

Bribes: The Dirty Little Secret of INTERPOL's Less Scrupulous Member Countries

By Michelle A. Estlund on December 27, 2011

How many bribes does it take to get a Red Notice removed? While this sounds like the lead-in to a bad joke, for many people facing Red Notices, it is unfortunately a matter that bears consideration.

Let me be clear: never once have I read, observed, or been advised by anyone about any bribery efforts on the part of anyone who works for INTERPOL. In fact, to the contrary, in the cases to which I am privy, I have found that INTERPOL's staff members have gone out of their way to avoid any appearance of impropriety.

The issue of bribery, when it arises, inevitably appears in the judicial and executive branches of government of the member countries that request Red Notices. Subjects report requests for bribes from National Central Bureau ("NCB") officials (who are employees of the member countries, not of INTERPOL), arresting officers, judges, prosecuting attorneys, and other judicial and law enforcement officials.

Red Notice subjects have complained regarding the issue of bribery in so many member countries that the question has to be asked at some point, are they all lying? While any person charged with a crime arguably has a motive to lie, should we not also recognize that these individual, un-verifiable reports take on credibility after they are made repeatedly from different sources at different times under different circumstances?

Member countries interact with INTERPOL via their own governmental officials who work at NCBs, which serve as the liaisons between the countries and INTERPOL. This arrangement ensures that the people who are in the best position to determine whether a country's laws have been followed-that country's own law enforcement officials- serve as the gatekeepers between the country and INTERPOL.

It also creates opportunity for non-INTERPOL staff to introduce corruption into INTERPOL's processes. Every member country's NCB is run by a law enforcement agency assigned by the member country itself. It is also staffed by employees of the member country, not INTERPOL. The NCB officials are therefore in a position to decide whether to request a new Red Notice, or to request that one be removed. In the more corrupt member countries, officials who are so inclined may seek bribes in exchange for either the issuance or removal of the Notice.

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If the claims of some Red Notice subjects are true, the subjects are left to decide whether to:

1. pay a bribe, which is likely a crime in both the country where they are wanted and the country in which they reside,
2. blow the whistle, or
3. say nothing.

If they either pay the bribe or report the bribery efforts, they further endanger themselves. If they do not, they fight the Red Notice while playing by the rules, even though the corrupt member country does not.

Quite a quandry.

In the next posts, more on this topic.

As always, questions and comments are welcomed.