STATEMENT

by

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Open Briefing

"Traveller Identification and Travel Document Security"

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Madame Chair,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen, all Protocol observed,

Good morning.

It is an honour to be here today and to be able to address this distinguished gathering.

As INTERPOL Secretary General, I regard this event as yet another demonstration of how strong the relationship between INTERPOL and the United Nations has become and especially of the close ties between INTERPOL, the Counter Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate.

What brought us here today? The answer can be found in the snapshots of terror – far too many – that even the very recent past has provided us and the world.

- Islamabad's deadliest attack since the 2008 Marriott bombing, leaving a five-foot diameter crater in the middle of a crowded market and killing dozens earlier this month;

- The carnage at Nyanya Park bus station in Abuja, Nigeria 10 days ago, only 24 hours before more than 200 female students were kidnapped from a school in the same country;

- A single day of suicide attacks, roadside bombings and shooting sprees in Iraq, leaving more than 100 killed or wounded last Monday;

- Two lawmakers killed by al-Shabaab in Mogadishu only one day apart;

- Or the thousands of foreign fighters from Europe, North America and beyond who are being trained, equipped and deployed into the Syrian theatre as I speak.

Clearly, more than a decade since the creation of this Committee, and despite the extraordinary efforts devoted to combatting terrorism by the UN, its bodies and its Member States, the terrorist threat remains. As present. As clear. As deadly.

Most importantly, it remains as capable of exploiting any cracks in our defenses and any gaps in our resolve.

History and past bloodshed have taught us that transnational terrorists will cross borders time and again to complete their distorted mission.

Hence the need for United Nations Security Council travel bans and other targeted sanctions against individuals and entities, and the reason behind the issuing of INTERPOL-United Nations Security Council Special Notices based on those sanctions.

But, criminals and terrorists know that sanctions are linked to their identity. Therefore, they hide behind 'shields'– which will often take the form of stolen or fraudulently altered passports.

The international community has long recognized the need to remove those shields. Great examples are here today: the UN resolve on border and travel document security under its Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy; the ongoing efforts by this Committee and its Executive Directorate in monitoring the implementation of counter-terrorism resolutions; the International Civil

Aviation Organization's leadership in promoting the highest standards in travel document security; and of course, UNODC's terrorism prevention activities.

But despite these laudable efforts, a gaping hole remains in our defenses. Yet a hole that, I believe, can be eliminated and relegated to the past with decisive action on the part of the UN and its Member States.

For more than a decade, INTERPOL has spoken about and acted to address the urgent need to fill this gap. Yet that urgency did not seem to grab the public and media's attention, until the tragic and puzzling disappearance of flight MH370 in March 2014.

Almost immediately after the incident, the world was shocked to learn that two passengers had used stolen Austrian and Italian passports registered in INTERPOL's databases to board that flight. Speculation ensued as to possible terrorist links to those passports, their holders and the fate of MH370. No such links have been found to date.

Less known, but perhaps even more shocking, is that on 7 April, just four weeks later, three other passengers were able to board two different airplanes at the very same airport, using stolen Turkish passports also recorded in INTERPOL's databases. Only this time, these passengers were exposed by Singapore's regular checks against those databases and stopped upon landing.

Yes, it is still possible to use a stolen passport to board international flights. Not only in Kuala Lumpur, but also in 170 or so other countries. This, despite the lesson of flight MH370 and other painful lessons. In a nutshell, it only takes one passenger to go through undetected, for terrorism to succeed.

The very city where we gather today is a constant reminder of the danger we face.

It was here in New York that on 1 August 1992, a 25-year old man entered the US at JFK Airport using a stolen Iraqi passport and seeking asylum under false pretenses.

Six months later, he parked an explosives-laden van under the World Trade Center complex, as the mastermind of the 26 February 1993 bombing. His name was Ramzi Yousef and he represented a lethal threat: a mobile terrorist, able to exploit cracks in the system using a stolen passport to cross international borders. Yet a threat far from unique.

In 1999 another al-Qaida operative, Ahmed Ressam, was arrested for trying to enter the US with 100 pounds of explosive components in his car and a plan to blow up Los Angeles International Airport, destroying hundreds if not thousands of innocent lives.

Ressam had a history of fraudulent travel document use, and regularly engaged in the theft and trafficking of passports to raise funds and to support his fellow terrorist operatives.

Still in 1999, 100 'blank' Croatian passport booklets were stolen in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Four years later, Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was assassinated by a sniper in Belgrade. Among those responsible was Milorad Ulemek, who had used one of those stolen blank passports to cross the borders of Switzerland, Austria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Singapore and Croatia 26 times in total.

And as I speak, Samantha Lewthwaite, the so-called 'white widow' of one of the London July 2005 suicide bombers, has been internationally wanted since 2013 by Kenya for possession of explosives in Mombasa and is still at large. She has known aliases associated with one fraudulent passport and to a stolen passport.

Similarly, stolen passports are currently listed in INTERPOL databases in connection with suspected members of Al-Shabaab – the group responsible for more than 500 attacks in the past six years across East Africa.

Madame Chair,
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Ladies and gentlemen,

The list seems endless, as are the opportunities available to those intending to cross international borders to spread terror. But there are many out there working to change that, including frontline officers guarding those borders.

In INTERPOL's eyes, preventing international terrorist movement is about helping those officers make the right decision, about whom to allow to continue with their journeys; whom to question; and whom to detain. To that end, INTERPOL designed and implemented three complementary tools, which today constitute our state-of-the art border security package.

First – INTERPOL's Stolen and Lost Travel Document database (SLTD), containing more than 40 million records, including information on more than 2,900 stolen or lost Laissez-Passer(s) provided by the United Nations itself.

Last year alone, this wealth of information was accessed more than 800 million times to screen passengers. Back in 2005, when the first batch of INTERPOL-

United Nations Security Council Special Notices was issued, slightly more than 200,000 SLTD searches had been conducted. If you go back another two years from then, in 2003 we barely reached 1,500.

The second tool - is the Digital INTERPOL Alert Library -Document (DIAL-DOC), developed jointly with the G8 to help member countries better detect identity document counterfeiting or forgery. Launched in 2013, it provides access to more than 600 alerts from 14 countries, and to 4,000 specimens of authentic foreign travel documents made available by Dutch authorities.

Third – the Travel Documents Associated With Notices (TDAWN) platform, enabling authorized users to detect, through travel document checks, fugitives wanted internationally; individuals deemed to pose a criminal threat and known to INTERPOL; and any subject of UN Security Council sanctions monitored by the nine Sanctions Committees currently working with INTERPOL.

Three different tools. One package. One single goal: stopping criminals and terrorists before they hide behind yet another passport to harm others. Even better, turning that passport into a powerful weapon against them. A goal that INTERPOL has seen achieved time and again in the field.

If Ramzi Yousef were even to attempt to board a plane to JFK airport today, he would never make it. Not when all inbound travellers to the US are screened against the SLTD database even before boarding. Indeed, he would become one of the 67,000 annual 'hits' recorded in that database.

Just like the two passengers ready to board a flight to Ireland but stopped by French police, after a journey originating in Kabul, Afghanistan and involving six INTERPOL member countries, three continents, and two stolen UK passports acquired in Mali.

Or like the self-claimed businessman stopped upon landing in Johannesburg, South Africa from Kenya, after SLTD matched his passport to one of the 2,000 blank documents stolen eight years previously in Pakistan. The same batch of stolen passports would later trigger hit alarms in Spain, the UK and China.

Therefore, let's look at the facts: the threat remains, but it can be successfully neutralized far more often than is currently the case. On one condition: that we seize all the opportunities before us....that we systematically use all the means at our disposal to screen those identity documents.

A condition which, to this day, is inexplicably far from being met. This, 21 years from the first World Trade Center bombing; 13 years since 9/11; and a decade since INTERPOL's Stolen and Lost Travel Document database became available to its member countries.

Currently, only nine countries account together for 80 per cent of total checks conducted via SLTD worldwide.

Out of the 10 countries hosting the top global hubs for international air passengers, only three are among the top 10 users of the SLTD database. And only two conduct a number of searches equal to or greater than the number of international passengers travelling through their airports.

At a time when we accept being required to systematically remove clothing, belts and shoes; empty our water bottles; expose our belongings to x-ray; and walk through magnetometers over and over, only a handful of countries systematically screen travel documents against INTERPOL databases.

Approximately 1.2 billion passengers flew internationally on scheduled flights in 2013. The same year, 808 million searches were recorded in the SLTD database. Therefore, a minimum of 400 million individuals were NOT screened against INTERPOL's SLTD database – and that's our most optimistic estimate.

Considering domestic passengers and land crossings, the number will soar even further. And with it, the gaping hole in global travel security.

In the meantime, the price for inaction is rising by the minute. According to ICAO, in 2020 1.7 billion air passengers will cross borders. By 2030, there will be a billion more. Emerging economies, where law enforcement capacity may lag behind, will reflect much of that growth.

The time to act - is NOW…The time for the United Nations, for this Committee and for its Executive Directorate to join INTERPOL, and make it a global priority to close this security gap.

An unequivocal call by this Committee upon UN Member States to systematically use INTERPOL platforms would send an incredibly powerful message worldwide.

Similarly, I see the use of INTERPOL tools as a key component of CTC/CTED monitoring. I would encourage country visit teams to ask very specific questions, like "Are INTERPOL tools deployed at your frontlines?"; "If so, are they systematically used to screen passengers?"; "If not, why not?"; "What can the international community do to help and change this?".

The tools I presented today were conceived to work in the field, no matter where and no matter a country's capabilities.

Existing border management structures can be linked easily to INTERPOL's system. Where local regulations or infrastructure do not allow this, mobile solutions can easily be deployed. Costs can vary from a few hundred to several thousand USD per location depending on the particular needs of a member country. Once operational, the SLTD database can respond to queries in less than a second, or up to a few seconds based on local infrastructure. In the past, we saw countries enter the top 10 users list, within a single month of the deployment of this tool.

Therefore, no single country can say: "We cannot do it".

Moreover, at a time when governments are failing to fill this enormous gap, we should look for new allies and untapped resources, and turn to those private sector entities with the greatest responsibility to screen identity documents.

For example, travelling criminals and terrorists will often have to present those documents to book trips, rent cars, open bank accounts, and check into hotels. But each transaction completed with a fraudulent travel document is also a missed opportunity to stop that threat.

This very principle is behind INTERPOL's *I-Checkit* initiative, aiming to empower private sector entities such as airlines, cruise lines, hotels and financial institutions to protect their businesses and customers by screening their identity documents legally and transparently via INTERPOL's databases, but without direct access to restricted police data.

The September 11 terrorist attacks made deterrence an absolute priority. If visible magnetometers deter people from carrying weapons onto planes, when it comes to the criminal use of stolen or lost travel documents, the same would

apply to the visible, systematic screening of passports by the industry against INTERPOL databases.

As I speak, pilot projects are ongoing with select airlines. Only 48 hours ago, the *I-Checkit* solution was fully integrated into one of their departure control systems. In parallel, tests have been conducted with the banking sector in one country. More than 400,000 documents used by foreign nationals to open bank accounts were checked against the SLTD database, resulting in more than 2,000 hits.

Clearly, there is potential for a revolution in how we prevent terrorists and dangerous criminals from even reaching our borders. I would therefore encourage this Committee and United Nations Member States to explore this option with INTERPOL, and to see how key industries in your respective countries can be involved in our common efforts to protect our citizens from harm.

Madame Chair,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We were brought together today by a basic question: "How can we do better to stop terrorists from crossing borders with fraudulent travel documents?"

If we stand still, and let this glaring global security gap remain open, then one day, once again, many will ask: "Why didn't we stop them, when we could have?"

But if we act – now; we can and will succeed; we will know that yes, our borders will be more secure. And that yes - we did "unite our strengths" – for "international peace and security", and for a safer world.

Thank you.