

72nd INTERPOL General Assembly

Benidorm, Spain, 29 September 2003

by [Ronald K. Noble](#), Secretary General of INTERPOL

Good afternoon

Mr President,
Members of the Executive Committee,
Director General of Spain's National Police,
Ministers and Heads of Police,
My dear Heads of NCBs and staff from NCBs,
Delegates and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In April 1999, 100 blank passports were stolen from the Croatian Consulate in Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina). This type of crime occurs on a daily basis around the world. Few countries enter this data in national databases and even fewer enter it in international databases.

If you look at the law enforcement priorities of our [member countries](#), this type of crime is generally not listed as a priority. Now, let me try to demonstrate why INTERPOL believes that it must become a worldwide priority. Not next week, next month or next year, but now.

One of these 100 stolen Croatian passports ended up in the hands of Milorad Ulemek. Well before the I-24/7 communication system was even an idea, let alone a reality, at INTERPOL. Well before we had created a Stolen Travel Documents project. Well before countries had a clear vehicle for reporting such criminal activity. These voids presented opportunities for Ulemek and he exploited these opportunities.

He travelled through Switzerland, Austria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Singapore and Croatia - many of these countries, more than once. Indeed, he travelled through some of these countries 26 times using public transportation. His passport diligently noted these changes as he entered these countries and records were maintained.

On March 12, 2003, the unthinkable happened. Zoran Djindjic, the Prime Minister of Serbia, was assassinated. You won't be surprised to learn that Ulemek is believed to have been involved in this murder. He is also suspected of being a leading member of a criminal organization known as the Zemun Gang. On March 28, 2003, INTERPOL Belgrade requested INTERPOL to issue its worldwide Red Notice for his arrest. And, we did so in one day in all of the four official languages of INTERPOL. We placed the notice of Serbia and Montenegro seeking his apprehension on our website and made it available to all member countries that are participating in the Electronic Notice system or are connected to I-24/7.

But, we could have done better. We might have prevented this assassination.

This story demonstrates the priorities that INTERPOL must pursue. First, we must build the right databases and make these databases accessible to police and law enforcement in the field as well as to NCBs. Second, we must have a global communication system that is in place and operational in every one

of our countries; it must be state-of-the-art, secure and flexible enough to meet the unique challenges confronting each of your countries and the world as a whole. Third, member countries must use these databases, both by putting information in and by taking information out. And, of course, we must have programs, projects and policies in place that build on the real life cases confronting our member countries and that help you to investigate, prevent and prosecute both national and international crime.

Here is dramatic evidence of how INTERPOL is implementing the first priority of building the right databases.

We went from two countries and over 3,000 stolen passports to 29 countries and over 250,000 passports in one year. That means that there are over a quarter of a million stolen passports in our databases. We should be happy about this accomplishment, but we have had only 29 countries search this database less than 400 times in total. If we go back to the Ulemek case, we see how any one of these 250,000 passports could be linked to serious and dangerous criminal activity requiring us to make this a priority.

I have highlighted a type of criminal activity where we can do better. Let me now show you where we are doing better. But, before I do so, please don't think of stolen motor vehicle crime as an unimportant type of criminal activity. We are celebrating our General Assembly in Spain. Spain and other countries see how stolen cars from neighboring countries are turned into bombs by terrorist groups such as ETA or FARC.

INTERPOL's Stolen Motor Vehicle Database is the most widely used database at INTERPOL because it is easy to enter data into and easy to consult. Perhaps most importantly, the police use this database because they get hits (positive results.) The database has grown from two million in 1999 to a projected 2.6 million this year. We expect the searches to reach the one million mark for the first time in INTERPOL's history. As far as the positive replies are concerned, we are projecting this year to have almost 16 thousand positive replies, which more than doubles the successes of just four years ago.

I know that most of us are concerned about INTERPOL's ability to apprehend fugitives. So, before I turn to what has been our second priority over the last thirteen months, we already have issued almost 10,000 Notices and Diffusions and you, our member countries, have recorded almost 2,000 arrests. Between 1998 and this year, our production of Notices alone has nearly doubled and we have done so faster than ever before.

Let me now give you a personal story about the value of the INTERPOL network, INTERPOL's databases and INTERPOL's NCBs.

During my recent mission to Ukraine in August 2003, I was given a CD-ROM from the Trafficking in Human Beings Sub-Directorate containing a number of images taken from the Internet showing two boys, who were known to have been sexually abused. The CDs were sanitized so that no offensive images were contained on them. Instead, INTERPOL wanted to determine where the photos had been taken in the world, so it could investigate this crime more thoroughly. Two of the photographs were taken in an outdoor environment and showed a number of buildings and a public fountain. On a related image there was a magazine that had words written in Ukrainian.

Based on our leads, we focused our attention on the Ukraine, and I hand delivered this CD to the Minister of Interior and NCB and asked for help. My request was made in Russian.

The Ukrainian NCB could have said, 'We're sorry, but you are asking too much of us; how do you know that this photo was taken in the Ukraine?' They did not. Instead, they worked the case like police and NCBs all over the world. They used the INTERPOL network and made contacts with other NCBs. Within one month, specifically on 5 September of this year, Ukraine contacted the Child Abuse On-line Project Team within the Trafficking in Human Beings Sub-Directorate, to inform them that with the help of NCB Moscow, the image in the photograph had been identified as having been taken in Russia. That is, the town where the sexually abused boys were photographed as Samara City, Russia. One particular photograph was taken in front of the Kaskadyn Fountain in Samara City.

By placing one image on top of another, we can see that the fountains are the same. Russian authorities are currently trying to identify the victims who appear to be street children. The interesting thing about this story is that I had to physically carry the CD to Ukraine because the old and obsolete X-400 system could not transmit the images.

Nothing could be a better example of why we need I-24/7. You will be hearing more about I-24/7 throughout this General Assembly.

No matter what else of benefit you take away from this General Assembly, news about I-24/7 - INTERPOL's Global Communication System - is what will most help you and your colleagues back home fight international crime and what will most help you keep your respective countries and citizens safer.

First, why the name I-24/7? We wanted to label such an important system in a way that translates easily into each of INTERPOL's languages and that signals the most important qualities of the system. The 'I' stands for INTERPOL. The 24 hours a day shows that INTERPOL's Global Communication System will be available 24 hours a day. And the '7' reflects the fact that INTERPOL's work week is seven days. When you combine these three components, I-24/7 means that INTERPOL's Global Communication System will be operational around the world 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That explains the name I-24/7.

Now, why the I-24/7 system?

In Yaoundé, we first told the General Assembly last year that a revolution was underway at INTERPOL's General Secretariat. For years, the organization had been restricted to communicating through the X-400 system that had only 168 points through which INTERPOL and its member countries could transmit and receive messages containing valuable police information. The X-400 was becoming technically obsolete; it was becoming prohibitively expensive each year; and the companies that had installed it were not producing replacement parts and did not wish to continue to service the system.

Although major technology projects usually take years to design and implement and frequently fail to be implemented, we committed ourselves to connecting INTERPOL's member countries to a functioning and operational system in one year from the General Assembly held in Yaoundé. That's right: one year. We (with your help) promised to finish designing, testing, installing, training NCBs on the system and to begin using the I-24/7 system within one year.

Not only that, we suggested and the Executive Committee and General Assembly agreed, that our Number 1 priority should be to remove the 44 countries from the Transpac X-400 contract which were projected to have cost us 1.8 million euro for the 2003 budget year.

The result? Thanks to the hard work of the I-24/7 Project Team, our Information Systems Directorate, the General Secretariat staff and you, our member countries, we have removed all of the 44 Transpac countries from the obsolete and expensive X-400 system and converted them to I-24/7. In the process, we have not only improved the work capability of these NCBs and the organization, but we have saved the organization one million euro as a result, consistent with our mandate.

But, what about last year's goal of connecting all of INTERPOL's member countries' NCBs to I-24/7 in one year? Or, what about this year's goal of connecting 120 countries to I-24/7? These were crazy goals proposed by an I-24/7 Team and Secretary General who wanted to set the highest goal and highest target possible. Who were prepared to reach for the sky. Who were prepared to go on record saying that at the new INTERPOL 'Anything is Possible.' The I-24/7 Team could have said that this year we would remove the 44 Transpac communication system countries and connect as many other countries as possible to the I-24/7 system. Had we done so, the I-24/7 Project Team and you, our member countries, would have been different kinds of heroes from the heroes that you are today.

But, what was accomplished in one year has been heroic. We have connected not only the 44 costly Transpac countries; we have connected a total of 78 NCBs and 10 other non-NCBs to the I-24/7 system. Beginning with Canada in February 2003, until the last week in September 2003, we have connected 78

countries and a grand total of 88 sites to the I-24/7. We have done so in a cost-effective way that will permit us to connect our poorer countries for free - that is, at no cost to them.

But I am not one to see the bottle as nearly half full....it is still over half empty. We have learned much over the last nine months, and our goal remains 100 per cent connection of INTERPOL member countries to the I-24/7 system. But to achieve this goal we need to use a satellite or regional approach for countries where the technical infrastructure does not permit easy connection to I-24/7; we need countries that have embargoes preventing some of our INTERPOL NCBs from obtaining the necessary technology to have those embargoes lifted; we need those NCBs that already have been connected and are discovering ways to make connection and use of the system easier, to share that information with you, and most importantly, we need a 100 per cent commitment from each and every one of the NCBs still not connected to make connecting to the I-24/7 system your Number 1 priority.

I will make the following commitment. We at the General Secretariat will make sure that each one of our member countries has an opportunity to be connected. With the Executive Committee's support, we will work to have embargoes removed and we will help you identify a technical solution to any problems you might have. From you, we will need the following commitment. We will be proposing a resolution that commits our member countries to take all necessary measures to assist the NCBs in converting to the I-24/7 system. We have learned that it is virtually impossible for an NCB do this in isolation. NCBs need senior police management and governmental support to address not just technical needs but also to meet legal and logistic challenges. We will present a Security Charter as a part of this resolution that establishes a partnership to ensure trust in our system and its users. This partnership will ensure that the highest levels of security for protecting the sensitive police information that travels over the network are met.

The resolution is important: action is essential. We will be discussing this issue in detail tomorrow morning with the NCBs. We have set up three workshops during the General Assembly for countries that have not yet connected, to let them know what is needed. We are operating a model NCB stand that is using the I-24/7 system live and will show you the functionalities available. Information will also be available at the Model NCB stand about new services such as password security and press information.

But, even if we have the best databases and even if we have the best communication system, INTERPOL cannot succeed unless each member country adapts the I-24/7 system into their domestic law enforcement network.

With the old obsolete X-400 system, we were restricted to one connection point per country. We had only 168 countries connected and the police in each country had no direct access to the X-400 system. To give you an analogy: do you remember the days when all telephone calls required using an operator? I don't, but that's how X-400 worked.

I-24/7 has enabled Brazil to do this year what no one believed was possible. Brazil designed its entire Federal Police Communications System using the same protocol as that contained in I-24/7.

Let's look at the results in two steps.

First, they connected the system to all of Brazil's 27 states and regional headquarters and 96 Federal Police Stations.

Second, they have made operational 8,000 computer terminals throughout the country where I-24/7 can be accessed.

Think about the transition from X-400 to I-24/7, a revolution, I would say, which provided a country with one access point and now with I-24/7, Brazil has 8,000 entry points domestically to get access to INTERPOL's databases.

In closing, our conference this week will help us all focus on ways that INTERPOL can carry out these priorities. We need your ideas, your energy, your commitment so that next year we can feel more assured that we have better police tools in place than we have today; tools that might prevent future crimes like the tragedy that occurred last March in Serbia.

Thank you to all the groups and individuals that have made the successes of last year possible. That includes the President and the Executive Committee, our NCBs and, of course, my staff at the General Secretariat in Lyon and our SRBs in El Salvador, Argentina, Zimbabwe, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Thailand.