

# UNDUE INFLUENCE: THE UAE AND INTERPOL



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# Executive Summary

**The President of Interpol is the figurehead of the only police and intelligence authority that can truly claim to span the globe.** Interpol has 194 member states, with vastly differing attitudes to human rights and the rule of law. Many jurisdictions have legal and political systems which are at odds with international standards, yet all members of Interpol purport to respect basic human rights and the rule of law. Within Interpol, it is undoubtedly preferable to foster international cooperation and to attempt to improve standards rather than simply to exclude those which use torture and repression as tools of governance.

**T**his inclusive ideal should not allow despots and torturers to control or improperly influence an organisation which plays an essential role in upholding the rule of law and human rights throughout the world. Interpol has suffered considerable problems with improper influence from member states and some of its practices remain opaque, despite significant improvements in recent years.

We have been asked<sup>1</sup> to examine the relationship between Interpol and the United Arab Emirates in the light of reports that Major General Al-Raisi of the UAE is now a leading candidate for the Presidency of Interpol. We have asked ourselves *“Is Major General Al-Raisi the right candidate to meet the challenges that face Interpol, or would his election as President be a dangerous step backwards?”*

This report has investigated the influence of the UAE on the mechanics of Interpol as well as reports of its repeated misuse of the Red Notice system. We have used public source materials, experience in legal practice representing clients in the UAE and around the globe, and information from interviews and accounts from victims.

### ***Abuse of Red Notices***

This report has found strong evidence that the UAE has misused the Red Notice system for both for minor offences and most importantly for political gain against those seen as a threat to the regime .

### ***Undue influence***

This report has found coherent evidence that the UAE is seeking to improperly influence Interpol through funding and other mechanisms and concludes that the UAE is seeking to cement its influence by seeking to have Major General Al-Raisi elected as President.

UAE

### ***No respect for Human Rights***

Whilst some human rights advances have been seen in the UAE recently, those changes are in reality superficial and amount to little more than window dressing. Evidence continues to point towards the use of torture and repression as a stock in trade of the UAE. This report notes, amongst other things, credible evidence that the UAE uses rendition dressed up as extradition, that the rule of law does not operate effectively, and that in political cases it simply does not operate at all.

### ***Major General Al-Raisi is unsuitable for the Presidency***

Major General Al-Raisi sits at the top of a repressive justice system in the UAE and has been directly implicated in the torture and detention in a number of high-profile cases. In all the circumstances, his election would send a message to the world that Interpol has little or no respect for respect human rights and will turn a blind eye to torture and repression.

<sup>1</sup> By victims of UAE abuse.

# Introduction

## **Undue Influence: The UAE And Interpol**

This report analyses the suitability of the UAE, a country with a well-documented history of abuses of human rights, the lead and provide the figurehead of Interpol, in particular:

- The regular use of the machinery of Interpol by the UAE for purposes beyond the purposes envisaged by its constitution.
- The consequences of a huge financial donation by the UAE likely leading to an increase in its influence over Interpol.
- The suitability of the UAE's reported candidate for the presidency of Interpol in its forthcoming presidential election.

Interpol's General Assembly is Interpol's supreme governing body. It meets once a year. The 2020 session, which was due to take place in December, has been postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The General Assembly is typically a grand, 3 or 4-day, affair attended by delegates from each of Interpol's 194 member countries. At this year's assembly, Interpol is due to elect a new President. Whilst that is on hold for the time being, Interpol will try to hold its elections as soon as possible.

Interpol has been under increasing international scrutiny in recent years - particularly after the fall from grace of Meng Hongwei, its first Chinese President, who was arrested in 2018, convicted of bribery in 2020, and sentenced to 13 ½ years in prison and a fine of 2m yuan. As an organisation, Interpol has been the subject of the repeated criticism that it has allowed itself to be used as a weapon by authoritarian regimes to attack dissidents and opponents around the world <sup>1</sup>

Of course Interpol is meant to be, and usually is, an international force for good. It allows for the ready exchange of information around the globe to help detain some of the world's most dangerous criminals. The Red Notice mechanism is a useful and collaborative way of marshalling international law enforcement agencies to detain a wanted person. However its international reach and kudos also make it attractive to tyrants and repressive regimes.

At such a moment, the identity and credibility of the next president of Interpol is more important than ever. It is essential that Interpol's next President should be, and be seen to be a credible advocate for the reform of Interpol and for the fundamental principles of policing. Sir Robert Peel, the father of modern policing, set those out in 1829.

**It is critical that Interpol's next President is both a credible advocate for the reform of Interpol and the basic principles of policing.**

He wrote that the police must "*recognise always that the power of the police to fulfil their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions and behaviour, and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect*"<sup>2</sup>. It is self-evident that global public approval of Interpol cannot be maintained without an actual and perceived respect for basic human rights.

Interpol is surprisingly secretive about the candidates for the post of president. No list of candidates is published in advance. Unsurprisingly, therefore, rumours and speculation are rife. However, there is little doubt that Major-General Naser Ahmed Al-Raisi is campaigning to become the next President and is widely viewed as being one of the front runners for the job. Major-General Al-Raisi is the United Arab Emirates' current General Inspector of the Ministry of the Interior. During his term of office the Ministry of the Interior has been accused of grave breaches of human rights over the last 10 years.

This report considers both the historic connexions between Interpol and the United Arab Emirates and the question of Major General Al-Raisi's candidacy and whether or not he is a suitable person to be the president of one of the world's most important policing organisations. The election of the next President of Interpol presents an opportunity for reform and progress. Is Major General Al-Raisi the right candidate to meet those challenges or would his election as president be a dangerous step backwards?

<sup>1</sup> For instance Bill Browder <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-browder-idUSKCN1RL0PY> or Mikhail Khodorkovsky <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-khodorkovsky-interpol-idUSKCN0VL202>

<sup>2</sup> <https://lawenforcementactionpartnership.org/peel-policing-principles/>

# The Election of Interpol's President

**Interpol's 194 member states meet annually in a  
General Assembly.**

## THE PRESIDENT OF THE ORGANISATION IS ELECTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR A PERIOD OF FOUR YEARS.

### The President sits at the top of the entire Interpol structure and commands considerable power and authority

According to Interpol's website<sup>1</sup>, "the General Assembly is Interpol's supreme governing body, comprising representatives from each of our member countries. It meets once a year and each session lasts around four days." The website goes on to say, "The General Assembly elects the members of the Executive Committee, the governing body which provides guidance and direction in between sessions of the Assembly". Further, "Each member country represented has one vote. The decision-making process is made by either a simple or two-third majority, depending on the subject matter."

Interpol's website also details that the President of the organisation is elected by the General Assembly for a period of four years.

The website sets out:

*...INTERPOL's Constitution requires that the President:*

- Preside at meetings of the General Assembly and the Executive Committee and direct the discussions;
- Ensure that the activities of the Organization are in conformity with the decisions of the General Assembly and the Executive Committee;
- Maintain, as far as possible, direct and constant contact with the Secretary General of the Organization.

Whilst the position of President is unpaid and part time, the President nevertheless sits at the top of the entire Interpol structure and commands considerable power and authority. The President directs the discussions that take place at the General Assembly. Whilst Interpol publishes outline details of its constitution and procedures, the mechanism for the election of the President is far from transparent. Interpol has declined repeated requests by rights organisations to demystify the presidential election process. By way of recent example, in 2018, Fair Trials called upon Interpol to ensure "... more timely and public information about individuals who put their names forward for [the role of President] to allow effective prior scrutiny."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Governance/General-Assembly>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fairtrials.org/news/more-transparency-needed-interpol-presidency>



In 2020, Fair Trials were again rebuffed by Interpol after requesting further information about the then upcoming presidential election. Fair Trials said that they were:

“...informed by the organisation that the details of the candidates could not be confirmed because the candidacies can only be formally presented once the General Assembly has begun and candidates can be proposed at any point before the election takes place. This process prevents any meaningful scrutiny of candidates (and of the countries they represent) by the public, or even by delegates from other member countries. It must also make it impossible for Interpol to implement any vetting procedure to ensure candidates prescribe to the organisation's constitutional commitments on human rights and neutrality, and that their election would not undermine the organisation's global standing”<sup>3</sup>.

The mechanism by which the election of President takes place is set out in the “Rules of Procedure of the ICPO – INTERPOL General Assembly”<sup>4</sup>. The Rules set out the broad procedures and regulations of the most important meeting of the year for Interpol.

Amongst other things, Article 21(1) provides that “... in conformity with ... the constitution, the President of the organisation shall preside at the General Assembly sessions and direct the discussions”. By way of further example of the President's power at the General Assembly, Article 22(1) provides that, “No delegate may address the General Assembly without the President's permission”. Article 22(3) also provides that “The President may call a speaker to order if his remarks are not relevant to the subject under discussion and may forbid him to speak.”

Article 35 sets out that each country represented shall have one vote and, within Article 38, the Rules provide that the election of the President requires a two-third majority of members present and voting. Article 40(1)(a) sets out that the election of the President, the Vice President and members of the Executive Committee shall be by way of compulsory secret ballot.

Article 48 provides more detail in relation to the specific procedure for electing members of the Executive Committee, including the President. It provides that a two-thirds majority shall be required for the President to be elected for a non-renewable four year term of office. Should no candidate obtain a two-thirds majority after two ballots, a simple majority will suffice.

**It would seem, therefore, that beyond the most rudimentary of requirements, anything goes when it comes to the election of the President of Interpol.**

Article 48(4) sets out that “Delegates wishing to stand for election shall inform the Elections Committee of their names and countries and of the posts on the Executive Committee for which they are candidates”. The Elections Committee is then required to compile a list of the candidates for each vacant post and “... shall ensure ... that no delegates are standing from countries whose voting rights have been suspended...” It is noteworthy that, beyond the compilation of that list and a basic eligibility check, no other requirements are stipulated. It would seem, therefore, that beyond the most rudimentary of requirements, anything goes when it comes to the election of the President of Interpol.

3 [https://www.fairtrials.org/sites/default/files/Letter\\_Jurgen%20Stock\\_13.10.20.pdf](https://www.fairtrials.org/sites/default/files/Letter_Jurgen%20Stock_13.10.20.pdf)

4 [https://www.interpol.int/content/download/5693/file/04%20E%20GENERAL%20ASSEMBLY%20RULES%20OF%20PROCEDURE%2011%2012%2019\\_ok.pdf](https://www.interpol.int/content/download/5693/file/04%20E%20GENERAL%20ASSEMBLY%20RULES%20OF%20PROCEDURE%2011%2012%2019_ok.pdf)

Interpol's "Rules of Procedure of the Executive Committee"<sup>5</sup> give a further indication as to the nature and extent of the President's power. Article 3 sets out that the President draws up the agenda for each Executive Committee session, Article 6 provides that the President directs discussions of the Executive Committee and again provides that no-one may speak at the Executive Committee without the prior authorisation of the President. It is abundantly clear, therefore, that whilst the post of President is highly symbolic, the President also wields significant actual power in the structure of Interpol.

The most important criticism that can be levelled against the election process relates to the steps leading up to the actual election itself. How a candidate gets onto the ballot paper, why he or she gets onto the ballot paper and the identity of that candidate should not be a matter for secrecy. It is difficult to understand what sensible objections Interpol can have to a full, fair and transparent election process including the details and procedure of the nomination of candidates. In essence, any election in which the candidates suddenly and mysteriously appear on a ballot paper just before the moment of election cannot really be described as democratic. Doubtless, delegates will do their best to scrutinise and debate candidates in the smoke-filled rooms of the General Assembly in the limited time available to them. However, the Presidency of Interpol is not simply a matter for the delegates themselves. Rather, the identity of the President is a matter of international concern and all candidates should be required to publicly declare their candidacy sufficiently in advance of the General Assembly in order that proper open scrutiny can take place.

**The current system not only bears the hallmarks of a shady and undemocratic process, but also recent history has shown that it is simply not fit for purpose.**

The current system not only bears the hallmarks of a shady and undemocratic process, but also recent history has shown that it is simply not fit for purpose: the nature and extent of recent controversies surrounding presidential candidates should be a warning to Interpol that its election system does not work. This report echoes and supports the endeavours of Fair Trials and calls upon Interpol to require that candidates for the Presidency declare their candidacy well in advance of the next General Assembly in order to allow a full, fair and reasoned debate about who the next holder of this important post should be.

5 <https://www.interpol.int/en/content/download/5696/file/Rules%20of%20the%20Procedure%20of%20the%20Executive%20Committee-EN.pdf>

# Interpol Red Notices

Red Notices are probably the best-known tool available to Interpol. According to Interpol's own website, "*A Red Notice is a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action.*"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.interpol.int/en/How-we-work/Notices>



Whilst Red Notices are widely viewed as being akin to national arrest warrants, they are in fact part of the extradition process. *The Red Notice* is not a request from Interpol, but rather a notification that an arrest warrant has been issued by one of the member states and is being circulated to the international community. It is a general request, circulated to all 194 Interpol countries, but it does not of itself carry any enforceable legal obligation to act on it. In essence, *Red Notices* are intended to be the ‘envelope’ that contains the extradition request and a warning to arrest someone when passing through immigration control. Different jurisdictions treat the notices in different ways. Some use it as an arrest notice whilst others treat it simply as an alert system. For example, the US does not consider an Interpol *Red Notice*, of itself, to be a valid basis for arrest<sup>2</sup>. Instead, the US treats *Red Notices* “as a formalized request by the issuing law enforcement authority to “be on the look-out” for the fugitive in question, and to advise if they are located.”<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, and irrespective of the precise attitudes towards *Red Notices* in each country, the outcome is fairly consistent: an arrest often results and, at the very least, travel becomes extremely difficult.

According to Chatham House’s International Law round table, Policing Interpol, “*The notice will carry the name of the issuing country; how to act on it is a decision for the recipient countries. Thus, the legal value of the Red Notice varies significantly from country to country depending on the countries’ national laws and their international obligations vis-à-vis the requesting state, for example based on the extradition arrangements between the countries in question.*”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, whilst the notice will carry the name of the issuing country, how to act on it is a decision for the recipient countries.

13,377 *Red Notices* were issued in 2019. There are currently around 62,000 live notices.<sup>5</sup> A *Red Notice* may be public or viewable only by law enforcement agencies. There are currently around 7,000 on the public list. To put matters in context, in 2001 there were fewer than 1,500 *Red Notices* issued.<sup>6</sup>

The Parliamentary Assembly for the Council of Europe (PACE) has repeatedly called for reform of Interpol:

“... the Assembly also notes with regret that a number of recommendations (including the creation of a compensation fund for victims of abuses of Interpol mechanisms) have not yet been implemented, in particular those intended to improve the transparency of Interpol’s work and to strengthen accountability for States whose NCBs abuse Interpol’s instruments.”

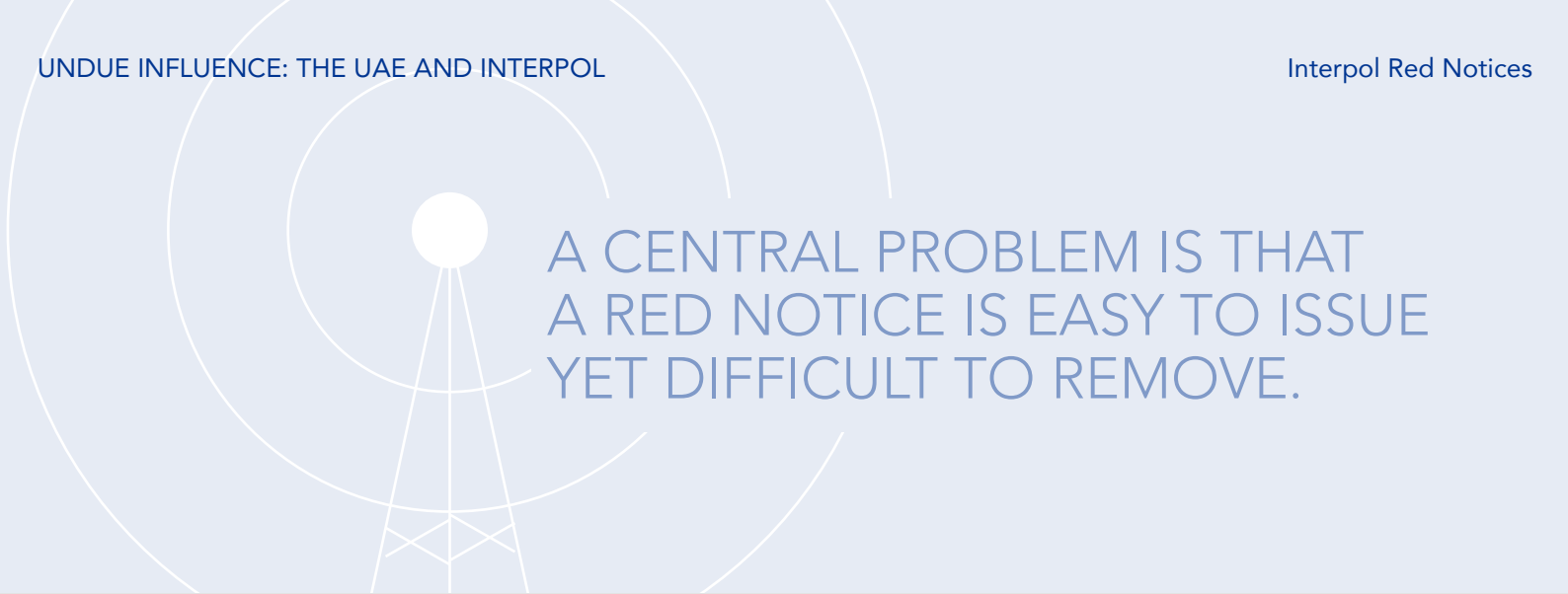
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/interpol-washington/frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/interpol-washington/frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/International%20Law/051212summary.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.interpol.int/en/How-we-work/Notices/Red-Notices>

<sup>6</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/12/03/the-scourge-of-the-red-notice-interpol-uae-russia-china/>



## A CENTRAL PROBLEM IS THAT A RED NOTICE IS EASY TO ISSUE YET DIFFICULT TO REMOVE.

**In blunt terms, there is strong evidence that despotic states issue Interpol Red Notices in order to arrest and extradite political opponents and business-people whose interests do not align with the regime.**

### **Abuse**

The issuing of a Red Notice requires a country's National Central Bureau to issue a Red Notice through Interpol for the tracing and apprehension of an individual. Interpol then conducts checks on that request. Interpol is essentially a police information sharing organisation, without the credibility of state to state cooperation or the security of the intelligence services. As a result, over the last few years, there has been an increasing trend towards the abuse of Red Notices, by governments for political purposes, as well as by business rivals for commercial purposes. Interpol's central role is to find alleged criminals by sharing information and executing extradition requests. Often there is no proper filter of the requests and Interpol has frequently been criticized for assuming that Red Notices are requested in good faith, when they are anything but.<sup>7</sup> Cooperation with countries such as China, Russia, Turkey and the UAE has also exposed the system to fundamental abuse in political corruption cases. In blunt terms, there is strong evidence that despotic states issue Interpol Red Notices in order to arrest and extradite political opponents and business-people whose interests do not align with the regime.

A central problem is that a Red Notice is easy to issue yet difficult to remove. Many are issued to stop people travelling and, in civil and arbitration proceedings, those with political influence will sometimes attempt to get a Red Notice issued to intimidate opponents. Whilst Interpol purports to check and filter requests, in reality through with minimal scrutiny. Interpol Diffusion Notices involve a less formal process and simply request cooperation from member states rather than the formal arrest request of the Red Notice and are even more open to abuse. Interpol is trying to tighten its procedures, but with the volume of diffusion notices it is difficult to effectively check every diffusion notice for abuse. Diffusion notices may be removed according to the same criteria as Red Notices.

### **Article 2 of Interpol's Constitution**

Under Article 2 of its Constitution, INTERPOL's aims are:

- (1) To ensure and promote the widest possible mutual assistance between all criminal police authorities within the limits of the laws existing in the different countries and in the spirit of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/nov/27/interpol-accused-red-notice-requests>

- (2) To establish and develop all institutions likely to contribute effectively to the prevention and suppression of ordinary law crimes.

There are also therefore a number of human rights issues that can be invoked to remove a Red Notice including:

- Right not to be discriminated against (Article 2 UN Declaration of Human Rights)
- Right to Life, Liberty and Security (Article 3 UN Declaration of Human Rights)
- Right to be protected from torture and inhumane and degrading treatment (Article 5 UN Declaration of Human Rights)
- Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law. (Article 8 UN Declaration of Human Rights)
- No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile (Article 9 UN Declaration of Human Rights)
- Right to fair trial (Article 10 UN Declaration of Human Rights)
- Right to a fair hearing in accordance with the law (Article 11 UN Declaration of Human Rights).

The fact that Interpol is meant to analyse Red Notice requests against human rights and political criteria has not prevented authoritarian regimes from making requests. It is open to individuals to ask Interpol to review the details in a Red Notice by writing to the Commission for the Control of Files (CCF) however, the process is not straightforward and takes weeks if not months. During that time many individuals will have been detained in custody or prevented from travelling.

### Article 3 of Interpol's Constitution

"It is strictly forbidden for INTERPOL to engage in any activities of a political, religious, military or racial character."

### The Commission for the Control of Files (CCF)

CCF decisions are taken behind closed doors and few Red Notices are actually removed. In 2016 only 170 were cancelled. In recent years a selection of anonymised decisions have been published which has allowed some insight into the decision-making process. There is, in theory, a right to make oral submissions to the CCF but that is a provision yet

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to be used. There is no appeal process and so the decision of the CCF is final. Individuals can make further submissions if there are changes in circumstances but are unable to challenge the decision in any other forum. This makes applications to the CCF extremely difficult and sensitive. The expert Ted R. Bromund<sup>8</sup> of the Margaret Thatcher Centre for Freedom, has argued that the CCF should be reformed in a number of ways including the creation of a Watchdog NGO to supervise Interpol's governance and to suspend abusive nations from Interpol.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/staff/ted-r-bromund>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.justsecurity.org/61782/10-ways-u-s-curb-interpol-abuses/>



Lyon

Interpol is based in Lyon, France, but it retains immunity under French law which means that there are no courts in which the actions of Interpol can be challenged.

In a recent Interpol case a Russian Member of the CCF had in fact been responsible for issuing a political Red Notice. When an application was made to remove the Red Notice, he did not take part in the decision making process and was recorded in the decision as being out of the room. However, there remains no mechanism to challenge any alleged bias. The lack of an appeal process and the opaque procedures make it difficult to remove Red Notices and easy for regimes to fabricate criminal charges and/or pursue political opponents around the globe.

The Council of Europe said in Resolution 2161 (2017):

“ Targeted persons cannot successfully challenge Red Notices before any national or international courts. This jurisdictional immunity can only be justified insofar as an internal appeals mechanism provides an effective remedy, in accordance with applicable human rights standards. In this respect, Interpol’s Commission for the Control of Files (CCF) has been criticised for being ill-equipped to deal with the large and growing number of complaints and their complexity. ”<sup>10</sup>

In 2019 it continued to criticise the lack of reform and the ease with which Interpol can be manipulated.

“ ... the Assembly found that Interpol’s procedures had been frequently abused for political or corrupt reasons by certain countries. It therefore made concrete proposals for reforms aimed at strengthening the Interpol system. ”<sup>11</sup>

One of the main difficulties with bringing Interpol to account is that it is a supra-national organisation. It is based in Lyon, France, but has immunity under French law which means that there is no court in which the actions of Interpol can be challenged. However, in June 2019, a German court referred a question to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in Luxembourg, asking it to examine the compatibility of Interpol’s practice and procedures with EU data protection law, the principle of *ne bis in idem* - double jeopardy - and freedom of movement within the EU.

On 19 November 2020 Advocate General Bobek of the CJEU delivered his preliminary opinion

“ Article 54 [Schengen Treaty], in conjunction with Article 50 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and Article 21(1) TFEU, preclude the Member States from implementing a Red Notice issued by Interpol at a request of a third State, and thereby restricting the freedom of movement of a person, provided that there has been a final determination adopted by a competent authority of a Member State as to the actual application of the principle *ne bis in idem* in relation to the specific charges for which that notice was issued. ”<sup>12</sup>

10 <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/23714/html> Abusive Recourse to the Interpol System: the need for more stringent legal safeguards

11 <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/28303/html> Resolution 2315(2019)

12 <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=233944&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=14757743>  
<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=233944&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=14757743>

The Advocate General's opinion, if followed, will give some protection to those individuals who have had a Red Notice removed as he in effect says that where a competent jurisdiction has decided on the criminal liability of the person named in a Red Notice, other member states should not execute that Red Notice. This marks a significant departure from previous law and may give some protection inside the European Union against Red Notice abuse.

## UAE

The UAE is notorious for its abuse of Interpol – many of their requests have been removed. In particular, the UAE has repeatedly requested the extradition of people accused of dishonouring cheques. Most jurisdictions do not accept dishonouring a cheque is a criminal offence on a strict liability basis, instead requiring dishonest intent. The repeated abuse of Interpol Red Notices by the UAE to try and extradite people for civil debt cases has resulted in Interpol refusing to issue Red Notices for low level cheque fraud. Interpol now requires any unfunded cheque case to be over \$10,000, however Interpol continues to execute Red Notices for what are essentially civil matters. Cheques are a part of everyday credit in the UAE and anyone who has done business there is at risk. The consequences of a bounced cheque can last for years. Robert Urwin, a UK National, was arrested and detained in Ukraine on an Interpol Red Notice from the UAE in relation to a cheque he had signed 13 years previously. He was detained for 40 days in custody in Ukraine and argued that he was the victim of Identity theft. In spite of being released from prison he was unable to leave Ukraine because of the Red Notice until the UK government stepped in and the Red Notice was removed.<sup>13</sup>

The website *Foreign Policy* describes the case of Pancho Campo. It took him 9 years to remove a Red Notice issued following a civil dispute with a former business partner, by which time his professional life was ruined.<sup>14</sup> The attorney Michelle Estlund described how the UAE uses the agency as its private international debt collection agency. The debt collection is often sinister, used by business rivals to leverage opponents in civil cases or by ex-partners in family disputes.

The UAE has a poor human rights record meaning that extradition to the UAE exposes individuals to the risk of torture and mistreatment and political changes have meant that a person can become an 'enemy of the state' overnight. Oussama El Omari, the former chief executive and director general of the Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone Authority in the UAE, was caught up in a battle of succession between rival ruling factions. Three years after being fired from his job in the UAE, political factions were trying to wipe out all dissent. They used the Red Notice to try asset control overseas. El Omari is a US Citizen and in 2016 he was stopped at the US border and told that he had serious problems with the UAE. It turned out that because he was associated with the deposed politicians, El Omari had been accused of a criminal offence. He described the UAE succession battle as a "scorched earth" policy, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake – effectively persecuting anyone associated with the politicians who had lost power.<sup>15</sup>

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13 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-50302252>

14 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/12/03/the-scourge-of-the-red-notice-interpol-uae-russia-china/>

15 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/interpol-red-notices-are-being-abused-one-ruined-my-life/2018/12/19/d0fd78a6-0310-11e9-b6a9-0aa5c2fcc9e4\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/interpol-red-notices-are-being-abused-one-ruined-my-life/2018/12/19/d0fd78a6-0310-11e9-b6a9-0aa5c2fcc9e4_story.html) 19 December 2018



## Use of rendition

The UAE abuses the Red Notice system but also often fails to follow legal process in international cases where individuals are in the UAE. The UAE does not follow the basics of the rule of law and extradition treaties. In recent years there have been several high-profile examples of what purported to be extradition but seem to have had no proper legal process. These individuals are therefore subject to extraordinary rendition or sometimes kidnapped and surrendered to other countries without any legal process whatsoever.

### Princess Latifa

Princess Latifa is the daughter of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum the ruler of Dubai. In 2018 she tried to escape from the UAE and was forcibly returned with help from the Indian Government which stopped the boat in which she was escaping and returned her without any legal process. Princess Latifa later released a video in which she said her father:

*“ will kill people to protect his own reputation ... he only cares about himself and his ego. So this video could save my life. And if you are watching this video, it's not such a good thing. Either I'm dead, or I'm in a very very very bad situation. ”*<sup>16</sup>

She was visited by Mary Robinson the Former Irish President, in a staged presentation, to say that she was happy but has not been seen in public since. In London the President of the Family Division ruled that the Sheikh had kidnapped both Princess Latifa and her sister.<sup>17</sup>

The recent BBC Panorama documentary “The Missing Princess” has highlighted the extraordinary abuse in this case.<sup>18</sup> The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson raised his concerns about the Princess as a result of the documentary.<sup>19</sup>

### Christian Michel

Christian Michel is alleged to be involved in a fraud involving the sale of helicopters. He was extradited from the UAE to India where he remains in Tihar Gaol having not faced trial. There is no record of any extradition procedure and his lawyers allege that he was effectively subject to extraordinary rendition to India in a quid pro quo for the assistance the Indian Government gave in the kidnapping of Princess Latifa.<sup>20</sup>

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled in February 2021 that he is being held arbitrarily. He is alleged to have been tortured.<sup>21</sup>

16 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/05/kidnapping-case-what-happened-to-sheikh-mohammeds-daughters>

17 <https://news.sky.com/story/dubai-ruler-kidnapped-two-of-his-daughters-including-princess-latifa-judge-rules-11950373>

18 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000sspm>

19 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/17/uk-proof-missing-dubai-princess-alive-and-well-raab-sanctions-latifa-father>

20 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/british-legal-team-takes-christian-michel-case-to-un-alleging-torture-by-india/articleshow/69041478.cms?from=mdr>

21 <https://news.sky.com/story/sons-plea-for-detained-father-caught-in-prisoner-swap-with-princess-latifa-12230024>

### **Paul Rusesabagina**

The case of Paul Rusesabagina provides another example of the UAE resorting to rendition rather than the legal process. The author of the book "An Ordinary Man" subsequently made into the film 'Hotel Rwanda' chronicling the Genocide in 1994, Rusesabagina was subject to rendition from Dubai to Kigali in August 2020. There is no record of any extradition proceedings. His son said:

*“ We are under stress, we are worried but we are strong. Our dad raised us to be this way, to expect the unexpected all this time. He has a voice that they want to shut down,” said Rusesabagina’s son, Filston.*<sup>22</sup>

He is now detained in Kigali facing terrorism charges.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/10/rwanda-dissident-mystery-kigali-court-paul-rusesabagina>

# Interpol - Trials and Tribulations

**Criticism of Interpol is nothing new.** After all, Interpol has been in existence for almost a century, founded as the International Criminal Police Commission in 1923 in Vienna. During the Second World War, Interpol moved from Vienna to Berlin and, at one time, had as its president Reinhard Heydrich. One might then expect an organisation with that sort of history to have had its detractors over the years.

Article 3 of the Interpol Constitution sets out its political neutrality stating “It is strictly forbidden for the Organisation to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character”



It remains difficult to make the case that Interpol remains aloof from international politics when a nation of some 24 million people is excluded from Interpol, in the face of its active attempts to join.

**“Taiwan’s exclusion from Interpol—in effect denying it timely access to key intelligence as well as preventing it from participating in seminars and training workshops—creates a major loophole in the global security and counterterrorism network”**

Interpol is a self-avowedly non-political organisation. It places its apolitical nature firmly at the heart of its identity. Article 3 of the Interpol Constitution sets out its political neutrality: *“It is strictly forbidden for the Organisation to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character”*<sup>1</sup>. Interpol is understandably keen to emphasise its apolitical nature. In 2013, in a foreword to a detailed 50-page paper on the neutrality of Interpol, the then Secretary General, Ronald K Noble, wrote that *“Neutrality is, and always has been, paramount to INTERPOL. As an international organization with a unique mandate, namely to prevent and fight crime through enhanced international police cooperation, it is of the utmost importance that our activities transcend domestic and international politics.”*<sup>2</sup>

However, Interpol’s political neutrality has been called into question a number of times in the past. As set out in detail elsewhere in this report on Interpol and the misuse of Red Notices, Interpol faces ongoing criticism for political use of Red Notices and the deployment of the apparatus of Interpol to attack political dissidents, human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers, amongst others<sup>3 4</sup>. Interpol faces a significant task to address those concerns.

As well as the criticism that Interpol faces in relation to the misuse of Red Notices, it has also attracted negative comment for its behaviour on other issues, ranging from the actions of its leadership to the conduct of its commercial affairs. Two of Interpol’s leaders in the last few years have been imprisoned for corruption. In any global organisation that would raise serious concerns but from an international policing perspective, this sort of record is nothing short of astonishing. As Interpol prepares to elect its next president in the coming months, it is important to consider some of the other challenges that Interpol faces. Interpol’s next president, whoever that might be, will need to possess sufficient moral authority to address the problems that Interpol has faced in recent years.

**Interpol’s next President will need to possess sufficient moral authority to address the criticisms that Interpol faces.**

1 <https://www.interpol.int/content/download/590/file/Constitution%20of%20the%20ICPO-INTERPOL-EN.pdf>

2 <https://www.interpol.int/content/download/12626/file/article-3-ENG-february-2013.pdf>

3 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/22/world/europe/interpol-most-wanted-red-notices.html>

4 <https://www.ft.com/content/6f6f7074-e8e1-11e8-a34c-663b3f553b35>

In the summer of 2015, Interpol was forced to suspend a

# €20m

partnership with FIFA, the international governing body of football

## It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Interpol has been tainted by its association with FIFA and others.

Notwithstanding Interpol's ostensibly apolitical nature, Taiwan remains excluded from all of Interpol's mechanisms and activities. Taiwan has repeatedly been rebuffed in its attempts to engage with Interpol, having been excluded from membership of Interpol since 1984, when mainland China joined the organisation<sup>5</sup>. Since then, efforts by the Taiwanese to participate in Interpol, even by way of observer status, have largely been unsuccessful, notwithstanding a coalition of international support<sup>6</sup>. An opinion piece in *The Diplomat* magazine sets out, "*Taiwan's exclusion from Interpol—in effect denying it timely access to key intelligence as well as preventing it from participating in seminars and training workshops—creates a major loophole in the global security and counterterrorism network*"<sup>7</sup>. Whilst Interpol isn't the first international organisation to bow to the might of Chinese pressure where Taiwan is concerned, it remains difficult to make the case that Interpol remains aloof from international politics, in the face of Taiwan's persistent attempts to join.

Concerns about Interpol's judgment extend beyond the political arena into the worlds of sport and business. Worryingly for Interpol, in the summer of 2015, Interpol was forced to suspend a multimillion-euro partnership with the international governing body of football, FIFA<sup>8</sup>. In recent years, FIFA has become a byword for corruption, with allegations of dishonest practices stretching back years<sup>9</sup>. Interpol and FIFA signed a ten-year agreement in 2011 to create a "*ten year integrity in sport programme*". Sadly, the agreement with FIFA included a clause requiring from FIFA that "*its activities are compatible with the principles, aims and activities of Interpol*"<sup>10</sup>. The €20m pledge was, at the time, "*hailed as the largest ever private donation to Interpol*"<sup>11</sup>. Interpol was moved to suspend the agreement after a raft of spectacular corruption allegations emerged against FIFA and its senior officers, leading to resignations and numerous convictions for corruption and fraud offences. Whilst Interpol could not reasonably be expected to know about every skeleton in FIFA's cupboard, its decision to accept a donation from FIFA nonetheless represented

5 <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2043354/taiwan-deeply-unhappy-after-interpol-snubs-request>

6 <https://unpo.org/article/21911>

7 <https://thediplomat.com/2016/10/interpol-is-not-complete-without-taiwans-participation/>

8 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-33107591>

9 <https://www.wired.com/2015/05/fifa-scandal-explained/>

10 <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2015/INTERPOL-suspends-agreement-with-FIFA>

11 <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/jun/12/interpol-suspends-fifa-match-fixing-partnership>

a spectacular error of judgment. For an international policing organisation to receive a significant sum of money, to *investigate corruption*, from what turned out to be an institutionally corrupt organisation was embarrassing. One question for Interpol, and an uncomfortable one to answer, is: *How did one of the world's most high-profile international policing institutions manage to enter into partnership with such an organisation without knowing what was going on?*

It is also worth noting that the FIFA donation was rather smaller than a more recent donation from the UAE, via the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World, set out elsewhere in this report. Considering the FIFA scandal, one might expect Interpol to pay close attention to large donations from third parties.

Interpol's connexion with the FIFA scandal also drew attention to some of the organisation's other sponsorship deals. In a detailed analysis for the Politico website, journalist Jake Wallis Simons wrote in 2015 that:

*"Aside from the FIFA deal, the hand-in-glove relationship with the private sector offers other examples of potential conflict of interest. In 2012, Philip Morris International (PMI), the American tobacco giant, donated €15 million, to be paid over a three-year period, to bankroll Interpol's operations to disrupt tobacco counterfeiting. Later that year, Interpol was embarrassingly barred from participating in the World Health Organization (WHO) Convention on Tobacco Control because of its financial association with a tobacco company. In 2013, Interpol and 29 of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, including Eli Lilly and Sanofi, signed a €4.5 million, three-year deal to create Interpol's "Pharmaceutical Crime Program" to combat production of fake medication. From Interpol's point of view, the crime harms public health; from the industry's point of view, it harms its bottom line. As Die Zeit pointed out at the time, "it remains unclear which of these two objectives is in the foreground."<sup>12</sup>*

In the same article for Politico, Jake Wallis Simons also interviewed the then newly appointed Secretary General of Interpol, Jurgen Stock, who told him that *"you cannot buy a priority at Interpol, you can just make the decision to support a specific programme"* and that conflicts of interest were eliminated by Interpol's *"due diligence processes and rules and regulations."*

Whilst Interpol has doubtless had the best of intentions in its partnerships over the last decade or so, it is nevertheless difficult to escape the conclusion that Interpol has been tainted by its association with FIFA and others. In a chapter on Interpol Funding and the UAE, this report also considers the sources of Interpol's income in more detail.

It is not only Interpol's dealings with external organisations that has attracted criticism. Interpol's own workings and processes have been criticised as lacking transparency. Interpol has refused to disclose the candidates list for the forthcoming presidency to international criminal justice watchdog, *Fair Trials*:

**Interpol has refused to disclose the candidates list for the forthcoming Presidency to international criminal justice watchdog, Fair Trials.**

“ INTERPOL recently told Fair Trials that they would not announce candidacies for the role prior to the organisation's General Assembly, which takes place in December. Once the General Assembly has begun, candidates can be proposed at any point before the election takes place. ”

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/fifa-funded-interpol-policing/>

As *Fair Trials* point out, the failure officially to announce candidates prior to the General Assembly “prevents any meaningful scrutiny of candidates and the countries they represent, by the public, or even by delegates from other member countries...” It is despite this ability to scrutinise, or perhaps because of it, that news of Major General Al-Raisi’s candidacy has leaked out. Whatever the reason for the emergence of Al-Raisi’s candidacy, Interpol’s continued resistance to a fully open process for the presidency election sits ill at ease with its assertions of transparency.

Notwithstanding apparent reforms to the Red Notice mechanisms and CCF procedures, Interpol still has a reputation for a lack of accountability. Interpol, for example, enjoys “immunity from legal process” save for in limited circumstances in France, where it is headquartered<sup>13</sup>, and further enjoys a significant degree of jurisdictional immunity in the US and Singapore where it has outposts. As *Fair Trials* points out, it is “not aware of any cases to date in which individuals have successfully challenged Interpol’s decisions in national courts”<sup>14</sup>. Interpol is not, in any real sense, accountable to any external body, court or jurisdiction.

With its recent history in the spotlight, the identity of the next president of Interpol is therefore of particular importance. Interpol continues to face ongoing challenges to demonstrate both that it can be a politically neutral organisation and that it has put its recent history of crisis behind it. The next President of Interpol must command the respect and authority needed to show that Interpol is a mechanism for good.

**The next President of Interpol must command the respect and authority needed to show that Interpol is a mechanism for good, and not the plaything of repressive regimes.**

13 <https://www.interpol.int/content/download/6815/file/Agreement%20between%20ICPO-INTERPOL%20and%20France.pdf>

14 [https://www.fairtrials.org/sites/default/files/publication\\_pdf/Dismantling%20the%20tools%20of%20oppression.pdf](https://www.fairtrials.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/Dismantling%20the%20tools%20of%20oppression.pdf) page 19, para 37

# Human Rights In The UAE – A Snapshot

**No country has a perfect human rights record**, yet even the most ardent supporter of the UAE would struggle to make the case that the UAE's record has been without blemish. To google the phrase "*UAE human rights*" is a sobering exercise.



It is important in analysing the UAE's relationship with international organisations to consider the current state of affairs and consider what progress, if any, has been made by the UAE in recent years. It would be unhelpful and perhaps churlish to make the case that simply because the UAE has started from a poor position it should not play a role in important international institutions. However, where the UAE has failed to improve upon its poor position, it is difficult to argue that it should assume leadership on the international stage. The direction of travel in human rights by the UAE is thus something which must be carefully scrutinized. With this in mind, it is not only fair but essential to have regard to the UAE's approach to human rights and criminal justice over the last few years. The leadership of Interpol, with its high profile, is a matter of particular importance from a human rights perspective and, as a result, it is especially important that scrutiny be applied at this critical juncture to those individuals and countries that would lead it.

Until the COVID-19 crisis struck in the first quarter of 2020, Dubai remained one of the world's most popular international tourist destinations. In both Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the UAE has two of the most international cities in the Middle East, home to some of the world's best hotels, international art galleries and the pre-eminent regional centre for business. The public facing images of Dubai, and Abu Dhabi, are internationalist and westernised. Nonetheless, it remains the case that there is a wealth of evidence that suggests that there continue to be significant, sustained, and systematic breaches of human rights in the UAE.

**There is a wealth of evidence that suggests that there continue to be significant, sustained, and systematic breaches of human rights in the UAE.**

Consider working conditions in the UAE. Precise figures vary, but migrant workers are thought to make up a remarkable 80% of the UAE's population of around 9.4 million people. In 2020 the conditions of migrant workers in the UAE remains extremely poor and unionisation is effectively prohibited. Low skilled migrant workers are frequently held in slave labour type conditions because of the Kafala system<sup>1</sup>. COVID-19 has exacerbated the situation with workers trapped in dire straits<sup>2</sup>. Even before COVID-19, Amnesty reported<sup>3</sup> that migrant workers were denied basic rights, noting that:

“the UAE maintained its no-minimum wage policy. This had a particularly negative impact on migrant workers, who comprised more than 90% of the country's workforce. Unlike UAE nationals, migrant workers did not receive government allowances for housing, subsidized health care or other services and were therefore dependent on their wages in order to access essential services. Migrants' wages were typically low relative to the cost of living in the UAE, posing a risk to their right to just and favourable conditions of work, and their right to an adequate standard of living.”

Basic freedoms which are taken for granted elsewhere, such as freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of religion, remain profoundly restricted. The criminal justice system is widely criticised at international level. In 2014, the then Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Gabriela Knaul, investigated the UAE judicial system and stated that she was:

“alarmed by a number of credible reports stating that persons arrested for allegedly violating the security of the state are subject to numerous procedural violations. Some are kept in secret detention facilities and held incommunicado, or even in solitary confinement, for extended periods of time, and under these circumstances many are subject to torture and/or ill treatment”<sup>4</sup>.

1 <https://insidearabia.com/how-the-uaes-workers-sponsorship-system-facilitates-human-trafficking/>

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/sep/03/i-am-starving-the-migrant-workers-abandoned-by-dubai-employers>

3 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/united-arab-emirates/report-united-arab-emirates/>

4 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14237&LangID=E>



Basic freedoms which are taken for granted elsewhere, such as freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of religion, remain profoundly restricted in the UAE.

## The UAE criminal justice system is widely criticised at international level.

The Rapporteur found that, “No serious independent investigation of such allegations of torture has taken place, even when complaints were brought to prosecutors or judges”. Despite the calls for reform, little progress has been made. Even before the notorious Hay Festival scandal in October 2020, a coalition of NGOs and international authors condemned the UAE in an open letter, timed to coincide with the Abu Dhabi Hay festival in February 2020, writing:

“ the UAE government devotes more effort to concealing its human rights abuses than to addressing them and invests heavily in the funding and sponsorship of institutions, events and initiatives that are aimed at projecting a favourable image to the outside world...<sup>5</sup> ”

Likewise, in 2018 IFEX, formerly the International Freedom of Expression Exchange commented:

“ The UAE has recently stepped up efforts to project an image of itself as a progressive and rights respecting nation... the UAE is hosting the first ever World Tolerance Summit...but to paint the UAE government as tolerant is laughable. The summit’s website conveniently makes no mention of the UAE’s sustained assault on freedom of expression since 2011, where the authorities detain and forcibly disappear people who criticize the government, and imprison for long periods those deemed guilty of such vague acts as “undermining national unity” and “insulting state symbols.”<sup>6</sup> ”

Are these criticisms fair? Well, the UAE government’s behaviour in a crisis response might perhaps be illustrative. Whilst governments around the world have rightly sought to crack down on “fake news” during the COVID-19 crisis, the Emirati response appears to take things a little further than most. In April 2020 the UAE imposed new laws, fining individuals up to 20,000 AED, approximately \$5,500, on anyone who shares medical information about the Coronavirus which contradicted official statements<sup>7</sup>. Since then, Emirati authorities have moved from fines to imprisonment, with two men convicted and detained for “fabricating a report about five members of an Emirati family dying of Covid...”<sup>8</sup>.

5 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/24/as-hay-festival-opens-in-the-uae-authors-condemn-free-speech-abuses>

6 <https://ifex.org/dubais-world-tolerance-summit-cannot-hide-worsening-repression-in-the-uae/>

7 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/18/uae-announces-5500-fine-for-coronavirus-fake-news>

8 <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/coronavirus-pandemic/coronavirus-fake-news-uae-court-orders-jail-term-for-accused>

Throughout 2020 Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International continued their impressive and detailed monitoring of the UAE, and in particular the UAE's attitudes towards freedom of expression. Amnesty International continues to lead the campaign for the freedom of Ahmed Mansoor, the well-known human rights activist who was convicted after a flawed trial in May 2018 on charges of *"insulting the status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols including its leaders"*<sup>9</sup>. Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International's Middle East Research Director said in March in this year *"The prolonged imprisonment of Ahmed Mansoor, who has now spent three years in solitary confinement, is the real indicator of the UAE's proclaimed role as an incubator of tolerance"*.

**Throughout 2020 Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International continued their impressive and detailed monitoring of the UAE, and in particular the UAE's attitudes towards freedom of expression.**

There have been some well publicised moves towards reform. 2019 was heralded by the Emirati government as the UAE's *"Year of Tolerance"*. Indeed, the UAE is home to the Orwellian sounding government organisation, the *"Ministry of Tolerance"*. According to *"The National"* newspaper, an organ often sympathetic to the Emirati state, in December 2019<sup>10</sup>, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid announced *"We want the culture of tolerance to be a lifestyle in the fabric of our policies, work environments and society as a whole, such that the UAE will be a leader in the field of tolerance and a unique model for spreading it globally"*.

As well as the *"Year of Tolerance"*, the UAE has been keen to publicize other attempts at reform. The website of the Embassy of the UAE in Washington DC sets out a bold human rights narrative in its *"About the UAE"* section *"the UAE is committed to providing equality and social justice to all people living within its borders"* and that *"The UAE is a progressive, moderate country where women hold leadership roles in all sectors and industries, including government, military, business and society, and participate meaningfully in every facet of civic and political life."* The website signs off with the powerful statement that *"respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are an essential part of the principles and values engrained in Emirati society. The UAE continues to promote and protect human rights by ensuring national implementation of human rights commitments and complying with international standards."*<sup>11</sup>

In November 2020, the UAE government announced that it was reforming certain aspects of the country's *"Personal Status"* laws. The reforms will allow unmarried couples to live together, as well as an effective decriminalisation of the consumption of alcohol. Perhaps most strikingly, as part of the package of reform, the Emirati government indicated that it would repeal legislation that allowed for lenient sentences in so-called honour killings. In future, defendants will no longer be able to evade prosecution or seek a lesser sentence on the grounds that the victim *"dishonoured"* her family.<sup>12</sup> However, despite recent publicity efforts, it is difficult to reconcile public statements of tolerance with the continued detention of pro-democracy campaigner Ahmed Mansoor and others such as Nasser bin Ghaith, an academic who remains in custody following his criticism of Egyptian and Emirati authorities. Outside its own borders, the UAE has played a prominent role in the Saudi-led coalition which intervened in the bloody civil war in Yemen.

**It is difficult to reconcile public statements of tolerance with the continued detention of pro-democracy campaigner Ahmed Mansoor and others such as Nasser bin Ghaith**

9 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/uae-ahmed-mansoor-unlawfully-detained-in-solitary-confinement-for-three-years-must-be-released/>

10 <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/government/uae-government-initiative-to-extend-message-of-tolerance-beyond-2019-1.948589>

11 <https://www.uae-embassy.org/about-uae/combating-human-trafficking>

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/07/united-arab-emirates-to-relax-islamic-laws-on-personal-freedoms>

The UAE's constitution provides for freedom of speech, freedom of the press as well as freedom of expression. However, local news outlets routinely practise significant self-censorship and the Emirati authorities have continued to detain and 'disappear' human rights defenders as well as other individuals who criticise the ruling authorities<sup>13</sup>. Amongst those detained or 'disappeared' in the last few years, as well as Ahmed Mansoor and Nasser Bin Ghaith, include the Jordanian journalist Tayseer al-Najjar, bloggers and sisters Mariam and Alyazia Al-Suwaidi, as well as other less high-profile individuals.

## Ahmed Mansoor

Ahmed Mansoor, a well-known Emirati human rights activist, was arrested by UAE security forces on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2017. In May 2018, he was convicted and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. His crime? Mansoor was guilty of *"insulting the status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols including its leaders"*.

Ahmed Mansoor is, in fact, a blogger, campaigner and peaceful human rights activist who has called for political reforms in the UAE. Since his arrest and conviction, he has spent years in solitary confinement.

In 2017, a body of UN experts said *"We fear that his arrest and secret detention may constitute an act of reprisal for his engagement with UN human rights mechanisms, for the views he expressed on social media, including Twitter..."*

In 2019, the UN found that *"Mr Mansoor has been kept in solitary confinement, and conditions of detention that violate basic international human rights standards and which risk taking in irrevocable toll on Mr Mansoor's health"*.

Despite the appeals by the United Nations as well as other rights groups around the world, Mr Mansoor remains in prison in the UAE.

**FOUND  
GUILTY**

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Perhaps one of the highest profile cases of Emirati injustice over the last few years is that of Matthew Hedges, a British academic who was detained in the UAE.<sup>14</sup> At the time, Hedges was a Durham University PhD candidate who travelled to the UAE for two weeks to research his thesis. He was arrested, tortured, kept in solitary confinement, and interrogated for up to fifteen hours a day. After his ordeal, Hedges was sentenced to life in prison in the UAE for spying. Hedges was later pardoned by the President of the UAE in November 2018 following a rare public rebuke from the UK authorities to the Emirati government. The Hedges case shone a spotlight on the UAE judicial system. The allegations made against the system was that in addition to torture and abuse during prolonged interrogations, Matthew Hedges was forced to sign a confession in Arabic, a language he did not speak.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/united-arab-emirates#aaa21f>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/czdzjwzdw9t/matthew-hedges-case>

The Hedges case is but one recent example of a continued failure by the Emirati criminal justice system to afford fair trials to accused persons. The most notorious example in recent years of the UAE's attitude to due process, the rule of law and fair trials was the *UAE 94 trial*. In 2013, 94 individuals were arrested and tried on charges of "establishing and managing an organisation with the aim of committing crimes that harm state security, opposing the constitution and the basic principles of the UAE ruling system and having leaks and affiliations to organisations with foreign agendas"<sup>15</sup>. 69 of the accused were convicted and 56 of those convicted were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. A further 8 of those convicted, who were tried in absentia, were sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment<sup>16</sup>. This mass trial of government critics was beset by violations of fair trial standards including incommunicado detention and allegations of torture. Alas, that trial seemed to have been part of a pattern of behaviour which still continues in the UAE. Recent well-known examples in 2019 include 8 Lebanese nationals detained for more than a year without charge in an unknown location<sup>17</sup> and UK football fan, Ali Issa Ahmad who was arrested, detained and tortured after he wore a Qatar football shirt during the Asian Cup football tournament in the UAE<sup>18</sup>. It is worth noting that Al-Raisi was General Inspector of Police in both the Matthew Hedges and Ali Issa Ahmad cases.

Prison conditions in the UAE remain notoriously poor. Ahmed Mansoor's prison conditions may amount to torture, according to the United Nations<sup>19</sup>. British national David Haigh, a successful businessman and former director of Leeds United Football Club, was arrested and imprisoned in 2014. After his release in 2016 David Haigh described the harrowing treatment he received in prison:

“The conditions I was kept in were, at times, appalling. There were beatings, I was raped and at one stage a guard said to me, “Be careful, British prisoners die here.” It was hot, there was overcrowding, and access to lawyers and other personal representatives was often limited to a few minutes a week, with a guard listening in. In my 22 months' incarceration, I had one humane head of prison, but he was quickly demoted to a lesser jail after trumped-up charges were levelled alleging he had taken bribes. The authorities clearly don't want prisoners to be treated humanely.”<sup>20</sup>

The UAE government is predictably secretive when it comes to its prison conditions and population. The official capacity of UAE prisons is believed to be a little over 7,000, whereas the actual prison population is believed to be in excess of 11,000, more than 150% capacity. Foreign prisoners are believed to make up the vast majority of inmates. Myriad reports detail excessive temperature, prisoner on prisoner violence, overcrowding and lack of access to medical facilities. Amnesty International reported that "several cases in which the rights of detainees were disregarded. In these cases, most often involving the State Security Agency (SSA), detainees were arrested without warrants, held incommunicado for weeks or months and tortured or otherwise ill-treated. In some cases, detainees were held in degrading conditions"<sup>21</sup>. Coronavirus has, perhaps unsurprisingly, spread within the UAE prison population and there are reports that the authorities have tried to cover up the extent of the spread.<sup>22</sup>

15 <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/530f04634.pdf>

16 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/06/uae-trial-94-activists>

17 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/25/uae-eight-lebanese-face-unfair-trial>

18 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/15/i-was-sure-i-would-die-ali-issa-ahmad-uk-football-fan-detained-in-uae-feared-for-his-life>

19 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-emirates-prisoners/u-n-says-uae-activist-mansoors-prison-conditions-may-constitute-torture-idUKKCN1SD1OE>

20 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/23/justice-uae-dubai-british-academic-matthew-hedges>

21 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/united-arab-emirates/report-united-arab-emirates/>

22 <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200622-covid-19-continues-to-spread-in-uae-prisons/>

In March of 2020, some of the most senior UN human rights officials, including Nils Melzer, Special Rapporteur on Torture, and Dainius Puras, the Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of Physical and Mental Health, felt so moved at the conditions of detention in the UAE that they urged the Emirati authorities to investigate and reform detention conditions that amounted to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. They said, “*The UAE has the responsibility to protect the rights of individuals deprived of their liberty, by ensuring that conditions of the detention respect their dignity and mental integrity*”. In a communication sent on 12th February 2019, the experts found that “*the UAE authorities have failed to take the necessary safeguards concerning the life security and dignity of persons deprived of their liberty*”<sup>23</sup>.

The spectrum of those detained by Emirati authorities ranges from international migrant workers all the way to the top of Emirati society. Princess Latifa, the daughter of Dubai’s ruler Sheikh Mohammed, was infamously abducted with the connivance of Indian military forces in 2018 and her whereabouts remain unknown. Similarly, the whereabouts of Princess Shamsa, Princess Latifa’s sister, remain unknown following her kidnapping by her own father, in 2000<sup>24</sup>.

According to the UAE’s government portal “*The official guide to living, working, visiting and investing in the UAE*”, women in the UAE enjoy the same constitutional rights as men<sup>25</sup>. That website sets out various policies and initiatives designed to protect women including national strategies for women’s empowerment, a gender balance guide for the workplace and the like. Research by Amnesty International<sup>26</sup> highlights an encouraging development, that “*almost 200 women stood in the Federal National Council elections in October*”. However, notwithstanding the laudable aims of the various initiatives referred to above, women face discrimination both in law and in practice. The Personal Status Law of 2005 provides for a statutory provision of “*a husband’s rights over his wife*” including that of his wife’s “*cautious obedience to him*”. It is also worth noting that whilst the UAE passed an antidiscrimination law in 2015, discrimination based on gender is not included in the definition of discrimination.

In October 2020, the Abu Dhabi offshoot of the Hay Literary Festival went ahead despite following an allegation by organiser Caitlin McNamara that she had been assaulted by UAE Minister for Tolerance, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak al-Nahyan.<sup>27</sup> The Crown Prosecution

**Despite the occasional attempt at superficial reform, and the passing of the “Year of Tolerance” not much has changed for human rights in the UAE in the last few years.**

Service in the UK has stated that it will be taking no action against the Sheikh as a result of the alleged assault<sup>28</sup> as the actions were abroad and it has no jurisdiction. Mindful that senior members of the royal family in the UAE have historically evaded punishment for far more serious offences<sup>29</sup>, it seems unlikely that Sheikh al-Nahyan will see the inside of a courtroom as a result of these allegations.

23 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25726&LangID=E>

24 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/05/kidnapping-case-what-happened-to-sheikh-mohammeds-daughters>

25 <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/human-rights-in-the-uae/women-rights-in-the-uae>

26 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/united-arab-emirates/report-united-arab-emirates/>

27 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/19/world/middleeast/hay-festival-abu-dhabi-sexual-assault.html>

28 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/oct/30/cps-will-not-prosecute-uae-minister-accused-of-sexually-assaulting-briton>

29 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/17/torture-tape-acquittal-abu-dhabi>

It would seem, therefore, that despite the occasional attempt at superficial reform, and the passing of the Year of Tolerance, not much has changed for human rights in the UAE in the last few years. As set out at the beginning of this section, it is important to consider the UAE's actual direction of travel, not just where it has come from. Despite the laudable aims as encapsulated on, say, the UAE US Embassy website, it seems that the direction of travel that the UAE has taken has been to continue on the road that it was already on. As Michael Paige, Deputy Middle East Director at Human Rights Watch said in January of this year:

*“ time and again during 2019, as it garishly sang its own praises as a tolerant and rights respecting state, the UAE proved just how little respect it really has for universal human rights. The UAE's fundamental disregard for the rule of law doesn't just harm dissidents and critics of the regime, but anyone who may fall afoul of the authorities and country's flawed justice system. ”*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/14/uae-dangerous-disregard-rule-law>

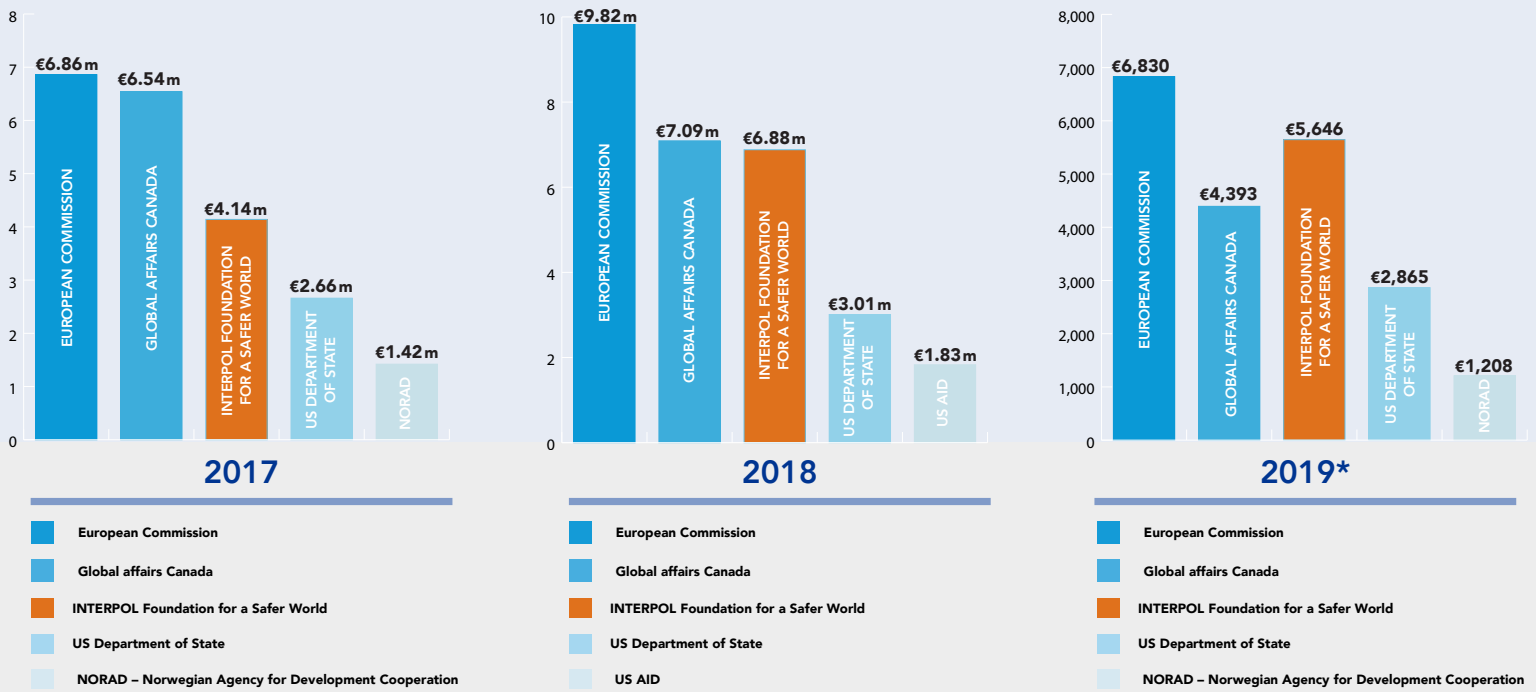
# Interpol – Funding and the UAE

**Despite public perception, Interpol is not a police force.** In fact, Interpol only has a handful of regional offices around the world, as well as agencies at the African Union, European Union and at the United Nations in New York. However, Interpol does have, access to more than 190 National Central Bureaux.<sup>1</sup> Those bureaux are part of the national police authority in each host country. For an organisation with the global reach of Interpol, its actual headcount is relatively modest.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Member-countries/National-Central-Bureaus-NCBs>





\* data provided relates to the first 3/4 of 2019

According to the Interpol website, “there are around 1,000 staff, one quarter of whom are law enforcement personnel seconded by their national administration”.<sup>2</sup> To put things in context, London’s Metropolitan Police Force alone has more than 44,000 officers and staff<sup>3</sup>. In crude terms, the Met’s annual budget can be measured in the billions and over the last few years has been well in excess of £3bn<sup>4</sup>. In contrast, Interpol’s total budget in 2019 was comparatively tiny at €139m<sup>5</sup>.

Yet despite its modest budget, Interpol has a high profile on the world stage. According to John Cohen, a former acting under secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security “There’s this public perception that Interpol is a bunch of highly trained investigators that travel the globe to track down international criminals.”<sup>6</sup> In reality, Interpol is better described as an information sharing bureau. In the absence of most of the tools of a traditional police force, Interpol’s power is exercised through the control of information and access to the mechanisms of other police forces. Therefore Interpol does not engage in typical police work and there are no uniformed officers, or forensics and investigatory capability. Instead, it controls information via databases and shares knowledge between police forces. As part of this process, it issues alerts and notices which can have far reaching effects. That information and those alerts and notices can be every bit as powerful as some of the machinery available to a national police force.

Interpol is a relatively small organisation, both in terms of employees and funding. As the Interpol website sets out, there are two main sources of income for Interpol<sup>7</sup> – statutory contributions from membership of each member country, and voluntary funding. The voluntary funding is split into voluntary cash contributions and in-kind contributions.

Despite its modest budget, Interpol has a high-profile on the world stage and packs a powerful punch in terms of public image

2 <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/General-Secretariat>

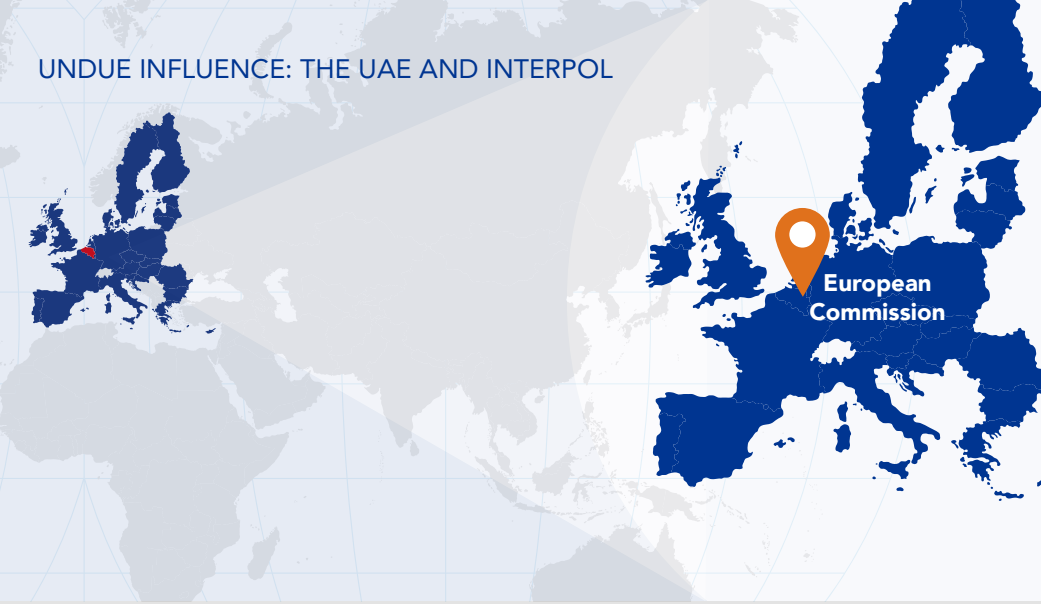
3 <https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/about-us/about-the-met/structure/>

4 <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/london-assembly-publications/police-funding-whos-paying-bill>

5 <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Our-funding>

6 <https://abcnews.go.com/International/myth-interpol-worlds-police-organization/story?id=58325721>

7 <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Our-funding>



European Commission  
The European Commission leads the field of the five largest published expenditures from external contributors to Interpol in 2018 with expenditure in the sum of €9.82m.

## The Interpol Foundation for a Safer World has quickly become one of the largest external contributors to the Interpol Budget

The statutory fees paid by each member country are based on the economic weight of member countries and measured out according to a formula. In 2019 the USA<sup>8</sup> was the largest contributor, paying a little over €11m, about 19.5% of the total budget. Japan was the next largest with 12%, followed by Germany at a little less than 8% with France and the UK on just short of 6%. Despite their size and economies, China pays less than 4% and Russia less than 2%.

In the Middle East in 2019, Saudi Arabia's statutory contribution was a very modest 0.803%, or €460,000, the United Arab Emirates paid 0.425% or €243,466, with Israel on a similar figure of 0.419% or €240,028.

The total statutory contributions *called for* in 2019 amounted to a little over €57m, with €59m received in 2019. It is worth noting that Interpol reports slight differences between the sums *due* and sums *received* each year. For example, notwithstanding the headline figure on the general website, according to Interpol's 2019 annual report<sup>9</sup>, the total income received by Interpol in 2019 was €142m, slightly up on the published sum on the general website. Of that €142m, statutory contributions for member countries accounted for €59m, representing 41% of the total, with voluntary cash contributions of €49m, and in-kind contributions totalled €34m. The completed 2019 financial statement is yet to be published on the Interpol website. Thus, aside from Interpol's 2019 statutory income, €83m was therefore received from voluntary cash contributions and in-kind contributions. It is clear therefore that Interpol receives a significant proportion of its income from voluntary cash and in-kind contributions.

**Interpol has received external contributions for years and, on the face of things, there ought to be little to be concerned about.**

Interpol has received external contributions for years and, on the face of it, there ought to be little to be concerned about. Many countries, governmental departments, NGOs and other international organisations undoubtedly have a legitimate interest in making sure Interpol receives the financial and practical support it needs.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.interpol.int/content/download/11394/file/INTERPOL%20member%20country%20statutory%20contributions%202019.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [file:///C:/Users/Rhys/Downloads/INTERPOL\\_Annual%20Report%202019\\_EN.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Rhys/Downloads/INTERPOL_Annual%20Report%202019_EN.pdf)

March 2017, the United Arab Emirates unilaterally pledged an unprecedented donation of

# €50m

to the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World

**The Interpol Foundation has attracted its share of criticism over the years with the foundation's closeness to the UAE causing particular concern.**

Considering the source of those external contributions to Interpol, it is convenient to consider 2018, the last year for which the fullest financial information setting out sums actually *spent* (as opposed to merely *pledged*) is published on Interpol's website<sup>10</sup>. The grand total of all additional contribution expenditure from January to December 2018 was a little more than €41m<sup>11</sup>. By way of comparison, for the calendar year 2017 the sum was €33m<sup>12</sup> and in 2016 a little short of €22m<sup>13</sup>.

The European Commission leads the field of the five largest published expenditures from external contributors to Interpol in 2018 with expenditure in the sum of €9.82m. Perhaps no surprises as Interpol is headquartered inside the EU and EU countries represented four of the top six contributors by way of statutory contributions. In 2018, the European Commission's contribution was put to good use on projects as diverse as capacity building and trading in Africa, cybercrime and maritime piracy.

The next biggest contributor in 2018 was Global Affairs Canada. Global Affairs Canada, Canada's foreign ministry, accounted for €7.09m of 2018 expenditure and supported projects including human trafficking, foreign fighters, and terrorism.

## **Interpol Foundation for a Safer World**

The third largest external contributor in 2018 was the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World. The Interpol Foundation for a Safer World accounted for €6.88m of expenditure in 2018 and supported projects similar to those supported by other significant external contributors. The donation made by The Interpol Foundation for a Safer World merits further scrutiny. What is it? According to its website, the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World:

“promotes a more secure, open world where economies allow citizens and companies to flourish, and where people can live and travel without the threat of crimes. Its mission is to engage government and companies to support Interpol's work in building a safer world.”<sup>14</sup>

10 <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Our-funding/External-contributions-in-2018>

11 <https://www.interpol.int/en/content/download/5645/file/AdditionalContributors.pdf>

12 <https://www.interpol.int/en/content/download/605/file/Additional-Contributors-2017.pdf>

13 <https://www.interpol.int/en/content/download/604/file/Additional-Contributors-2016.pdf>

14 <https://www.interpol.int/en/Our-partners/INTERPOL-Foundation-for-a-Safer-World>



## SIMPLY PUT, A DONATION TO THE FOUNDATION IS A DONATION TO INTERPOL.

### The €50m contributed dwarfs the compulsory statutory contribution due from the UAE and represents one of the largest single donations ever made to Interpol.

The Interpol Foundation for a Safer World was set up in 2013 and is a not-for-profit organisation. Although Interpol's headquarters are in Lyon, France, the foundation is based in Geneva. According to the download available on the Interpol website, the foundation "*supports the programmes and activities of INTERPOL while remaining legally and administratively independent.*"<sup>15</sup> The current president of the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World is Elias Murr, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Lebanon and son of Michel Murr, a former Deputy Prime Minister of Lebanon. Mr Murr junior was re-elected as head of the foundation in 2018 for a second term of seven years<sup>16</sup>. By the time his current term expires, Mr Murr will have been president of the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World for 12 years.

The foundation's website also lists 11 board and honorary members, including Jurgen Stock, Secretary General of Interpol, and Hamad al Shamsi, the United Arab Emirates Ambassador to Lebanon and "*Ambassador of the Foundation*". Beyond the board members, no other employees or members of staff are listed on the website. Details of the constitution or principles of association are not readily apparent.

The Interpol Foundation for a Safer World sets out the sort of mission statements to be expected on a charitable website supporting a law enforcement type organisation: "*We help police worldwide to communicate and investigate crimes*" and "*We develop the programmes tackling the main threats facing people around the globe*", amongst others. However, the Interpol Foundation has attracted its share of criticism over the years with the foundation's closeness to the UAE causing particular concern. Upon investigation, the connexion between the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World and the United Arab Emirates runs a little deeper than the mere the presence of the UAE Ambassador to Lebanon on the board.

**The relationship between the Foundation and the UAE is more than merely casual: it seems that the foundation is in fact totally reliant on the UAE.**

According to reports in the Emirati newspaper "*The National*" in May 2016<sup>17</sup>, plans were then afoot to build the Interpol Foundation's "*World Bureau*" headquarters in Abu Dhabi. Then, in March 2017, the Unity

According to reports in the Emirati newspaper "*The National*" in May 2016<sup>17</sup>, plans were then afoot to build the Interpol Foundation's "*World Bureau*" headquarters in Abu Dhabi. Then, in March 2017, the Unity

15 <https://www.interpol.int/content/download/5261/file/INTERPOL%20Foundation%20for%20a%20Safer%20World%20-%20Brochure.pdf>

16 <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/breaking-news/411930/elias-al-murr-reelected-as-head-of-the-interpol-fo/en>

17 <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/government/interpol-foundation-to-establish-abu-dhabi-headquarters-1.225295>

# 2017

THE UAE DONATED  
**€50m**  
 TO THE INTERPOL  
 FOUNDATION

THE UAE'S  
 STATUTORY  
 CONTRIBUTIONS  
 TO INTERPOL WERE  
**€231,064**

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World's sole purpose is to be a channel by which to funnel cash from the UAE government into Interpol.

for Security Forum was held in Abu Dhabi, an event which features heavily on the Interpol Foundation's website<sup>18</sup>. Then on 27th March 2017, the United Arab Emirates unilaterally pledged an unprecedented donation of €50m to the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World to "support seven Interpol projects designed to combat terrorism and global crime..."

The main Interpol website helpfully notes that, "Since May 2016, the Foundation has been supporting seven key INTERPOL initiatives by donating EUR 50 million over a period of five years, as part of a contribution agreement between the Foundation and the Government of the United Arab Emirates."<sup>19</sup> No other funding sources for the foundation appeared to be referred to on the main Interpol website. It would appear therefore that the relationship between the Foundation and the UAE is more than merely casual: it seems that the foundation is in fact totally reliant on the UAE.

In a recent article published on the Forbes website in February 2019<sup>20</sup>, the connexion was put rather more strongly: the Foundation was described as "a front for the United Arab Emirates, a known and frequent abuser of Interpol and a non-democracy..." Whichever way it is phrased, there is certainly more than a modest connexion between the UAE and the foundation.

It is worth noting that whilst the Interpol Foundation is said to be an arm's length organisation from Interpol itself, being "legally and administratively independent", its sole purpose is to support Interpol. It does not obviously engage in any other non-Interpol related philanthropic work. In the circumstances, a donation of any size, let alone a donation of €50m, is nothing more than a donation directly to Interpol itself. This stands in contrast to the status of other leading external contributors to Interpol.

**The 2017 €50m UAE donation is larger than the entirety of the 2019 voluntary cash contributions to Interpol of €49m**

It is also worth considering the size of the March 2017 pledge relative to the Interpol total budget, as well as the statutory contributions from the UAE. Using Interpol's published figures in the annual report for

18 [https://www.interpolfoundation.org/#the\\_programs\\_section](https://www.interpolfoundation.org/#the_programs_section)

19 <https://www.interpol.int/en/Our-partners/INTERPOL-Foundation-for-a-Safer-World>

20 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tedbromund/2019/02/28/how-large-is-the-democratic-worlds-financial-contribution-to-interpol/>

## The €50m contributed dwarfs the compulsory statutory contribution due from the UAE and represents one of the largest single donations ever made to Interpol.

2019, the 2017 €50m UAE donation is larger than the entirety of the 2019 voluntary cash contributions to Interpol of €49m. Interpol's total income in the year that the sum of €50 million was pledged was €124.3m. thus, to look at the €50m donation in another way, the pledge is equivalent to more than 40% of the 2017 total annual income.

It may be perhaps a little unfair to make only a direct comparison between the total donation of €50m to the annual budget of Interpol: the pledge appears to be spread over a number of years, and the figure provided for the contribution to Interpol from the Foundation in 2018 shows an annual donation of €6.88m with "*total current projects funding: €50m, from 2016 to 2021*". The external contributions detailed in 2016<sup>21</sup> (that being the first year given for the funding bracket notwithstanding the pledge only having been made in 2017) make no reference to any income from the Interpol Foundation. The first entry appears in the 2017<sup>22</sup> in which the 2017 expenditure from Interpol Foundation for a Safer World was said to be €4.14m with "*total projects funding: €50m from 2016 to 2021.*"

In 2017, the year that the UAE made a €50m donation to the Interpol Foundation, the UAE's statutory contributions to Interpol were €231,064, or just 0.425% of the total. That figure remained constant in 2018 and 2019, with an apparent increase to 0.485% for statutory contributions for the year 2020.

In that context, in the ordinary course of things, the UAE ought to be just another modest contributor to the statutory scheme for Interpol. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the €50m contributed in 2017, and the sum of €6.88m in 2018, dwarfs the compulsory statutory contribution due from the UAE.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World's sole purpose is to be a channel by which to funnel cash from the UAE government into Interpol. Whether or not the channelling of this money into Interpol is an attempt to buy influence by the UAE is perhaps a different issue. Nonetheless, the links between Interpol and the Interpol Foundation are clear, as are the links between the UAE and Interpol Foundation.

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21 <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Our-funding/External-contributions-in-2016>

22 <https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Our-funding/External-contributions-in-2017>

# Who is Major General Dr Ahmed Naser Al-Raisi?

**The 2020 General Assembly, coincidentally due to be held in the United Arab Emirates, has been postponed due to COVID-19.** As a result, elections for the Executive Committee, including the elections for the next President of Interpol, have also been postponed<sup>1</sup>. As yet, no new date has been given for the General Assembly meeting but Interpol is likely to reconvene the General Assembly as soon as is practically possible.

Major-General Ahmed Naser Al-Raisi, now the UAE's candidate, has himself been accused of serious and significant human rights abuses, including overseeing the torture of a British academic.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2020/INTERPOL-2020-General-Assembly-postponed>

## THE VOLUME OF REPORTS OF ABUSES FROM EMIRATI JAILS APPEARS TO PUT THE UAE IN A LEAGUE ALL OF ITS OWN

According to his personal website, “Major General Dr. Ahmed Naser Al-Raisi is a leading UAE law enforcement officer and the current General Inspector of the Ministry of Interior, UAE.

**M**ajor-General Dr Ahmed Naser Al-Raisi is purportedly the UAE’s candidate to replace incumbent Kim Jong Yang of South Korea as the President of Interpol. The Presidency of Interpol has attracted significant controversy in recent years. Meng Hongwei, the first Chinese national to hold the post, was elected in 2016. Hongwei had previously been China’s Vice Minister of Public Security for over a decade<sup>2</sup>. In September 2018, he mysteriously disappeared whilst on a trip home from France. Several months after he went missing, he re-emerged in Chinese custody. He was sentenced to 13½ years’ imprisonment in January 2020, after being convicted of taking more than \$2m in bribes<sup>3</sup>. For the president of one of the world’s foremost international policing agencies to have been convicted of an offence of this kind was astounding. Remarkably, Meng Hongwei is not the only former President of Interpol in recent years to have attracted allegations of corruption. In 2008, Jackie Selebi, a former National Commissioner of the South African Police Service, was forced to resign after he was alleged to have received \$170,000 from a convicted drug dealer<sup>4</sup>. Selebi was convicted of corruption in 2010 and sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment, although he was paroled on medical grounds less than a year after beginning his sentence.

Following Meng Hongwei’s disappearance in 2018, Interpol moved quickly to elect a replacement to fill his shoes. Kim Jong-Yang was elected President in November 2018, beating the favourite for the post, the Russian, Alexander Prokopchuk. Major-General Prokopchuk was himself a highly controversial candidate. Chief of the Russian Interior Ministry’s National Central Bureau of Interpol, Prokopchuk had attracted repeated criticism for allegedly abusing Interpol’s Red Notice scheme for political purposes in order to target critics of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. One group of US Senators went so far as to describe Prokopchuk’s prospective presidency as “akin to putting a fox in charge of a henhouse”<sup>5</sup>.

This recent history of scandal and turmoil has not, it seems, tempered the appetite of Interpol for controversial candidates. Major-General Ahmed Naser Al-Raisi, now the UAE’s candidate, has himself been accused of serious and significant human rights abuses, including overseeing the torture of a British academic<sup>6</sup>.

2 <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/21/798121397/former-interpol-president-sentenced-to-prison-in-china-for-corruption>

3 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-51185838>

4 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7186024.stm>

5 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-46274261>

6 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/10/01/exclusiveuae-police-chief-accused-presiding-torture-british/>



Who is the Major-General? According to his personal website<sup>7</sup>, “Major General Dr. Ahmed Naser Al-Raisi is a leading UAE law enforcement officer and the current General Inspector of the Ministry of Interior, UAE. He was appointed to this position in April 2015 after leaving an indelible mark upon the Abu Dhabi Police, General Directorate of Central Operations”. In a helpfully detailed biography on that website, Al-Raisi explains that he joined the Abu Dhabi police in 1980 as an officer in the “*burglar alarm branch*”. He rose through the ranks and, in 2005, became the General Director of Central Operations of the Abu Dhabi Police. Since 2015, Al-Raisi has been the General Inspector of the Ministry of Interior of the United Arab Emirates. The Ministry of Interior website tells us that “*the ministry runs a variety of functions on top of them are ensuring peace and security, organizing and managing security and police forces...*”<sup>8</sup> As General Inspector of the ministry, there can be little doubt that Major General Al-Raisi has particular power and influence over security and police forces in the UAE. Al-Raisi is also an active participant in the machinery of Interpol and regularly takes part in Executive Committee meetings<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to his police career, Al-Raisi has also found the time to pursue a full and diverse academic career, obtaining a Doctorate from London Metropolitan University, an MBA from Coventry University, a Diploma from the University of Cambridge, and a BSc from Otterbein College, Ohio, USA. Al-Raisi is also noted on his personal website to have “*a dynamic personality, with strong presence in diverse activities inside and outside the police institution*”. His website notes that he has “*earned dozens of medals and prizes*”. Despite Al-Raisi’s academic and professional career, the Major-General’s candidacy for presidency of Interpol has attracted sustained international condemnation. In “*The New Arab*”, Jonathan Fenton-Harvey<sup>10</sup> wrote damningly in 2020 of the candidacy:

“*Earlier this month, Dubai’s police chief Nasser Ahmed Al-Raisi was nominated as the next president of the global crime control organisation Interpol, gifting the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with another golden opportunity to whitewash its reputation and cover up its human rights violations*”.

No criminal justice system, and certainly no police force, is beyond criticism. However, the volume of reports of abuses from Emirati jails are regular and sustained. There have been allegations of torture in Emirati jails for some time. In October 2013, Reprieve published a report<sup>11</sup> outlining that:

“*Recent events have made it increasingly clear that the UAE’s use of torture is not confined to isolated incidents. In June 2013... Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch voiced fears about the use of systematic torture in state security facilities in the UAE*”.

Yet despite significant levels of international attention in recent years, little progress appears to have been made. Since Al-Raisi’s appointment as General Inspector of the Ministry of Interior of the UAE in 2015, there have been, as set out elsewhere in this report, numerous allegations of torture and abuse in Emirati jails, both in Abu Dhabi<sup>12</sup> as well as in Dubai’s prisons and jails.<sup>13</sup> Given Al-Raisi’s candidacy, the state of prisons, policing, and criminal justice in the UAE – areas in which the Major-General undoubtedly has significant power and influence – must merit scrutiny. By way of example, since Al-Raisi was appointed to his current position:

7 <https://www.drahmednaseralraisi.com/>

8 <https://www.moi.gov.ae/en/About.MOI/genericcontent/about.moi.aspx>

9 <https://www.moi.gov.ae/en/media.center/news/6872326.aspx>

10 <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2020/10/14/dubai-police-chief-nominee-for-interpol-raises-red-flags>

11 [https://reprieve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2013\\_10\\_28\\_INT-UAE-Torture-Report-final.pdf](https://reprieve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2013_10_28_INT-UAE-Torture-Report-final.pdf)

12 <http://icfuae.org.uk/news/leaked-documents-abu-dhabi-prisons-reveal-harrowing-torture-female-inmates>

13 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/26/uae-torture-prisoners-beatings-electrocution>

- UAE prisons have repeatedly found to have breached basic standards. According to a 2016 report by the International Campaign for Freedom in the United Arab Emirates,<sup>14</sup> "the UAE government has given up its job of reforming, rehabilitating and helping the prisoners to reintegrate in society especially when it comes to dissidents, activists and opponents. This approach violates all the principles and rules related to detention or imprisonment such as the rehabilitative and correctional mission of the prison highlighted by Article 10 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the UAE has not yet ratified"
- UAE police have developed a culture of arresting foreign nationals for minor matters which do not reach the threshold of criminal activity including deploying perceived insults on social media, and drinking alcohol on board aircraft<sup>15</sup>.
- UAE security forces have targeted the relatives of dissidents detained in the UAE, as well as dissidents living outside the UAE.<sup>16</sup>
- Evidence continues to pour out of the UAE showing that torture and abuse in the criminal justice system are endemic and that basic rights are routinely ignored <sup>17</sup>.

There is no evidence of any major improvement to human rights in the UAE in recent years. The evidence suggests therefore, that Major-General Al-Raisi has been unable to stem the flow of allegations of abuses which have taken place during his tenure as General Inspector. After his candidacy was announced, several human rights groups were so alarmed that they were moved to write to Jurgen Stock, Interpol's secretary-general, expressing their concern over Al-Raisi's potential appointment.<sup>18</sup> Human rights groups including the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and the Freedom Initiative wrote that,

“we believe that it is antithetical to the mission and aims of INTERPOL that the organisation be represented by an individual and a state that have been repeatedly responsible for grave human rights violations. We additionally believe that candidates for the presidency of INTERPOL should have their suitability for the role scrutinised through proper vetting processes that seek to uphold INTERPOL's commitment to international human rights standards. The United Arab Emirates, in the person of Mr Ahmad Al-Raisi, should therefore not be in a position to head the International Criminal Police Organisation.”

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Major-General Al-Raisi has been unable to manage and police the criminal justice machinery of the Emirati state effectively. Against a backdrop of clear and compelling accounts of abuse and wrongdoing in Emirati police stations and prisons, it may well be that Major-General Dr Ahmed Al-Raisi is the most controversial candidate for the President of Interpol for some years.

14 <http://icfuae.org.uk/research-and-publications/report-prison-conditions-united-arab-emirates>

15 <https://www.insider.com/dubai-arrest-westerners-got-into-trouble-with-legal-system-2019-4#laleh-shahravesh-who-faced-jail-for-calling-her-ex-husbands-new-wife-a-horse-on-facebook-1>

16 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/22/uae-unrelenting-harassment-dissidents-families>

17 <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200313-report-lady-in-uae-prison-attempts-suicide-after-torture/>

18 <https://www.uae-embassy.org/about-uae/combating-human-trafficking>

# Conclusions

**Interpol has had a rocky time over the past few years.** Its former President has been convicted of corruption, it has faced criticism over the politicisation of Red Notices, and it has often viewed as being too cooperative with undemocratic regimes.

This report has focused on Interpol and its relationship with the United Arab Emirates. As this report sets out, there has been an increasingly close connexion between Interpol and the UAE over the past few years.

## THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF INTERPOL SHOULD COME FROM A COUNTRY WITH AN ESTABLISHED AND MATURE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, WITH A PROVEN RECORD OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

*At the outset of this report, we posed the question “Is Major General Al-Raisi the right candidate to meet the challenges that face Interpol, or would his election as President be a dangerous step backwards?”*

**T**here can be no doubt that the machinery of Interpol has been used against journalists, human rights defenders, and dissidents. Thus, Interpol faces a particular challenge. If Interpol does not address those growing criticisms, its authority will almost certainly be further eroded. Interpol’s success and effectiveness depend on the support of its member nations, particularly democratic countries with mature criminal justice systems. Without reform, that support will diminish.

At this juncture, the leadership of Interpol is more important than ever. Whilst the day to day administration of Interpol is overseen by Interpol’s Secretary General, Jürgen Stock, the position of President is nevertheless critical. Interpol’s President has the power to set both the tone and agenda of Interpol. The President is perhaps the individual best placed to be the champion of reform. The presidency is also a position heavy with symbolism. No doubt that fact is one of the reasons that the presidency of Interpol remains such a prize for repressive regimes is the legitimacy that the role confers. The Presidency offers an easy way to polish a tarnished reputation and lend an air of respectability to the disreputable.

As this report sets out, Interpol is not a transparent organisation. Amongst other things, it does not officially announce the candidates for presidency. Only two candidates are publicly known to be in the running – Major General Al-Raisi of the United Emirates and Commissioner Olushola Subair of Nigeria. The December 2020 General Assembly was adjourned due to the Covid-19 crisis. This adjournment now presents Interpol and member nations with an opportunity: *the chance to hold transparent elections, with publicly declared candidates, and to choose a new leader untainted by allegations of misconduct.*

This report has focused on Interpol and its relationship with the United Arab Emirates. There has been an increasingly close connexion between Interpol and the UAE over the past few years. In the light of the emergence of Major General Al-Raisi as the UAE’s candidate for the presidency of Interpol, that closeness bears the hallmarks of a deliberately orchestrated campaign by the UAE to seize control of the organisation. The donation of €50m by the Interpol Foundation for A Safer World represents a concerning voluntary cash contribution by the UAE.

The reality remains that the UAE has a poor record on human rights, criminal justice, and the use of Interpol Red Notices. Moreover, the UAE’s candidate for President, Major General Al-Raisi, is, distinctly ill-suited

for the position. Not only would an Emirati President of Interpol serve to validate and endorse the UAE's record on human rights and criminal justice but, in addition, Major General Al-Raisi is unsuitable for the role. He sits at the very top of the Emirati criminal justice system. He has overseen an increased crackdown on dissent, continued torture, and abuses in its criminal justice system. That he is accused of complicity in the torture of a British academic is concerning. He is a far from ideal candidate for leadership of one of the world's most important policing organisations.

At the outset of this report, the question was posed "*Is Major General Al-Raisi the right candidate to meet the challenges that face Interpol, or would his election as President be a dangerous step backwards?*" It is clear that Major General Al-Raisi would be the wrong choice for President of Interpol. In short, this report recommends that Interpol takes advantage of the breathing space now afforded by the delay in the presidential election by reforming its election process and publishing its candidates for the presidency.

This report concludes that the next President of Interpol should come from a country with an established and mature criminal justice system, with a proven record of respect for human rights and that each candidate for the presidency should be able to demonstrate his or her own human rights record.

**Sir David Calvert-Smith**

London, March 2021

# Authors

## Sir David Calvert-Smith

**Sir David** was Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) from 1998 to 2003. Whilst a High Court Judge from 2005 to 2012, he was in charge of the Terrorism List and was also Presiding Judge of the South Eastern Circuit.

Following his retirement from the High Court in 2012 Sir David served as Chairman of the Parole Board of England and Wales from 2012 to 2016 and as a judge of the Channel Islands Courts of Appeal from 2012 to 2017.

Sir David has, since his retirement from the High Court Bench, provided services as an independent investigator, trainer and advisor, and has given evidence in two international arbitrations as an expert witness. He has conducted a review of the Iraqi Historical Allegations Team (IHAT) for the Ministry of Defence, carried out investigations on behalf of the IAAF, and taken part in training for overseas judges in the conduct of terrorism trials. In 2017 he rejoined the Parole Board as a serving member.

Sir David had a successful career at the Bar. He has been 1st Senior Treasury Counsel at the Central Criminal Court, Panelled Counsel to the SFO, and Chairman of the Criminal Bar Association.

As DPP, Sir David implemented the biggest structural change ever in a government department following the recommendations of the Glidewell Report and negotiated the transfer of the charging decision from the police to the CPS in all but the least serious offences.

In 2004 Sir David headed the Formal Investigation of the Commission for Racial Equality into racism within the Police Service of England and Wales and in 2019 was the first recipient of the Sylvia Denman award of the National Black Crown Prosecutors Association.

He is a member of the Senate of International Prosecutors.

He has been assisted in the preparation of the report by International Human Rights Advisors (“IHR Advisors”). **Rhys Davies** and **Ben Keith** are specialist international legal experts who act in the most serious matters in international law, in jurisdictions around the world. International Human Rights Advisors represent and advise governments, individuals, and human rights organisations.

IHR Advisors are intimately familiar with the international courts and tribunals in the Hague, the United Nations, and the mechanisms and procedures of Interpol. They have significant experience of in-country representation in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and throughout Africa. IHR Advisors conduct campaigns on behalf of individuals arbitrarily detained around the world and have mounted successful press campaigns to highlight the plight of the victims of totalitarian governments. More information can be found at [www.ihr-advisors.com](http://www.ihr-advisors.com).

