

# İNSAN HAKLARI HUKUKUNDA INTERPOL KIRMIZI BÜLTENİNİN SİYASİ AMAÇLARLA SUİİSTİMALİ

## Abuse of the Interpol Red Notice for Political Purposes in Human Rights Law

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### Öz

Tüm dünya ülkelerine yayılmış elektronik bir ağı sahip uluslararası en geniş polis örgütü olan INTERPOL, sınırı aşan suçlarla ciddi şekilde mücadele etmek için güvenlik güçleri olarak Jandarma, Polis ve adli makamlara önemli imkânlar sunmaktadır. INTERPOL'ün kilit işlevlerinden biri, kendi ülkelerinde tutuklanmaları gerektiği için iadesi istenenler hakkında "Kırmızı bülten" ve "caydırıcı ve önleyici" kapsamındaki tedbirleri diğer ülkelere duyurmaktır. Talep edilen kişi hakkında; elektronik bir arama çağrısı olarak kişinin yerini ve tutuklanmasını, iadesini, teslim edilmesini veya benzeri bir yasal işlem yapılması için hareketinin kısıtlanmasını istemek amacıyla INTERPOL Genel Sekreterliği tarafından "Kırmızı Bülten"ler yayınlanmaktadır. INTERPOL'ün yayınladığı istatistiklere göre, Kırmızı Bültenlerin sayısının son on yılda sürekli bir şekilde artmaktadır. Verilere göre, ülkelerdeki artan suçluluk oranları kırmızı

### Abstract

As the largest international police organization with electronic networks spanning nearly every country in the world, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) provides valuable tools for security forces, gendarme, police, and prosecutors to combat serious cross border crime effectively. One of INTERPOL's key functions is the circulation of 'wanted person alerts' including 'Red Notices' and 'Diffusions', which countries can use to seek a person's arrest with a view to extradition. INTERPOL's published statistics indicate that use of the "Red Notice" has increased steadily over the course of the last decade. According to the data, the increasing guilt rates in countries is not the main reason behind this increase. Some countries have been criticized for producing fake crimes against their own people and using this mechanism to destroy political rivals. If the crimes about people are not real,

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bültenlerdeki artışın arkasındaki ana neden gibi gözükmemektedir. Bazı ülkelerin siyasi muhalifler hakkında uydurma suçlar üzerinden politik baskı kurduğu iddia edilmektedir. Eğer şahıslarla ilgili INTERPOL'e bildirilen suçlar gerçek değilse, INTERPOL'ün kendi otoritesi baltalanırken, masum insanlar aylarca gözaltına alınacak, aileleri mahrum bırakılacaktır. INTERPOL'ün imkânları, politik mültecileri izlemek veya barışçıl kampanyacıları susturmak için ülkeler tarafından kötüye kullanıldığında bu durum hem yasadışı ve hem de uluslararası insan haklarına aykırı olacaktır. Ayrıca, INTERPOL Anayasasının 3. Maddesinde; "Örgütün siyasi, askeri, dini veya ırksal nitelikte herhangi bir müdahale veya faaliyette bulunması kesinlikle yasaktır." İlgili maddeye göre INTERPOL, ülkelerin iç siyasetine alet edilmemelidir. Bu çalışmada, uluslararası suçlarla mücadele eden INTERPOL mekanizmasının kötüye kullanımdan korunması gerektiği vurgulanacaktır. İnsan haklarının, uluslararası hukukun sorumlulukları dâhilindeki suçlarla mücadele eden ülkeler için bir öncelik olduğu hatırlatılarak hukuki bir çerçevede incelenecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** INTERPOL, İnsan Hakları Hukuku, Kırmızı Bülten, Suçların Suiistimali, Uluslararası Hukuk.

INTERPOL's own authority will be undermined while innocent people will be being detained for months on end - separated from their families, reputations destroyed and lives ruined. Article 3 of INTERPOL's Constitution provides; "It is strictly forbidden for the Organization to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character." This article clearly states that INTERPOL should not be used in politics. In this study, it will be emphasized that the INTERPOL mechanism which has fighting international crimes must be protected from abusing. And it will be underlined that human rights are a priority for countries in the fighting against to crimes within the responsibilities of international human rights law.

**Keywords:** Abuse of Crimes, Human Rights Law, International Law, INTERPOL, Red Notice.

## Introduction

The presumption of innocence is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a core principle in the administration of criminal justice. This principle is appeared in many international human rights texts. For example, according to article 11 of “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defense. And also “No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.”

However, the people living in some authoritarian countries can be criminalized by politicized courts in various ways, although they are not guilty. Likewise, it can be used for domestic criminal laws for political purposes. This problem can even be seen in the European countries in the recent history. There are sometimes attempts to politicize or control the judiciary in ways that could threaten suspects’ rights to a fair trial, even in countries where the right is fairly well established. In 2018, the European Union’s highest tribunal, the European Court of Justice, ordered Poland’s government to suspend a law lowering Supreme Court retirement ages that would have obliged two-fifths of its judges to step down. It was widely interpreted as an effort by the government to fill the bench with its own people.

The crime types change as the law becomes politicized. In today, terrorism, cybercrime and many organized crimes are increasingly in the world. As security forces gendarme, police and prosecutors need international cooperation mechanisms to combat serious cross border crime effectively. So, police, judges, and prosecutors across the globe should work together to fight serious crime. As the largest international police organization with electronic networks spanning nearly every country in the world, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) provides valuable tools for them to do so.

INTERPOL is the world’s largest international police organization, with around 194 member countries and an annual budget of €137 million. INTERPOL is second

only to the United Nations in the breadth of its global membership. INTERPOL regards itself as “*an independent and autonomous international organization established by international law*” But some countries don’t accept the INTERPOL as an international organization. For instance, the United Kingdom does not recognize INTERPOL’s status as an international organization.

By circulating information about criminals, and giving it the INTERPOL ‘stamp of approval’, INTERPOL has considerable human impact. A request for international cooperation, including the arrest, detention or restriction of movement of a convicted or accused person, sent by a National Central Bureau directly to other National Central Bureaus and simultaneously recorded in a police database of INTERPOL. If the crimes recorded in a police database of INTERPOL is described by states about people are not real, INTERPOL’s own authority will be undermined while innocent people will be being detained for months on end — separated from their families, reputations destroyed and lives ruined. So that, the structure and aims of INTERPOL is needed to be examined closely.

## 1. The Structure of INTERPOL and Its Key Functions

Initially titled the International Criminal Police Commission, INTERPOL itself was founded in 1923 in Vienna, with fifteen members. INTERPOL’s organizational structure is established by the Constitution. INTERPOL’s internal structure and activities follow the model and procedures is prescribed by this constitution. According to the 1956 Constitution Article 2, INTERPOL’s aims are: “*to ensure and promote the widest possible mutual assistance between all criminal police authorities*” and “*to establish and develop all institutions likely to contribute effectively to the prevention and suppression of ordinary-law crimes.*”

In 1956 Constitution, Articles 6 and 7; the key parts of INTERPOL are, firstly “The General Assembly is the ‘supreme authority’ of the organization and is composed of ‘delegates’, who should be experts in police affairs. The second one is “The Executive Committee” supervises the execution of decisions of the General Assembly and oversees the work of the General Secretariat. Thirdly, “The General Secretariat” is the main executive body, which administers INTERPOL’s networks, databases and other activities, and acts as the contact point between INTERPOL and the national police forces.

INTERPOL acts as an “information clearinghouse” staffed by criminal-intelligence specialists who maintain international criminal databases and facilitate contact among officers from different national police forces. Now headquartered in Lyon, France, INTERPOL employs close to nine-hundred people (Lemon, 2019: 19).

Headquartered in Lyon, INTERPOL is the world’s largest international policing institution but INTERPOL is not a police force in itself. It has no powers to arrest anyone, investigate or prosecute crimes. It occasionally deploys ‘Incident Response Teams’ to assist national police forces during joint cross-border operations or large-scale public events. However, its key function is to provide secure communications and information-sharing channels for its members. It connects the law enforcement authorities of 194 countries, enabling them to exchange information and cooperate in fighting crime. INTERPOL currently has 194 member nations. But some states are not belonged to INTERPOL. For example, North Korea is one of the few well-known nations that is not a member of INTERPOL.

One of INTERPOL’s key functions is the circulation of “wanted person alerts” including ‘Red Notices’ and ‘Diffusions’, which countries can use to seek a person’s arrest with a view to extradition. As an electronic alert Red notice is published by the INTERPOL General Secretariat in order to seek the location of a wanted person and his/her detention, arrest or restriction of movement for the purpose of extradition, surrender, or similar lawful action. The Red Notice has been described as a ‘wanted poster with teeth’, and indeed has significant human rights impact. Each Red Notice is based on a national arrest warrant issued by the competent authorities of the requesting state. The request must also include identifiers for the person: their name, photograph, nationality and other items, including biometric data such as fingerprints and DNA profiles. Since 1994, INTERPOL has also worked with international criminal tribunals such as the International Criminal Court, issuing Red Notices seeking the arrest of persons accused of offences falling within the remit of the relevant court.

A Red Notice is not compulsory an international arrest warrant. Each country decides what action to take based on a Red Notice. Some countries, such as the UK, do not consider the Red Notice to be a valid legal basis for provisional arrest. But for approximately one-third of the member countries a Red Notice serves as a provisio-

nal arrest warrant for wanted person and they will automatically arrest anyone with an alert against them.

## 2. Impact of Colored Notices of INTERPOL in Human Rights

There is INTERPOL's system of colored notices, including its Red Notice. By rule, all notices must be published to all INTERPOL member nations. There are different types of colored notices. For instance, "Yellow Notices" are created to alert police to a missing person, "Blue Notices" are created to collect additional information about a person in relation to a crime, and "Green Notices" are created to provide warnings about persons who have committed criminal offenses and are likely to repeat those offenses in other countries. These are all relatively common, but by far the most-used notice is the "Red Notice"

A Red Notice of which 13,048 were published in 2017 (Bromund and Grossman, 2019:21) is created "*simply to inform all member countries that the person is wanted based on an arrest warrant or equivalent judicial decision issued by a country or an international tribunal*" (Interpol, 2020: 3). The other words, the purpose of a "Red Notice", according to INTERPOL, is to "*seek the location and arrest of wanted persons with a view to extradition or similar lawful action.*" The red notices are issued by INTERPOL to authorities worldwide asking for the arrest of individuals pending their extradition to the member state that wants to detain them.

The purpose of a Red Notice is the detention of a lawbreaker, pending their extradition. Red Notices serve as a request from one-member country to another asking for the location, arrest and extradition of a wanted individual. The people targeted with Red Notices can have their travel visas canceled and bank accounts closed or have difficulty traveling internationally. Eventually a Red Notice is a document, circulated on INTERPOL's databases, identifying wanted persons, in order to effect their arrest and detention, pending extradition. It can be granted as long as a domestic warrant has been issued by national agencies. Most Red Notices are not published online, and when they are, this is done only with the consent of the issuer. Since the data stored by INTERPOL is formally owned by the issuing states, the organization's rules also require the General Secretariat to obtain their consent in order to delete information from its database or release it to individuals (Lemon, 2019: 21-22).

Before 2002, the establishment of web-based communication system in INTERPOL, physical copies of notices were delivered to members in a process that required four to six months. After 2002, technological change has also made it possible for members to share information much more quickly and easily. After a 2009 upgrade to INTERPOL's online systems made it possible for states to upload "draft Red Notices" instantaneously visible to police in other jurisdictions, the number of Red Notices issued jumped 60 percent (Lemon, 2019: 20).

All the number of notices has almost tripled over the past decade, growing from 5,020 to 13,048 by the time of the 2017 Annual report. A recent INTERPOL fact sheet reports that the number of diffusions in circulation has risen to more than 100,000, with 50,530 of these alerts issued in 2017 alone. In 2002, by comparison, only 7,500 new diffusions were issued. Similarly, INTERPOL issued 13,048 Red Notices in 2017, as compared to a mere 1,277 in 2002 (Interpol Fact Sheet, 2018: 14). Advocates, lawyers, and academics all stressed that the majority of Red Notices are issued for people suspected of committing serious crimes. The number of Red Notices issued each year has increased from 1,418 in 2001 to 13,048 in 2017. This rise has been largely attributed to the introduction of a new web-based communication system, which has streamlined the process of filing Red Notices. Prior to its introduction in 2002, the notices were issued on paper.

Most of the countries consider a Red Notice to be a sufficient legal basis for arrest and detention for criminals. Red Notices are published and visible only to law enforcement agencies. This means that often an individual who is the subject of a Red Notice may not be aware of it until he or she is confronted by state's law enforcement units- for example when crossing an international border into another state. The United States does not consider a Red Notice alone as grounds for arrest. But in different cases, the cancellation of a visa can render a person undocumented, triggering detention, and also the UK, do not consider the Red Notice to be a valid legal basis for provisional arrest, but many others do.

It is known that human rights guarantee for those who are considered criminals, as well as for any person, rights such as the presumption of innocence, the right to a trial, and the right to physical integrity. The opposite of that Red Notices can also have a seriously discrediting effect in human rights for the individual concerned. This is particularly serious where public extracts of Red Notices are made available

on INTERPOL's website, as these will associate the person's name with criminality. The existence of a Red Notice, with consequent travel restrictions, may also make employment impossible. In some cases, the revocation of visas may lead directly to the suspension and eventual loss of employment. A person who knows that they are subject to a Red Notice is likely to refrain from travelling for fear of arrest and detention when passing international border points. Many national authorities often refuse visas to those subject to a Red Notice, sometimes severely restricting the freedom of movement of the individual concerned. Red Notices may have a seriously damaging effect on business activities. A Red Notice may also have an impact on an asylum as a 'serious reason for considering' that a person is committed an offence, a ground for exclusion from asylum under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Additionally, UK-based nongovernmental organization "Fair Trials International" argues that Red Notices often have serious human impact, placing individuals at risk of arrest and lengthy detention, restricting freedom of movement and impacting upon the private and family life of the individual concerned (Fair Trials, 2019: 18).

### **3. Abuse of Red Notice by Some Authoritarian Countries**

The use of Interpol's notice system against critics and opponents of autocracies has drawn growing public attention in the recent years. The European Parliament has also debated the issue of Red Notices and highlighted the abuse by some member countries of Interpol's Notice System in violation of international standards of human rights. The use of Interpol against political dissidents represents an important and understudied aspect of today's globalized autocracy. Russia and some authoritarian countries are known to issue Red Notices through the Interpol system in pursuit of their political enemies abroad. There are currently no penalties for countries that misuse the system.

According to specialists, the increasing guilt rates in countries is not the main reason behind this increase. With rising of social and political problems and wide spreading anti-democratic regimes in the world, fighting against to crimes and criminals begin to change. In recent years, human rights and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Open Dialog Foundation, Fair Trials, and Centre for Peace Studies, regularly report on abuse of Red Notices against opposition politicians, journalists, human rights activists and businessmen. Additionally, some countries is



criticized for producing fake crimes against their own people and using this mechanism to destroy political rivals. If the crimes about people are not real, INTERPOL's own authority will be undermined while innocent people will be being detained for months on end - separated from their families, reputations destroyed and lives ruined. When INTERPOL's channels are being misused by countries to track down political refugees or to silence peaceful campaigners, at the same time this will be unlawful and against international human rights.

Article 3 of INTERPOL's Constitution provides; "*It is strictly forbidden for the Organization to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character.*" This article is supposed to guarantee INTERPOL's neutrality and prevent it from being used by repressive regimes to persecute their political opponents. But it is increasingly being subverted by autocratic regimes seeking to pursue their exiled political opponents. The number of Red Notices increased ten-fold in the past fifteen years.

Theoretically, INTERPOL must to remain politically neutral. The Constitution's most-cited portions are its Article 2, which requires that international police cooperation be conducted within the "spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," and is committed to fighting "ordinary law crimes." But over time, the definition of "ordinary law crimes" has been stretched to include acts normally seen as falling outside this domain. Bowing to pressure from certain members in 1984, INTERPOL passed two resolutions that brought under its mandate "*violent crime commonly referred to as terrorism*" (Lemon, 2019: 20).

All INTERPOL activities, including all communications over its network, must respect its Constitution and subsidiary rules adopted by the general assembly, including its "Rules on the Processing of Data" (RPD). The purpose of the Constitution and the subsidiary rules is to ensure that INTERPOL is used only against "ordinary-law crime," and is not in any way involved in politics, or for purposes of a political, and therefore illegitimate, persecution.

Although INTERPOL clearly states that it does not take political sides and that Red Notices are not tantamount to guilty verdicts against those targeted, authoritarian regimes consistently use the presence of dissidents on INTERPOL lists as proof of an international consensus regarding their guilt (Lemon, 2019: 19). Unfortunately, as discussed below, INTERPOL's system of publications

and other communications is subject to abuse by member nations. Long before 2018, the authoritarian regimes had begun turning to INTERPOL for help in pursuing their political opponents abroad. Thanks in part to these efforts, those who fall afoul of such regimes often face continuing legal woes well after they leave their country (Lemon, 2019: 16). By 2016, the Council of Europe had grown sufficiently alarmed by INTERPOL's misuse to appoint a special rapporteur on the subject.

Members of the European Parliament have also begun pressing the EU High Representative for "Foreign Affairs and the European Commission" for answers regarding INTERPOL and abuses of its systems targeted at recognized refugees, pointing out that INTERPOL systems can be misused to obtain the arrest and detention, in one Member State, of those who have been recognized as refugees in another Member State in accordance with common EU standards' (Wandall et al, 2019: 13-38).

In reports the states such as Russia, China, Egypt, UAE, Indonesia, Bahrain, Belarus, Venezuela, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran are presented as abusers of INTERPOL's notice system to persecute dissidents. On the other hand, the use of INTERPOL to pursue critics abroad is not confined only to large or wealthy authoritarian states. Despite accounting for just 0.12 percent of the world's population, Tajikistan has issued 2,528 Red Notices, or 2.3 percent of the total in circulation, including one against Muhiddin Kabiri, the leader of the country's main opposition party (Mackinnon., 2018: 29). In short, if authoritarianism has gone global, then INTERPOL is one of a number of organizations that have facilitated this move (Lemon, 2019: 17). For instance, the other name is Dolkun Isa, a renowned activist and member of the World Uyghur Congress. After fleeing China, Mr. Isa has been subject to a Chinese Red Notice abuse since 2003. The resulting travel restrictions have hobbled his advocacy work to promote Uyghur self-determination. It is possible to mention various names from different countries in many reports. But ultimately it is accepted that there are currently no penalties for countries that misuse the system. A senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, Theodore Bromund fears that abuse of the system may have also increased as authoritarian regimes have learned they can use it to disrupt the lives of dissidents and debtors outside of their borders, even if they're not ultimately extradited (2019: 3).

## Conclusion

Red Notices have a serious negative impact on the human rights of innocent persons, including the rights to liberty and security and the right to a fair trial. People accused by authoritarian states cannot successfully challenge Red Notices before any national or international courts. Such jurisdictional immunity can only be justified to the extent that an internal appeals mechanism provides an effective remedy within the meaning of applicable human rights standards.

Interpol is not accountable to an international court, being a *sui generis* organization. Interpol has no executive powers of its own and depends on information of its members. The use of INTERPOL against political dissidents represents an important and understudied aspect of today's globalized autocracy (Diamond et al, 2016: 24). Attempts by autocrats to pursue their domestic political opponents through INTERPOL form part of this broader process of authoritarianism going global.

Democratic states have several options for confronting the abuse of INTERPOL. They can pursue the path of engagement with the global policing body, pushing for more transparency in its operations, increasing the burden of proof for those issuing detention requests, preventing states from repeatedly submitting Red Notices previously rejected by the CCF as politically motivated, and demanding that INTERPOL more rigorously enforce its own rules (Lemon, 2019: 26).

INTERPOL is an important organization with a laudable role; but it does not have the mechanisms in place to prevent abuses by some countries that seek to use it to persecute oppositionists. In 2016 the organization established the Notices and Diffusions Task Force to review Red Notices for compliance with INTERPOL's principles.

From late 2014, the Secretary General of INTERPOL Juergen Stock launched a reform imposing new controls aimed at better ensuring the system was not abused by member states (France 24: 2019:12).

In general, the abuse of INTERPOL can be reduced by the adoption of the following measures (Satter, 2015: 9):

- INTERPOL should introduce and enforce stronger sanctions – up to and including expulsion against states filing requests for Red Notices out of political motives.

- INTERPOL should enhance the transparency of the provision of information about a subject of a Red Notice, as well as of requests for striking off an entry.

- Red Notices should be synchronized with asylum and extradition proceedings, and Red Notice applications should be automatically deleted where asylum is granted or extradition has been refused.

- INTERPOL should address those individuals affected by wrongful red notices or diffusions by countries.

- INTERPOL member states should engage more actively in strengthening the accountability of Red Notice measure.

- INTERPOL Institutions, bodies, and member states should ensure further transparency concerning the activities of police authorities and their relationship with international organizations and third countries in dealing with red notices.

- INTERPOL could engage in bilateral initiatives with the member countries through a new development programme to raise the human rights and rule-of-law capacity in international cooperation in criminal matters.

While INTERPOL seems to recognize the need for reform to counter politically motivated notices, it has not made this a main priority. The organization's "Strategic Framework 2017–20" makes no mention of upholding human rights. Nor was the abuse of INTERPOL by members discussed at the 2017 General Assembly in Beijing, although members did find time to note "mounting concerns that dangerous criminals and terrorists might try to abuse the refugee protection regime" (Interpol Resolution, 2017:1).

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