INTERPOL's almost complete global coverage allows police across the world to share information, but amongst its members are many countries which are known human rights abusers and notoriously corrupt (Syria, Russia and Venezuela, to name just three). Countries are effectively misusing INTERPOL to export repression and silence dissent. Despite this, INTERPOL does not have the effective mechanisms it needs to prevent countries abusing its systems.

Since our campaign began, Fair Trials has been contacted by dozens of people from countries all over the globe, who believe they have been victims of this abuse. Many of the thousands of wanted alerts issued by INTERPOL each year will, no doubt, be perfectly legitimate – but our own cases have shown that INTERPOL's channels are being misused by countries to track down political refugees or to silence peaceful campaigners.

What is the impact?

INTERPOL 'wanted' alerts have the potential to devastate people's livelihoods and deprive them of their liberty. When alerts are misused this harm is unjustified. We've profiled cases that show this impact on our website www.fairtrials.org.

Once an alert has been disseminated, it is for each country to decide how it will respond to this information. Many countries will automatically arrest anyone with an alert against them. In some cases, there is little by way of a fair legal process before the person is then extradited.

People subject to these wanted alerts are often unable to travel for fear of arrest. Many people do not know they have an INTERPOL alert against them until they are arrested at a border point.



"It means that basically your life as a normal human being is over."

Bill Browder,
Campaigner

Many Red Notices are publicly available on the internet, labelling a named individual as a wanted criminal or terrorist. People's reputations can be destroyed; they can lose their jobs and visas, and have their bank accounts closed – all as a result of an INTERPOL alert.



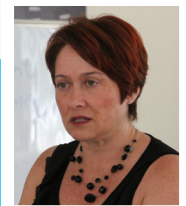
Azer Samadov

An Azerbaijani political refugee who faced arrest after elections in the country, Azer has been subject to a Red Notice since 2009, and despite numerous appeals to INTERPOL he remains on the database and unable to travel without fear of arrest.



Petr Silaev

Petr is a Russian activist and recognised refugee who was imprisoned while travelling in Spain and threatened with extradition following a request circulated through INTERPOL by Russia. He was wanted by the authorities for the vague catch-all offence of 'hooliganism'



Michelle Betz

In 2012, Canadian journalist Michelle was one of 43 NGO workers charged in Egypt with operating without a licence and receiving foreign funding. This was followed by an INTERPOL alert which stopped her from being able to travel.

Effective remedies

INTERPOL should do more to stop countries misusing Red Notices against journalists, human rights campaigners and political opponents, but no system is perfect. If an abusive alert does slip through the net, victims need to be able to challenge the alert through a fair and transparent process.

At present, the only realistic avenue to seek a remedy is the Commission for the Control of INTERPOL's Files (CCF), a review panel within

INTERPOL. INTERPOL has agreed legal immunity in the countries where it is based, meaning its actions cannot be challenged in court.

Fair Trials has made a number of applications to the CCF and has serious concerns about its review mechanism: proceedings are not adversarial, no reasons are given for the decision reached (which can take many months) its decisions are not binding on INTERPOL and there is no process by which to challenge a decision.

Our work

Fair Trials is campaigning for simple reforms which will help INTERPOL detect and prevent these abuses, enhancing confidence in its systems, and which will enable people who are wrongly targeted to achieve justice quickly and fairly.

We provide advice, assistance and information to people who believe they are the victim of abuses of INTERPOL and since 2012, we have helped dozens of people subject to abusive INTERPOL alerts from countries including Russia, Turkey, Venezuela, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

This work for individual victims of abuse has enabled us to get some alerts removed and has generated global press coverage. Our report 'Strengthening respect for human rights, strengthening INTERPOL' demonstrated for the first time the extent and causes of these abuses, and proposed reforms to prevent injustice. However, in countries across the globe, the number of cases continue to rise.

Our work has not gone unnoticed: political pressure is mounting for INTERPOL to introduce much-needed safeguards, including from the OSCE, a US Senate Committee and the Council of Europe.

In 2015, INTERPOL announced that it had taken the first steps towards implementing reforms that Fair Trials had proposed. INTERPOL have also established a working group to look at the way the organisation operates, and Fair Trials has been invited to take part.



Our Chief Executive, Jago Russell, at a meeting with INTERPOL's General Secretary Jürgen Stock

Support Us

At Fair Trials, we rely on the generosity of our supporters to continue our work. With your support we will continue to fight individual cases of injustice and to campaign for fair trials around the world.

To find out more about how to support us and to how get involved visit www.fairtrials.org

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