



OPENING ADDRESS

by

Jürgen Stock

INTERPOL Secretary General

23rd Americas Regional Conference

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Your Excellency, President of Panamá, Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez;

Senior officials of the Panamanian government and the Panama National Police;

Honourable Ministers and Ambassadors;

INTERPOL Vice-President for the Americas and Executive Committee Delegates;

Chiefs of Police and Heads of INTERPOL National Central Bureaus;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

¡Buenos días a todos!

A very good morning to all of you.

It is my great privilege to welcome you to the 23rd INTERPOL Americas Regional Conference, here in “the Hub of the Americas”, Panama.

The international policing community is deeply honoured by the presence here today of His Excellency, President Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez. On behalf of INTERPOL, I would like to express my gratitude for providing an ideal setting for this important event. I would also like to offer our sincere condolences on the recent tragic loss of members of your government team. Our thoughts are with their families, friends, and colleagues at this time.

Panama is one of the most stable and fastest growing economies in Latin America. Just last month, the ambitious Canal expansion project was finished, and will increase capacity and competitiveness.

Indeed, what better place to come together to strengthen police capabilities in the Americas, than the meeting point of civilizations in the centre of the hemisphere?

Millions of years ago, the Isthmus of Panama joined the continents and changed the world forever. By providing a bridge for human, animal, and plant migration, it increased biodiversity. By changing the ocean currents, it created a favourable climate for human development.

Today, we are also assembled to create change; to look at the ways in which we can better protect and serve the region and its citizens, and consequently, the world.

We face increasingly complex security and policing challenges on local, national, regional, and global levels; and our joint action must connect them all.

The trafficking of illegal narcotics, illicit weapons, and vulnerable human beings across our borders remains a clear and significant threat. Violent and organised crime has caused immeasurable suffering and damage to our communities. Age old threats such as terrorism are joined by the newer menaces of cybercrime and online child exploitation.

These scourges cannot, and should not, be battled by individual countries in isolation. To prevent and fight crime in the 21st century, we must combine our strengths and work together towards our shared vision of a safer world.

I am therefore pleased to see representatives gathered here from the entire breadth of the Americas - from Argentina and Chile to Canada, from Mexico to Trinidad and Tobago. I cannot understate the importance of convoking all of our members from the region, and appreciate the efforts you each made to attend.

I also extend a warm welcome to our observer countries who are joining us from other parts of the world, as well as to the international organizations and other observers present: CARICOM; the Central American Integration System (SICA); the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP); and the UN Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament, and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC). Your attendance underlines the significance of this region in global security, as well as the crucial value of relationships between actors in our domain.

Excelentísimo Señor Presidente,

Last year, during the General Debate of the UN General Assembly, you chose to bring before the entire world an issue at the core of INTERPOL's birth and existence. You told the community of nations that "the exchange of security information and intelligence by governments is key," and that Panama supports its neighbors in the fight against crime.

In helping to carry out that vision, I pay tribute to the efforts of the *Policía Nacional de Panamá* under the leadership of the Director General Omar Ariel Pinzón Marín. So far this year, the National Police of Panama has seized 20 tons of drugs – 4 tons more than during the same period in 2015 – and arrested over 250 gang-members in 11 operations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be able to visit this dynamic and vibrant country for the first time as Secretary General. However, this is not the first time that Panama has hosted this Conference. There have been many changes in this country, the Americas, and the world, since the 4th INTERPOL Americas Regional Conference was held here in 1974.

While INTERPOL's commitment to serve police worldwide remains the same, we are also committed to innovate and respond to the threat landscape. As an Organization, we are constantly adapting and evolving to best support the needs of our member countries.

To this end, over the next two and a half days, we will learn about national experiences in different crime areas. We will hear about the work going on in our General Secretariat to provide optimal support to our members. We will hold consultations to listen to your views on the ways in which we, as an Organization, should continue to improve and move forward with our global strategic reform agenda, INTERPOL 2020.

Particularly on the latter point, I would like to thank the INTERPOL Executive Committee for its steadfast support and dedication in guiding the Organization in its global reform agenda. Let me recognize first and foremost the Vice-President for the Americas, Mr. Todd Shean, as our Chairman; Delegate for the Americas, Ms. Jolene Lauria from the United States; Delegate for Asia, Mr. Daqi Duan from China; and Delegate for Europe, Mr. Alexander Prokopchuk from Russia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Isthmus of Panama is the only place in the world where one can watch the sun rise over the Pacific and set over the Atlantic. May the outcome of this event be as unique, and may our work be inspired by the Panamanian national motto: "*pro mundi beneficio*" – for the benefit of the world.

Mr. President, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen; I would like to thank you once again for your presence and participation in this important event for our Organization.

In closing, on behalf of myself and INTERPOL President Mireille Ballestrazzi, I look forward to lively and productive discussions, and wish you all a wonderful stay in this beautiful country.

Muchas gracias.