



Opening Address

by

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INTERPOL Secretary General

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Honourable Gabriel Oprea, Vice Prime Minister of National Security and Minister of Internal Affairs of Romania,
Honourable Oleg Balan, Minister of Internal Affairs of Moldova,
Honourable Dimitrijs Trofimovs, Deputy State Secretary of the Interior of Latvia,
Mr Petre Toba, Inspector General of the Romanian Police,
Chiefs of Police,
Mr Gilles de Kerchove, Counter Terrorism Coordinator, General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union,
Mr Wil Van Gemert, Deputy Director of Operations, Europol,
Members of the INTERPOL Executive Committee,
Heads of INTERPOL National Central Bureaus,
Representatives from international organizations,
Honourable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

Just over a 100 years ago, at the first international criminal police congress held at Monaco in 1914, proposals were made for the next congress to be held in 1916, at another city in Europe.

But history had other plans, and the next congress could not take place owing to – as we all know – the events that transpired in Europe, and indeed the world.

Nevertheless, INTERPOL's General Assembly in Monaco recently marked 100 years of international police cooperation, and now the first European Regional Conference since after that event – is being held in the very city that had planned to host the 2nd international criminal police congress.

Ladies and gentlemen, this moment is therefore befitting, for Bucharest – to host this conference, as it begins, amidst the presence of such distinguished participants.

Times were difficult then in Europe and times are difficult now, even if for different reasons. Yet, throughout this time, to safeguard citizens and their freedom, police personnel have served and often fallen in their line of duty. We have also unfortunately, witnessed this happen again and again, in the last few months.

But for such relentless, dedicated work of law enforcement to continue across borders, it is essential that it gets the consistent backing of governments and of decision-makers.

We are therefore extremely grateful for the presence here today, of the Honourable Ministers, and for their interest in INTERPOL's work for fostering global police cooperation.

At this moment, I also wish to convey apologies on behalf of the INTERPOL President, Mrs. Mireille Ballestrazzi, who could not attend this conference owing to unavoidable duties related to her national responsibilities. We are grateful for the presence of INTERPOL Executive Committee delegates for Europe, Chairman Filippo Dispenza from Italy, Mr Alexander Prokopchuk from the Russian Federation, and Mr. David Armond from the United Kingdom.

In the European region, governments' support to law enforcement has become even more crucial, in the wake of recent global events.

A new, increased threat level became evident in the series of incidents since early January this year, starting with the terrorist attacks in Paris. This happened soon after I had assumed office at INTERPOL last November, with the first major event for my participation being at the UN Security Council.

The Paris attacks were to be followed by a series of terrorist incidents, attacks and anti-terrorism operations in Europe and in many places beyond Europe.

Europe itself has shown its vulnerability not only as a target, but also as a resource for terrorism. The number of Foreign Terrorist Fighters traveling from all over Europe towards conflict zones has been on the rise. INTERPOL's database presently contains more than 1,500 such profiles from Europe alone.

Others are choosing Europe and its sub-regions, such as the Balkans, as corridors to reach their intended destinations.

In parallel, European borders are dealing with yet another grave concern: illegal migration, and the dangerous involvement of transnational organized crime groups in facilitating it as just another source for profit. This, often without concern for the loss of human life, as was seen in recent tragedies in the Mediterranean.

All in all, seeking responses to the current threat level, governments worldwide have been relooking at the global security architecture. That is how, for instance, INTERPOL was recognized by the UN Security Council, in its Resolution 2178 (in September 2014) as the global platform for information exchange on Foreign Terrorist Fighters.

At the same time, INTERPOL is being called to participate in high level meetings time and again, forging political will for the fight against these new threats. Examples abound:

- the informal EU ministerial meeting in January in Riga, at the invitation of Latvia's Minister of Interior;
- in February, the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in the United States, held under the chairmanship of Secretary Kerry, Secretary Holder and Secretary Johnson, which myself and Mr de Kerchove attended;
- quite recently, two weeks ago, the Salzburg Forum ministerial conference, where INTERPOL's participation was sought by Austria's Minister of Interior;
- Or the UN Security Council, where once again later this month, to speak on its efforts in the global fight against Terrorism upon the invitation of Lithuania.
- Finally, next July, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and I will meet to discuss how INTERPOL and the EU, together, can further help strengthen European security.

Yet, whether at the political or operational level, two common observations seem to emerge.

Firstly, better international law enforcement information sharing needs to be endorsed as a key principle. Secondly, we must improve cooperation and information sharing not only within regions, but across continents. This also applies to Europe and its neighboring regions.

This is exactly where INTERPOL can play a strong and efficient role with its tools and services. Together, we can further strengthen INTERPOL's ability to act as the global platform of information sharing, against global threats.

Whether in facing organized crime facilitating illegal immigration across borders, cyber-enabled crimes, or Foreign Terrorist Fighters, this principle will apply. All international tools, resources, and response mechanisms will never prove their effectiveness, without shared information as their strong foundation.

Indeed, INTERPOL has made the collection of intelligence across regions one of its priorities. Just last week, INTERPOL held an extraordinary operational meeting with counter terrorism experts from the Middle East and North Africa region focused on data exchange and best practices.

Typically, INTERPOL will encourage data owners to allow access of such information to European member countries and Europol. For example, we are one of the largest contributors of profiles on Foreign Terrorist Fighters to Europol's Focal Point Travelers initiative.

However, this sharing is not two-way presently. Europol and INTERPOL complement each other's work very well – but current restrictions by select EU member states are still limiting synergies between the two organizations.

Nevertheless, we are confident that, by working and communicating closely with those countries sharing INTERPOL and EU membership, we will achieve even more together.

What is clear is that we need to put more effort into promoting INTERPOL's tools and services. Only if they are known and understood, will they be put to effective use.

Our strong data protection regime is a case in point. A member country entering any piece of data in INTERPOL's system will always remain in complete possession of the data; will be able to decide with whom it is to be shared, or even to delete the information at any stage. Yet we are still fighting with a perception that sharing information through INTERPOL implies full access by all 190 member countries!

Obviously, much remains to be achieved. Bilateral and multilateral dialogue with Ministers shows encouraging results. For instance, Ministers from central and southeast Europe participating in the "Salzburg forum", which I mentioned earlier, will establish a "High Level Reflection Group on Information Exchange" which both Europol and INTERPOL are invited to join.

I have also proposed additional secondments to INTERPOL – particularly by counterterrorism experts – in order for them to experience firsthand our data processing rules.

I am confident that this dialogue and other such measures will help us develop a strong and efficient architecture of security with European partners such as Europol, the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC) and the Southeast Europe Police Chiefs Association (SEPCA).

Ladies and gentlemen, with information available, the next natural step is to make sure it will reach the right officer in the field. This is where the deployment of specific INTERPOL tools - for example in strengthening border security - becomes pivotal.

INTERPOL's tools – such as the Stolen and Lost Travel Documents Database – are not new to those police agencies that have seen the results of their systematic use for themselves. Our NCBs have been invaluable pioneers in this respect.

Today let me encourage all countries represented here today to further extend access to INTERPOL data services beyond their National Central Bureaus, to the frontlines of policing, such as at national borders.

And for INTERPOL to continue delivering its tools and services the organization owes its gratitude to those institutions that have lent it their support. In particular, I would like to thank the European Union institutions for their consistent support to the funding of multiple INTERPOL initiatives.

Such contribution is all the more welcome in financially challenging times for INTERPOL. As for the organization's measures to keep up with such challenges, I shall talk about the steps we are taking in detail, on day three of the conference as a part of my presentation on the "INTERPOL 2020" project.

For now, I can say that this process, aimed at better meeting the expectations of member countries, is already proving its value, particularly in identifying the difficult decisions that were needed.

Among them is the reduction in the number of staff working at INTERPOL, to build a financially sustainable organization. We are faced with the same challenge as many of our member countries in the past – which is to meet higher expectations, with lesser resources. But we also see across Europe that the resource cuts are coming to end in at least some countries. The shift in policy is to now strengthen law enforcement capacities significantly.

Despite all budgetary constraints, INTERPOL is working to support its newly built Global Complex for Innovation in Singapore (IGCI), which will also be housing a think-tank to support global policing. Many delegations from the European region recently attended the official opening of this new structure and were impressed by the opportunities this new building presents – presents to all of us.

However, as we face these challenges, I also appeal for more officers from law enforcement agencies of member countries to be seconded to INTERPOL. Secondments will play an even more important role in our revised strategy on human resources, while creating a win-win situation for both member countries and INTERPOL, by providing flexibility in achieving our aims.

In this context, let me take this opportunity in introducing a very fine senior officer seconded to INTERPOL very recently. He has taken over as the new Executive Director of Police Services, from Mr Jean-Michel Louboutin.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr Tim Morris has had a distinguished career with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) since he joined it in 1986. He has experience in commanding the AFP's Counter Terrorism Intelligence Functions; was previously Head of INTERPOL National Bureau Canberra; and was head of the high tech crime unit, before coming to join INTERPOL at Lyon . I am convinced that under Tim's leadership – our efforts to serve INTERPOL member countries will only get stronger. Welcome on board, Tim.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I conclude, I must further acknowledge the support INTERPOL receives in its work.

INTERPOL is thankful for the excellent cooperation that we see growing between us and the EU institutions, through INTERPOL's Office of the Special Representative to the European Union, in Brussels.

Likewise, we are grateful today for the presence of representatives from Europol, Frontex, SELEC and SEPICA, with all of whom INTERPOL enjoys fruitful and mutually beneficial relationships – in working to jointly enhance the safety of the European region.

The interest and support of this region's member countries is also visible in the number of high level candidates they have nominated for the elections to the INTERPOL European Committee, which I congratulate for its valuable work and achievements over time.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the minds of those who met in Monaco in 1914, and had aimed to meet again here in Bucharest two years later, was a very simple vision: to build a new security architecture – for the world, and for Europe as one of its key components. Today, that vision lives through INTERPOL and all the law enforcement bodies Europe has created through the years.

No matter the evolving nature of threats, and the challenges stemming from them for police, a single truth remains, as valid back then as today: Europe will always need a secure gateway to police in the rest of the world. And it will always find one in INTERPOL.

Vice Prime Minister Mr Oprea, Inspector General Mr Toba, on behalf of INTERPOL and all the member countries of the European region, in closing let me extend our sincere gratitude for the excellent organization of this conference and the warm hospitality under your supervision! Thank you – “Mulțumesc”.

Romania is a very regular and systematic user of INTERPOL tools, and is one of the top member countries to provide operational information.

Incidentally, this also happens to be my first ever visit to Romania. Even through my entire policing career in Germany’s BKA, perhaps no trip took place, because our cooperation with the Romanian police bodies was simply excellent – and no issues needed to ever be sorted out!

Now, on a lighter note – this does not mean that my travel to any INTERPOL member country would only be when issues arise!

I wish you all a very successful 43rd European Regional Conference, and I also take this opportunity in inviting you all to the 84th INTERPOL General Assembly to be held in Rwanda later this year.

Thank you very much for your kind attention, and thank you once again to our hosts, Romania.