

(English version)

Priority question for written answer P-001584/24
to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Yvan Verougstraete (Renew)
(2 September 2024)

Subject: Release of Paul Watson

Paul Watson is an American-Canadian activist who founded the Sea Shepherd organisation in 1977. He was arrested on 21 July 2024 in Greenland, Denmark, on the basis of an international arrest warrant issued by Japan in 2012. He is accused of having damaged a Japanese whaling ship in 2010 in the Antarctic during one of his actions. Paul Watson is now awaiting an extradition decision by the Danish court. This judicial process demonstrates Japan's willingness to bring pressure to bear to intimidate all those who may be tempted to embrace Paul Watson's radical mode of action.

It is imperative to act now. Protection for whistleblowers must be strengthened, including when their methods involve necessary disobedience intended to denounce, among other things, the looting of the seabed and ensure the protection of ecosystems.

What action does the Vice-President/High Representative intend to take in this matter?

Submitted: 2.9.2024

Answer given by Commissioner Reynders on behalf of the European Commission
(31 October 2024)

The EU has in place an effective legislative framework for the protection of persons reporting breaches of EU environmental law. Directive (EU) 2019/1937⁽¹⁾ (the 'Whistleblower Protection Directive') provides robust protection to persons who report, within the organisation for which they work, or to competent authorities of the Member States, or to the public (under certain conditions), breaches of the EU law in certain areas, including environmental law, which they discover in the context of their work, and who, for this reason, suffer or may suffer retaliation in that context.

In the light of the information provided, this directive does not seem applicable to the individual circumstances of the case referred to by the Honourable Member.

The EU remains committed to upholding the International Whaling Commission's moratorium on commercial whaling and has consistently voiced strong concerns about Japan's whaling activities.

The Commission will continue to use all available diplomatic channels to engage with Japan to discourage such practices.

⁽¹⁾ Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 23 October 2019, on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law, OJ L 305, 26.11.2019, p. 17.