

The Innocent Red Notice Client: When INTERPOL is Used Improperly by Member Countries

By Michelle A. Estlund on July 18, 2011

Today's post addresses an insightful and very personal comment that was posted two days ago [here](#). The author of that comment noted, correctly so, that INTERPOL is sometimes used to further the corrupt goals of certain law enforcement officials in various member countries. Obviously, the issuance of a Red Notice has a debilitating effect on its subject, and when the Notice is improperly issued, that effect is worsened by the very real sense of injustice which accompanies the Notice. The author of Saturday's comment reports having experienced just such an injustice, and wonders why INTERPOL seems to allow this to happen without oversight.

Unfortunately, his is not an isolated experience. INTERPOL has 188 member countries, each of which is bound by its membership conditions with INTERPOL to request Red Notices only when it has ensured that the proper legal channels have been followed. Based on that obligation, INTERPOL does assign a rather high level of trust to member countries, and Red Notices are strongly presumed to have been validly issued.

This does not mean that a Red Notice, once issued, must remain active until it has led to an arrest. On the contrary, INTERPOL's stated goals include observation and adherence to not only its own rules, but also such texts as the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). Upon a proper showing to INTERPOL of a violation of its governing rules and texts it is indeed possible for a Red Notice to be withdrawn, modified, or revoked.

Nonetheless, what of the author's larger question about INTERPOL's quality assurance problem? INTERPOL's "honor system" with its member countries inevitably results in the problem that any honor system encounters: someone, somewhere, cheats. That cheating may take the form of active misinformation or simple laziness and failure to carry out one's duties. Regardless of the manner of non-compliance with INTERPOL's rules, the outcome for the Red Notice subject is the same: she is immobilized, finds difficulty obtaining employment, suffers financially, and risks detention by law enforcement constantly.

My thanks to the author of the comment for raising these important questions about a persistent problem. More on this topic will appear in the next post.

As always, thoughts and comments are welcomed.