



Opening Remarks

by

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Fourth Meeting of Police Chiefs of the Middle East and North Africa

25 November 2019

Marrakech, Morocco

Excellencies,
Central Director of Judicial Police, Mr Mohamed Dkhissi
Secretary General of the Arab Interior Ministers Council, Dr Ali Koman
Distinguished Chiefs of Police
Director of GCCPOL, Col. Mubarak Al-Khyeli
INTERPOL Executive Committee Members
Representatives of local authorities
Heads of Delegation, Ladies and Gentlemen
Sayyidati Sadati,
Assalam aleykum

It is a pleasure to meet you here in Marrakech for this fourth meeting of Chiefs of Police from INTERPOL's Arab membership.

I wish to start by acknowledging the Moroccan authorities, for agreeing to host this meeting here, in the Red City. This is an especially fitting location, where law enforcement representatives from across the globe had already come together for INTERPOL's 76th General Assembly in 2007.

Mr Dkhissi, Central Director of Judicial Police, I would like to thank you for your gracious support in organizing the first meeting of its kind outside of the walls of INTERPOL's General Secretariat headquarters in Lyon. *Shukran Jazilan.*

This gathering was designed by INTERPOL to better serve this region. For the Middle East and North Africa to embrace it and host it was its natural evolution.

This is an occasion to reflect on how we as law enforcement can collectively address some of the threats that undermine the stability of our societies and threaten the well-being of innocent citizens across the region.

I believe this begins by sending a strong message to criminals and fugitives from around the world – that they will not find safe havens across our borders.

On this very day, INTERPOL is launching a new global appeal, to locate and bring to justice violent fugitives wanted internationally for their crimes. It coincides with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and it focuses on perpetrators who have made women their victims.

Both law enforcement agencies and the general public across our membership will be called to contribute to this effort.

As we know, too often fugitives seek to shelter themselves from the rule of law by crossing national boundaries and exploit what they see as blind spots of law enforcement. And there can be no effective response without strong transnational cooperation.

This spirit brings INTERPOL and the Middle East and North Africa together today. This meeting provides a welcome opportunity to look back at how INTERPOL and the region have developed their strategic and operational ties, since our first meeting in Lyon, three years ago.

Today, three INTERPOL Executive Committee members, including a Vice President - almost a fourth of our governance oversight body - come from your administrations. Three years ago, there were none.

This greater involvement in INTERPOL's institutional mechanisms is also visible in other parts of the Organization. Some of your countries were recently represented during the second meeting of the Working Group to review legal provisions relating to INTERPOL's governance bodies, held this month in Lyon and focusing on its broader legal framework.

Through their participation, they are contributing to critical discussions on the future of the Organization, and of its institutional practices.

As the Organization continues to evolve, this is key to ensure that the region keeps its strong voice in shaping the future of INTERPOL – to ensure that it can best meet the needs of each of its members.

And as the region is bringing itself closer to INTERPOL, so is INTERPOL coming closer to the region.

Just last month, at the 88th General Assembly in Santiago de Chile, INTERPOL's member countries overwhelmingly voted to endorse ongoing efforts to finalize the legal requirements for the establishment of a Regional Bureau in this region.

This is a key institutional milestone to make Regional Bureau Riyadh a reality, and to bring the General Secretariat yet closer to your law enforcement agencies – in operational support, coordination and training.

During this same General Assembly, our member countries - your administrations - have also chosen to entrust me with a second mandate to serve the Organization and its membership.

I wish to thank all countries represented here today for their trust and support. Please be assured that the swift operationalisation and staffing of RB Riyadh, and answering the needs of your police forces are among my key priorities as Secretary General.

Let me also take this opportunity to already invite your respective administrations to consider talented officers for secondment to the Regional Bureau, to be part of this new page in the history of INTERPOL.

Just as important a priority will be to maintain the momentum of high-level outreach efforts across the Middle East and North Africa. I had the opportunity over the past years to visit most of the countries of the region and meet with you and your NCBs – and I firmly intend to keep in close touch with the region.

Since our first meeting, INTERPOL has also been invited to discuss strategic imperatives with Ministers of Interior from across the region, as well as the national leadership of many of your countries. This is largely owing to the critical visibility and endorsement INTERPOL has received in this region, thanks to your support and the work of your NCBs.

These efforts will continue, and INTERPOL must be fully aligned with those setting the priorities of your police forces, which we are committed to serve.

And in this endeavour, we are very lucky to count on the leadership of His Excellency, Dr Koman, for driving the growing partnership between the Arab Interior Ministers Council and INTERPOL.

Excellency, I look forward to attending the meeting of the AIMC Chiefs of Police in Tunis in two weeks' time, and to explore how our cooperation can become yet more impactful.

I should also like to thank you for representing the AIMC during the INTERPOL Dialogue on global threats along with other regional law enforcement entities at INTERPOL's General Secretariat last June, as I would like to thank Colonel Al-Khyeli, for representing the Gulf Cooperation Council-POL.

Participation by both the AIMC and GCCPOL has been giving a voice to the region in building the multilateral policing architecture of the future. In keeping with the spirit of the Dialogue, INTERPOL remains committed to aligning actions with both actors to maximize our respective operational impact.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This past year has been marked by encouraging operational achievements.

INTERPOL activities in support of Middle East and North Africa continue unabated, strengthening our collective understanding of the threat landscape, while supporting the collection and dissemination of intelligence by your agencies.

Such is the case, to cite one example, with the activities conducted under Project FIRST in the region. Under this initiative, two INTERPOL deployments were conducted in Libya and in Iraq this year to support the collection of biometric data of terrorist inmates across detention centres, building on the success of the FIRST deployment that took place in Djibouti last year.

This resulted in the sharing with our broader membership by the concerned countries of valuable police information, and has immediately started to trigger hits on existing INTERPOL Notices and Diffusions.

The consolidation of our collective databases is crucial to help law enforcement track and prohibit the movement of criminals across borders. During Operation Neptune II, coordinated by INTERPOL in cooperation with six countries across Mediterranean ports - gateways to North Africa - those databases have allowed for the successful detection of 12 terror suspects earlier this year.

And of course, we are working to develop more coordinated operations in the fight against illicit trafficking, and replicate previous successes such as that of Operation Lionfish Sandcat held last year across the region. With the participation of much of the region, the operation had led to record seizures of captagon alongside other illicit drugs, and ultimately served to put 67 criminals behind bars.

From a broader perspective, among the outcomes of our previous meetings was to work jointly to increase the use of INTERPOL capabilities in your respective jurisdictions. And so we did, together.

Searches across the region in INTERPOL databases have increased by 30 per cent in just a single year. Records originating from the region and its law enforcement agencies grew by 15 per cent.

The results speak for themselves. The number of hits registered at your border points and across the specialized agencies provided with access to I-24/7 has increased 37 per cent in a single year.

These are not only hits on records shared by Europe, or by the Americas – these are hits on records owned and selectively shared by the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The hits generated in the region, against records held by the region, have increased by 52 per cent compared to last year.

Behind these impressive figures is also our joint work to ensure critical access to the I-24/7 communication network across the agencies within your respective national security structures, key transit hubs and your frontlines.

We are working closely with your National Central Bureaus, the custodians of I-24/7 in your countries, to support their search for fugitives through INTERPOL alerts. These are among our most powerful weapons against international criminals and the General Secretariat is supporting NCBs around the clock to ensure that notices and diffusions can be issued as rapidly as possible in compliance with our data processing rules.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I spoke earlier about bringing INTERPOL closer to the region.

Building the capacity and skills of your respective officers in the realm of international policing and state of the art investigation is an integral part of this effort.

Under this spirit, allow me to also announce that the prestigious Naif Arab University for Security Sciences has graciously agreed to host select editions of the INTERPOL Policing Capabilities Programme to train staff from your National Central Bureaus in the future.

I am grateful for this generous support. We look forward to organizing the next iteration of this programme alongside Naif Arab University, and to develop joint law enforcement training courses to support policing across the region.

Investing in teaching is investing in the future. And it is not a coincidence that the first ever INTERPOL Young Global Police Leaders programme was held in the region, to encourage the potential of the policing decision makers of tomorrow, and allow us to catch a glimpse into the future of policing. I would like to reiterate my gratitude to the United Arab Emirates for taking the lead in hosting this program.

In closing, I would like to thank you all once again for taking the time from your busy schedules to attend this meeting.

I wish to invite you to take every opportunity over the next two days to provide candid feedback and recommendations on how INTERPOL may best support your law enforcement agencies in the fight against transnational crime – today and in the future.

Thank you for your attention. Shukran Jazilan.