

Anti-graft agency hunts 946 fugitives

China's top graft buster said on Thursday that 946 corrupt fugitives are still at large in foreign countries, and China hopes those nations will support its war against corruption.

Thursday's disclosure was the first time China has released the exact number of corrupt fugitives abroad.

Of the 946, most of whom are corrupt officials, Chinese law enforcement officers have a good idea of where 365 are. But the whereabouts of the other 581 are unknown, according to the Communist Party of China's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.

"These corrupt fugitives used illegal means to grab a large amount of public funds and escaped abroad to avoid punishment, which has seriously harmed people's interests and undermined our credibility and social justice," said Liu Jianchao, director of the CCDI's International Cooperation Bureau.

"We hope the public will provide clues about the fugitives, as well as report corrupt officials who intend to flee," he said.

Liu also called for countries harboring such fugitives to adhere to international conventions on fighting corruption and actively assist Chinese law enforcement authorities.

Feng Jingyou, a senior official in the CCDI's International Cooperation Bureau, said China respects different legal systems in other countries, but hopes that such countries would not shelter corrupt Chinese fugitives, nor facilitate their asset transfers.

"We urge some individual countries which have ignored the suspects' corruption crimes and issued them visas under investment immigration policies in return for economic benefits to tighten the management of visas and revoke the visas already issued," Feng said.

Liu said the fugitives should return to China to confess their crimes and seek lenient punishment as soon as possible. "We have the resolve and ability to uphold the law, ... and we'll make every effort to bring them back to face justice, and never will allow them to get away with no legal penalty."

In recent years, a large number of corrupt Chinese officials have escaped abroad, especially to the United States and Canada, because of a lack of extradition treaties and legal differences, Liu said. Some of them have obtained permanent residence in those countries, he said.

"We hope that overseas Chinese and foreign friends recognize the nature of these fugitives and expose them to drive them away," Liu said.

China launched a massive crackdown on corruption in November 2012 and in 2014 started an operation called Sky Net to hunt for corrupt fugitives abroad.

In April 2015, Interpol issued "red notices" requests to locate and provisionally arrest an individual pending repatriation for the 100 most-wanted corrupt Chinese officials. So far, 40 have returned from more than 16 countries and regions, while half of the remaining fugitives are still on the run in Western countries, CCDI figures show.

On Thursday, the CCDI also made public detailed information about 22 high-profile Chinese fugitives, 15 of whom are in the US and Canada. The information included suspects' photos, ID numbers, passport numbers, suspected crimes, the date they fled China and their suspected current location.

The 22 people are considered high priority cases because of the difficulty that Chinese law enforcement authorities have encountered in their attempts to locate and return them, according to the CCDI.