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OPENING REMARKS

by

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INTERPOL Secretary General

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The Honorable Nelson Navarro, Minister of Justice of Curaçao,
INTERPOL President Mireille Ballestrazzi and Executive Committee members,
Commissioner Marlon Wernet, Chief of Curaçao Police Force,
Honorable Ministers, Chiefs of Police and Heads of INTERPOL National Central Bureaus
Dedicated colleagues from the INTERPOL General Secretariat,
Distinguished guests and invitees,

Ladies and Gentleman,

Today, across the street from us, lies a common challenge.

The Caribbean Sea is classified as having some of the most intensive maritime traffic in the world.

At the same time, the countries whose shores it touches are responsible for governing parts of these waters, which in some cases are larger than the land they oversee.

Criminal enterprises looking to transit drugs, humans or cash from one point to the next have taken notice, benefiting from this opportunity at the expense of countries here today and across the globe.

Law enforcement have noticed as well, which is why last month, INTERPOL launched Operation Lionfish in partnership with the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council (CCLEC).

Through the INTERPOL Capacity Building Programme on Organized Crime for the Americas, some 161 officers from police, customs, coast guard and naval agencies gathered from 34 countries to undergo specialized training in advance of Operation Lionfish.

These training sessions were conducted in this region, and implemented in order to better secure your coastlines and waters.

Over the 15 days that Operation Lionfish was run, drugs worth an estimated USD 822 million were seized alongside precursor chemicals, firearms and vessels.

Equally impressive is that enough cocaine was seized during this operation to equal roughly four per cent of what is seized globally in a given year.

Again, all within 15 days.

The 142 suspects arrested in Operation Lionfish probably thought they could carry out their activities with impunity.

But, our cooperation showed them they were wrong.

Others, such as Santo Scipione, most likely had the same belief – only to learn a similar lesson.

An alleged member of the Italian *Ndrangheta* and wanted by Italy for criminal organization and drug trafficking, Scipione arrived in the Americas hoping to avoid arrest and hoping to continue his illegal activities undetected.

But even an ocean separating Italy from this region was not enough to save him from the long arm of justice.

An INTERPOL Red Notice was issued, and following collaboration between INTERPOL Bogotá, INTERPOL Rome, and our Fugitive Investigations unit at INTERPOL headquarters, Scipione was successfully located and arrested in Medellin, Colombia two months ago.

He followed in the footsteps of another Italian organized crime figure, Antonio Reccia, who realized in December 2011 the reach of the global law enforcement community when he was arrested based on a Red Notice, right here in Curaçao.

The Reccia case is particularly symbolic because of the timing, taking place only a month after Curaçao joined INTERPOL back in 2011.

It symbolizes our ambitious and collective effort against transnational crime, and our ability to make a difference.

We witnessed this difference when Curaçao recently located and arrested the suspected leader of a human trafficking ring based on a Red Notice by Colombia, and we saw it again last week when the country entered the final phase of expanding I-24/7 services to their national police forces.

If this is not convincing enough, then consider that today Curaçao has brought the entire region together by graciously hosting the 22nd Americas Regional Conference.

However, progress, like that made by Curaçao over the last two years, has not been unique to the region, rather it's a common trend.

We have seen an increase in the use of INTERPOL tools and services to the point where our databases are now being searched by this region approximately 360 million times per year, compared to 280 million in 2011 and only a few million times 10 or so years ago – an extraordinary growth rate.

This growth is why, for the first time ever in 2012, our databases were searched 1 billion times globally – and remember that any one of those searches could be the stolen passport that prevents a suspected terrorist from entering your country, or that links a stolen vehicle used for a robbery in one country back to a potential suspect in another.

And when you want to alert your colleagues globally to known fugitives and escaped convicts, or disseminate intelligence on criminal operations, you have been one of the most active regions in doing so.

This is why, in 2012, you were the first region in INTERPOL history to issue more than 5,000 notices in one year, every one of which is instrumental in informing our daily activities and operations.

Perhaps no operation depends more on INTERPOL notices than INFRA-Red.

You heard at the 21st Americas Regional Conference about Operation INFRA-South America, which to date has resulted in the arrest of 57 fugitives with Red Notices against them and the location of another 32.

This success has since been repeated at the global level with INFRA-RED 2012, resulting in the arrest of 80 fugitives and 60 positive locations of wanted fugitives.

In the same way you rely on Red Notices to help arrest fugitives, you depend on real-time intelligence to protect and save victims from pharmaceutical crime and medical product counterfeiting.

At the last Americas Regional Conference, we talked about Operation Pangea III that took place in 2010 and involved 44 countries.

This operation resulted in the seizure of two million illicit pills worth USD 6.5 million, and the arrest of 87 individuals.

Now, we can talk about Pangea VI, an operation that concluded just this month of June with nearly 100 countries participating – many from this region.

Along with 58 arrests, almost 10 million illicit pills were seized during Pangea VI worth USD 41 million.

When compared to Pangea III, five times as many pills were seized in Pangea VI worth seven times as much.

This type of growth demonstrates how sustained cooperation between law enforcement and across borders can have meaningful results over time.

Results like these matter not only for criminals, but also for victims as well.

It mattered to the 356 victims of human trafficking rescued during Operation Spartacus, which was run out of our Regional Bureau in Buenos Aires last year, and it mattered to the 474 who were rescued in 2011 during Operations Pacto II and III, which were organized from our Regional Bureau in San Salvador.

Now imagine that the operational success of Spartacus, Pacto, or any other operation you have heard about, could be even greater.

This was the logic behind the creation of the INTERPOL Travel Document, a passport unique to INTERPOL that enables us and you to deploy the right staff, to the right place, at the right time at the invitation of the member country concerned.

The INTERPOL Travel Document has received resounding support from member countries because of the way it enables their police forces to access training and operations, rapidly and at low cost.

Consider that when this information was shared with you in 2011, only 18 countries recognized the INTERPOL Travel Document.

Now, it's 60.

The goal is that by the next time we meet this number will be over 100, and our hope is that the Americas will lead the way as we work towards this goal.

The exponential growth you have heard about is part of a larger, soaring global demand for our services.

However, without finding sustainable, alternative funding mechanisms, this demand will never be met by mandatory statutory contributions alone.

No business, no country and no organization that wishes to remain relevant speaks only about cutting costs during financial crises.

This is why INTERPOL has taken action.

As we have gotten better at cooperating internationally in preventing, investigating and prosecuting crime, we have gotten better at encouraging member countries, intergovernmental institutions and even private sector corporations to invest in INTERPOL.

In 2013, INTERPOL will be able to rely on EUR 19.4 million in funds from external donors, allowing us to build and strengthen the kinds of tools and services you and your colleagues utilize.

But paradoxically, a greater willingness to invest in INTERPOL has presented us with new challenges.

Certain countries have asked the question whether INTERPOL can maintain its independence, neutrality and reputation in light of increasing external financial support.

The answer is 'yes', but we need to find an agreed way of going about it.

This is why, last year, I asked Dr Jürgen Stock, Vice-President of Germany's BKA, to chair a Working Group on INTERPOL's Evolving Funding Model.

Because it was important for me, as Secretary General, and the Executive Committee to receive independent advice about options, the working group – open to all member countries – was asked to analyse this issue and make recommendations for us to consider.

Thanks to great leadership and strong collaboration with our INTERPOL General Secretariat staff, recently the working group reached agreement on a number of key findings and principles.

I adopted all of the recommendations in principle and encouraged the Executive Committee that it also endorse in principle the results advanced by the working group.

This year, at the General Assembly in Cartagena, Colombia, you will be presented with the way forward as proposed by the Executive Committee.

Dr Stock is also in attendance here today. Let me thank him once again. He has agreed to make himself available to meet with you if you have any questions concerning the working group.

Despite the many challenges confronting INTERPOL and our member countries at this time, we know for certain that our way forward lies in Southeast Asia, where we are building the INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation (IGCI) in Singapore.

The IGCI will help all countries, including those within the Americas region, to build capacity, to benefit from innovative training and to gain technical expertise in a variety of areas, including cybercrime.

Moreover, it will be operational and will actively assist our member countries in their cybercrime investigations by the next time we meet.

This is why absolutely anyone in this room belonging to a country that considers fighting cybercrime as a national law enforcement priority should assess today how you can best link into the IGCI of tomorrow.

One way is through the secondment of specialized officers to INTERPOL's General Secretariat, a process that has been central to our effectiveness in conventional crime areas since our foundation.

So today, I would like to put forward a challenge.

To those countries that do not yet have representation within INTERPOL's General Secretariat, I challenge you to help secure this region – your region. You can do so by seconding a law enforcement official from your staff to the INTERPOL General Secretariat at our headquarters in Lyon; to our Regional Bureaus in San Salvador and Buenos Aires or to our offices of Special Representatives in New York or Brussels.

And to those that already have representation, consider the value of seconding experts to the IGCI so that the Americas region will have a voice in the next stage of our future.

By working together, we will address both the conventional crimes that exist on the high seas of the Caribbean and the unconventional crimes emerging in the virtual world.

Law enforcement and police officials are what make INTERPOL what we are.

As our life source, you are what make us both unique and effective worldwide.

In making a greater commitment to international law enforcement cooperation and INTERPOL, we will improve the world around us.

And after all – at INTERPOL, and for all of us – this is what we are striving for – a better, safer world.

Thank you.