



INTERPOL

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**“THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF EU POLICE CO-OPERATION
IN WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES: TOWARDS GLOBAL
AND INTEGRATED INTERNATIONAL POLICING”**

**EU-INTERPOL Joint Symposium
(BRUSSELS, 30 SEPTEMBER 2010)**

Prepared Remarks

by

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Belgian Minister of Interior, Annemie Turtelboom,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Special guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you. I am very pleased to welcome you to this Symposium.

One year ago this month, INTERPOL officially inaugurated our Office of the Special Representative to the European Union in Brussels. We sought to have a presence here to enhance the already strong and fruitful cooperation we enjoyed with the EU.

The fact that all of you took time out of your schedules to join us today is a sign that we have achieved what we set out to do. It is also a real demonstration of your commitment to strengthening security – in Europe, in West Africa and throughout the world.

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Back in 2007, INTERPOL deployed a team to Mauritania to assist national authorities with their investigation following the seizure of 629 kilos of cocaine that had been abandoned on an airport runway.

The cocaine had been transported from Venezuela aboard a propeller plane modified with auxiliary fuel tanks that extended its normal flying range. An INTERPOL international wanted persons notice was issued for the man authorities believed was the intended recipient of the shipment.

Over the next few years, we would send specialized teams to Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and again to Mauritania to provide investigative and technical assistance with large seizures.

What once seemed like a trickle has turned into a full-scale assault on countries in the region by transnational drug-trafficking networks.

As much as a quarter of the cocaine consumed in Europe transits through West Africa from South America.

The costs of this flow – on all regions involved – are staggering.

It is estimated that there are now 12 million cocaine users in Europe, with usage rates doubling or tripling in several of the largest economies.

Drug cartels have shifted significant activities from Colombia to Venezuela, and perhaps partly as a result, Venezuela's murder rate has spiked. Last year, the country saw four times more civilian deaths than Iraq.

And countries in West Africa now face issues that rarely existed in the past, like drug-related violence and addiction and abuse. Local networks are being paid in cocaine, making the countries both transit and consumption points.

These are proud countries emerging from years of civil strife and instability. The added menace of drug trafficking undoes any progress we have made and undermines all our efforts to foster sustainable peace and prosperity in the region.

This has implications for countries far beyond Africa's borders. The current EU Internal Security Strategy recognizes this by highlighting the interdependence of internal and external security.

One of the projects I am most excited about is the West African Coast Initiative in support of the Regional Plan of Action on illicit drug trafficking and organized crime of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Our partners on the West African Coast Initiative are the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UN Department of Political Affairs, ECOWAS and national authorities in the four pilot countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

It is the essence of integrated policing, because we are coming together to leverage our individual strengths and expertise to achieve the greatest impact.

The European Commission has pledged \$16 million towards the implementation of the ECOWAS Plan of Action, while several EU members, including Austria and the Netherlands, are supporting our work in individual countries.

The first component of the initiative will see the creation of elite Transnational Crime Units in each country. These units will bring together police, customs and immigration officers, prosecutors and INTERPOL National Central Bureaus to work side-by-side.

It also involves the expansion of access to INTERPOL's I-24/7 communications network and global police databases to international airports and other border points, putting INTERPOL tools and services directly into the hands of the officers who need them the most.

We hope to see results like the ones already seen in Ghana and Senegal. Both went from zero searches of our database of stolen and lost travel documents before they extended access to airports and borders in 2008 to tens of thousands of searches.

More important than the numbers of searches is the fact that these tools strengthen border security by putting transnational criminals on alert that the days of moving around the region with impunity are over.

We are very fortunate to have strong support from the EU, its bodies like Europol and its member countries on this and many of our initiatives in the region.

Funded by Germany, our OASIS program has provided operational and analytical training to thousands of police officers from all corners of the African continent. And last year, INTERPOL, Italy and Nigeria launched a groundbreaking joint initiative to tackle human trafficking and illegal immigration and the organizations behind these crimes.

Partnerships like these are critical.

The EU Stockholm Programme adopted in December 2009 specifically calls for enhanced cooperation with INTERPOL, and I urge all of you to enlist INTERPOL to assist in areas where we can make a meaningful impact.

We have a network of National Central Bureaus throughout West Africa and a Regional Bureau in Côte d'Ivoire and close ties with the West African Police Chiefs Committee (WAPCCO).

Ladies and gentlemen,

Countries are interconnected. I have spoken briefly – and we will hear in much greater detail over the course of today – how a crime originating in one region destabilizes all others in its wake.

And crimes are interconnected. Drug trafficking raises the specter of further violence and corruption. Routes created can be used to commit many other cross-border crimes. And unstable areas make attractive safe havens for extremists.

Let us take what we learn today and use it to integrate our efforts even further to avoid the duplication of resources and to strengthen our collective endeavors.

I would like to close by expressing my gratitude to Minister Turtelboom and our Belgian hosts for their great support and hospitality, without which this symposium would not have been possible.

And I would also like to recognize INTERPOL's Special Representative to the EU, Mr. Pierre Reuland, and his staff for all of their hard work in organizing this event.

Thank you.