

## 100 Human Rights Activists Urge UN Probe of Top Official For Harassing Watchdog

**GENEVA, July 11, 2023** — A cross-regional coalition of 100 human rights activists and UN-accredited civil society organizations today [called on](#) UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk to investigate Eric Tistounet, the powerful head of the UN Human Rights Council staff for the past two decades, for his campaign of “harassment and gross misconduct” targeting a human rights group that has been [recognized](#) for [giving a global platform](#) to dissidents of authoritarian regimes.

In the current 4-week session of the Human Rights Council that concludes on July 14, Mr. Tistounet blocked UN Watch from testifying in debates concerning abuses in Iran, Syria, Pakistan, Venezuela and Russia, said Hillel Neuer, an international human rights lawyer who directs the Geneva-based non-governmental organization.

### Whistleblower Confirms: Head of UNHRC Staff Personally Intervenes to Block UN Watch From Speaking

“The numbers are astonishing: while groups friendly to Mr. Tistounet were allowed to speak in more than 20 debates in the current session, we have been prohibited from speaking more than once. And we know exactly what’s going on because Mr. Tistounet’s former employee [revealed](#) that he is close with China and other dictatorships that seek to silence UN Watch, and that he actually orders his UNHRC staff to tamper with speakers’ lists to prevent us from speaking.”

“What is shocking is that nine months ago, a senior aide to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres promised that they would review our [Legal Complaint](#), which details how Mr. Tistounet wilfully and systematically rigs the system to block us from speaking. In the [June 2021](#) session, we registered for 31 debates and were [denied 30 out of 31 slots](#), and in [June 2022](#) he barred us from all [36 debates](#). Only 10 NGOs get to speak in each debate, so he maliciously moves UN Watch down the list so that we are silenced. Coming from a UN human rights officer, this kind of unethical conduct is disgraceful,” said Neuer.

### Leaked Emails: Eric Tistounet Orders Staff to Anonymously Smear Hillel Neuer Online

“According to [leaked emails](#), Mr. Tistounet also engages in wilful and illegal harassment by instructing his Human Rights Council staff to go to internet cafés to anonymously spread false information about me online, and he told his employees to think of ways to have me physically detained by UN security, in order to block me from entering the Council chamber in Geneva.” (See [pp. 18-24 of the Complaint](#).)

### 100 Activists Say Blocking UN Watch Silences Victims Worldwide

The signatories of today’s joint appeal — including some of the most prominent human rights dissidents and former political prisoners from China, Russia, Cuba, Turkey, North

Korea, Libya, Belarus, Venezuela and Zimbabwe — said they were “gravely concerned by any restrictions on the ability of UN Watch to exercise its legitimate rights to take the floor at the UN Human Rights Council.”

The dissidents said this would harm “the human rights of victims of urgent country situations worldwide who are regularly given a voice and platform by UN Watch.”

“We express our strong support for the vital work of UN Watch to monitor the world body and uphold the Charter of the United Nations, and to promote and protect human rights for all,” said the activists, many of whom have been hosted by UN Watch to speak at the United Nations, either [in the Human Rights Council](#) or at UN sessions held as part of UN Watch’s annual [Geneva Summit for Human Rights](#).

“We commend UN Watch for being one of the leading non-governmental organizations in bringing human rights defenders, dissidents, victims, and family members of political prisoners to testify before the United Nations,” said the human rights activists.

The joint appeal called on the UN officials to “create an independent investigation as an essential step for accountability and justice.”

### **Background: Tistounet Handed Names of Dissidents to China**

More than any other group at the Human Rights Council, UN Watch routinely brings high profile dissidents to address the council, from China, Cuba, Libya, Russia and elsewhere. Many of the regimes have in turn pressured Tistounet’s office, as [China recently did](#) when UN Watch hosted Hong Kong activist Tania Chan.

In March, Venezuela’s Maduro regime filed a [complaint](#) to the UN calling to shut down UN Watch, after the group gave the floor at the Human Rights Council to opposition figures Leopoldo Lopez, María Corina Machado and Diego Arria.

As reported by [the BBC](#) and [Le Monde](#), Mr. Tistounet is [accused](#) of putting in place a UN policy of handing over to China in advance the names of dissidents registered to speak at the UNHRC, putting their lives and their family members at risk, as Uyghur activist Dolkun Isa has [testified](#).

### **Tistounet handed UN Watch speeches in advance to his friend Jean Ziegler, the UNHRC expert who created the “Qaddafi Human Rights Prize”**

In a June 2006 [report](#), UN Watch exposed the role of UNHRC expert Jean Ziegler in co-creating and managing the Muammar Qaddafi Human Rights Prize, an award that was given to dictator Hugo Chavez, antisemite Louis Farrkhan and convicted French Holocaust denier Roger Garaudy, in the same year that Ziegler himself won the prize.

Tistounet participated in a [panel](#) honoring the controversial Qaddafi supporter, who in turn wrote [the preface](#) to one of Tistounet’s novels.

According to Emma Reilly, “Mr. Tistounet extended his targeting of UN Watch to his personal friend Mr. Jean Ziegler, whose UN appointments have

often been criticized by UN Watch. Uniquely among mandate holders, Mr. Ziegler would frequently come to the NGO liaison office and request to see lists of speakers to verify whether UN Watch would take the floor.”

“He would also request advance copies of UN Watch speeches, which we were instructed to provide. No other NGO was targeted in this manner, and no other mandate holder was accorded this favor.”

### **Tistounet intercepted UN Watch speeches, drafted reprimands for chair to read, tampered with the time clock to run out UN Watch’s speaking time**

Tistounet personally obtained all UN Watch speeches in advance, so he could draft unjustified reprimands for the chair to read out afterwards.

“Mr. Tistounet had a standing instruction that when a statement was received in advance from UN Watch, it was to be given directly to him either in his office or on the podium, and placed on the desk of his office if he could not be immediately located. This instruction did not exist for any other NGO,” testified whistleblower Emma Reilly.

“On occasion, when a UN Watch speech was received in advance, Mr. Tistounet would request that I draft new language for the President to give a false impression that the speeches broke the rules.”

“He was fully aware that his advice to successive Presidents to reprimand UN Watch for disobeying rules was false, and that no rule was in fact being broken.”

In addition, when he could get away with it, Tistounet manipulated the clock to remove time from UN Watch.

“When points of order are made during speeches, the NGO liaison and Secretary are responsible for pressing a button on the podium to pause the NGO speaking time. it.”

“Mr. Tistounet issued a standing instruction that the button was not to be pressed during UN Watch speeches, but instead that their speaking time should be deemed to continue during the point of order. This instruction applied only to UN Watch.”

“Mr. Tistounet made clear on a number of occasions that his ultimate aim was to exclude Mr. Neuer and UN Watch more generally from UN premises.”