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Address

by

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI

To participants of the  
81st Session of the INTERPOL General Assembly

9 November 2012

Vatican City State

Distinguished Authorities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you as you conclude the General Assembly of INTERPOL, which has brought together here in Rome representatives of police and security agencies, along with political and institutional delegates of its 190 member states, that have included Vatican City State since 2008. I greet all those present, and through you I wish to offer my cordial greetings to the distinguished leaders of your countries and their citizens, for whose security you labour with professionalism and a spirit of service. In particular, I greet the Ministers and the members of Government, and the Italian Minister of Internal Affairs who has just spoken, as well as the President of INTERPOL and the Secretary General, whom I thank for his address to us just now.

In these days of study and discussion you have focused your attention on the development of international cooperation in the struggle against crime. It is important to strengthen collaboration and the exchange of expertise at a time when, at a global level, we see a widening of the sources of violence provoked by transnational entities which hinder the progress of humanity. Among these we include the evolution of criminal violence which is a particularly troubling aspect for the future of the world. No less important is the fact that the task of reflection brings together politicians responsible for security and justice, as well as judicial bodies and the forces of law and order, in such a way that each one, in his respective sphere, can offer an effective contribution to the service of constructive exchange. Indeed, political authorities, with the help of institutions of law and order, can more easily identify the most significant emerging risks to society and, as a consequence, will be able to give adequate legislative and operational direction to combating crime.

In our own day, the human family suffers owing to numerous violations of justice and law, which in not a few instances is seen in outbursts of violence and of criminal acts. Thus, it is necessary to safeguard individuals and communities by a constant, renewed determination,

and by adequate means. In this regard, the function of INTERPOL, which we may define as a bastion of international security, enjoys an important place in the realization of the common good, because a just society needs order and a respect for the rule of law to achieve a peaceful and tranquil coexistence in society. I know that some of you at times carry out your work in extremely dangerous conditions, and that you risk your lives to protect the lives of others and to facilitate the construction of a peaceful society.

We are aware that violence today is taking on new forms. At the end of the Cold War between the Eastern and Western blocks, there were high hopes, especially where a form of institutionalized political violence was ended by peaceful movements demanding freedom of peoples. However, although some forms of violence seem to have decreased, especially the number of military conflicts, there are others which are developing, such as criminal violence which is responsible each year for the majority of violent deaths in the world. Today, this phenomenon is so dangerous that it is a gravely destabilizing threat to society and, at times, poses a major challenge to the supremacy of the state.

The Church and the Holy See encourage all those who help to combat the scourge of violence and crime, as our world resembles more and more a global village. The gravest forms of criminal activities can be seen in terrorism and organized crime. Terrorism, one of the most brutal forms of violence, sows hate, death and a desire for revenge. This phenomenon, with subversive strategies typical of some extremist organizations aimed at the destruction of property and at murder, has transformed itself into an obscure web of political complicity, with sophisticated technology, enormous financial resources and planning projects on a vast scale (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 513). For its part, organized crime proliferates in ordinary places and often acts and strikes in darkness, outside of any rules; it does its work through numerous illicit and immoral activities, such as human trafficking – a modern form of slavery – the smuggling of materials or substances such as drugs, arms, contraband goods, even the traffic of pharmaceuticals, used in large part by the poor, which kill instead of curing. This illicit market becomes even more deplorable when it involves trafficking the organs of innocent victims: they undergo physical and moral humiliation which we had hoped were over after

the tragedies of the twentieth century but which, unfortunately, have again surfaced through the violence generated by crime carried out by unscrupulous persons and organizations. These crimes transgress the moral barriers which were progressively built up by civilization and they reintroduce a form of barbarism which denies man and his dignity.

Dear friends, this meeting today with you who work in international policing affords me the opportunity to assert once again that violence in all its forms, whether crime or terrorism, is always unacceptable, because it profoundly wounds human dignity and is an offence against the whole of humanity. It is therefore necessary to combat criminal activities within the limits of moral and juridical norms, since action against crime should always be carried out with respect for the rights of each person and of the principles of the rule of law. The struggle against violence must aim to stem crime and defend society, but it must also aim at the reform and the correction of the criminal, who remains always a human person, a subject of inalienable rights, and as such is not to be excluded from society, but rather rehabilitated. At the same time, international collaboration against crime cannot be reduced to the work done by police. It is essential that the necessary work of containing crime be accompanied by a courageous and lucid analysis of the underlying motives for such unacceptable criminal acts. Special attention should be paid to the factors of social exclusion and deprivation which persist in the population and which are a vehicle for the spread of violence and hatred. Special effort should also be made in the political and educational fields, to remedy the problems which feed violence, and to foster conditions that prevent violence from occurring or developing.

Therefore, the response to violence and crime cannot be delegated to the forces of law and order alone, but requires the participation of all those capable of confronting this phenomenon. To overcome violence is a task which must involve not only the institutions and organizations mentioned, but all of society: the family, educational institutions, including schools and religious bodies, the means of social communication, as well as each and every citizen. Everyone has his or her particular responsibility in building a future of justice and peace.

I renew to the authorities and all the staff of Interpol my gratitude for your work, which is not always easy and not always understood in its proper purpose. I cannot finish without acknowledging the assistance which INTERPOL offers to the Gendarmes of Vatican City State, especially during my international journeys. May the all-powerful and merciful God enlighten you as you carry out your responsibilities; may he sustain you in your service to society; and may he protect you, your co-workers and your families. Thank you for coming and may the Lord bless all of you!