

Briefing on Global Security and Virtual Borders

Speech by [Ronald K. Noble](#) INTERPOL Secretary General
15 June - New York

Members of the Secretariat,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In the 10 years I have had the privilege of serving as Secretary General of INTERPOL, we have all seen and suffered from a growing epidemic of traditional and innovative criminal activities enhanced by extraordinary technology and facilitated by great illicit wealth.

I would like to share with you a few of the compelling missions INTERPOL has undertaken in just the past couple weeks in order to provide a snapshot of our activities globally. These cases have been unfolding in different corners of the world, involving very different crimes.

Last Wednesday, less than 48 hours before the World Cup football championships kicked off in Johannesburg, INTERPOL was alerted by one of our member countries about an urgent case of a woman possibly being lured to South Africa under false pretenses to be victimized.

We took the alert very seriously because experience has taught us that human traffickers often use fraud and deception, like offers of lawful employment or settlement, or sheer force to bring young women and children to the sites of major international sporting events for sexual exploitation – in what can only be called one of the cruelest forms of supply and demand.

In this case, the young woman had accepted a prize from a major telecommunications company to attend the World Cup. Her family suspected the prize was a fraud and contacted the police in Colombia about their fears.

INTERPOL's National Central Bureau in Bogotá sent her itinerary and passport information to our Command and Co-ordination Centre located at our General Secretariat Headquarters in Lyon, France, at about 2 that morning.

The woman was due to transit through Dubai on her way to South Africa, but by the time we had received this information, we confirmed by reviewing the flight manifest that she already had boarded the flight from Dubai.

Time was quickly running out for us to alert the South African police so that they could meet her upon her arrival, so that she would not be lost in the shuffle of hundreds of thousands of foreign visitors.

We had deployed a Major Events Support Team to South Africa during the World Cup for the very purpose of screening visitors to the country. That team and the South African police were stationed at all of the country's major international airports and border crossings.

Armed with the relevant flight, passport and other identifying information, South African police officers and one of the Spanish-speaking officers on our team met her as she was exiting the plane.

Although she said she was not a victim of trafficking, we were not completely convinced. Human traffickers frequently coach their victims on what to say if stopped by law enforcement. They use threats of violence against them or their families to ensure their cooperation.

In the end, following extensive background work by INTERPOL National Central Bureaus in Abu Dhabi, Bogotá and Pretoria, we were able to confirm that she was not a victim.

Her family and the Colombian police were satisfied, the INTERPOL alert was cancelled, and our network and system proved resilient to the specific needs of that case.

Two days later, within hours of the first media reports of a prison break in Sudan, we were able to confirm the reports, gather the relevant identifying information from Sudanese authorities, and send out global security alerts – which we call Orange Notices – with the photos and identity particulars of the four escapees.

All prison breaks are serious and all fugitives pose a potential threat. You may recall that last January, 3,000 of Haiti's most dangerous inmates reportedly escaped following the devastating earthquake, adding to the woes of a country already in turmoil and putting the whole region on alert.

But the one in Sudan was especially urgent, because the prisoners had been sentenced to death a week before for the killing of a U.S. government aid official and his driver. For police, there are perhaps no more dangerous escapees than those facing the death sentence. They have the least to lose and will use the most violent means to stay free.

The Orange Notices were disseminated to police around the world to limit the escapees' ability to travel freely and to warn police of the potential danger if they were to confront them.

The next day, we were helping police in the United Arab Emirates to confirm the arrest of a man in Poland – who was suspected of involvement in the assassination of the former leader of Hamas – for obtaining a German passport fraudulently.

On another continent, following close co-operation between INTERPOL National Central Bureaus in Chile and Peru, Joran van der Sloot, a named suspect by authorities in Aruba in the disappearance of an American woman in May 2005, was detained by INTERPOL officers in Chile two weeks ago and expelled to Peru for the alleged murder of a 21-year-old Peruvian woman.

Van der Sloot had been arrested in the highly publicized disappearance and presumed murder of the American student, Nathalie Holloway, but never charged. Whether he had any involvement is still for the courts to decide, but there are reports that he confessed to the killing in Peru.

He has also been charged by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Alabama for extortion in connection with the Holloway case for seeking to obtain money in exchange for information relating to the location of her body.

What is the common link between all of the cases I have just discussed?

They are fast-moving, they involve mobility and they have implications for the security of countries far beyond where they occurred.

They also illustrate perfectly how INTERPOL connects police for a safer world.

We ensure that whenever, wherever, there is a call for assistance – during an investigation, after a natural disaster, following a prison escape, when a terrorist strikes or a cyber-crime is committed – that call is answered.

The backbone of our efforts is our network of National Central Bureaus located in each one of our 188 member countries. They are controlled and staffed by the national authorities in the country in which they are located, and they act as our points of contact between law enforcement and INTERPOL in their countries and between law enforcement around the world.

From the above examples, you can see that the continued success of INTERPOL's network will depend on the ability of police to determine the identity, location and backgrounds of individuals, whether criminal or victim, wherever they might be.

Using this global network and our various tools and services, we should be able to set up a virtual border at any location in the world, to stop the would-be trafficker, the terrorist, the dangerous escaped criminal where they least expect it.

What do we mean by a virtual border?

We mean any place where a person's identity could be checked and confirmed by law enforcement or security personnel, just as we now do at airports and borders. It could be the entrance of a football stadium, a meeting of the G-20 or a UN conference.

A key component of this effort – whether talking about a physical national border or a virtual one – is our database of stolen and lost travel documents.

Before INTERPOL created this database in 2002, there was no global repository for this kind of information. The number of records in the database has grown from just under 4,000 in 2002 to more than 21.5 million today, including more than 12 million passport records.

Last year, our member countries conducted more than 300 million searches of the database in 2009, resulting in close to 30,000 hit alarms. Here in the U.S., authorities conducted more than 79 million searches last year – up from just a few thousand in 2002, which resulted in almost 4,000 hits.

What worries me the most as Secretary General of INTERPOL is the 500 million or so international travelers worldwide who did not have their passports checked against our database.

We have already developed the technology to give officers in the field real-time access to this and other INTERPOL databases at airports and border crossings.

As we speak, mobile INTERPOL teams are equipped to conduct checks of individuals and their identity documents at World Cup venues and hotels, as well as border crossings.

Beyond the operational support we provide to member countries, beyond the technological tools and services we offer, one of INTERPOL's greatest strengths is our neutrality.

We operate on the fundamental belief that that which binds us – the desire to keep our citizens and our countries safe – far outweighs that which separates us.

Our Constitution prohibits us from getting involved in matters of a political, racial, military and religious nature, so we are able to achieve police-to-police co-operation even on occasions when governments do not or cannot.

I have seen this firsthand during my visits to 135 of our member countries.

Amid tensions over the interception of ships carrying aid to the Gaza Strip two weeks ago, I received a call from Pakistan's Minister of Interior asking for our assistance in locating missing Pakistani journalist Talat Hussein Syed and his two colleagues. Reaching out directly to our INTERPOL offices in Israel and Jordan, we received quick and reliable assistance for their safe return.

We publicly congratulated the police-to-police co-operation by Pakistan, Jordan and Israel at a time when Israel was facing widespread criticism for its handling of the situation.

We have also worked to mediate a dispute between Argentina and Iran over the publication of international wanted persons notices, called Red Notices, for six individuals sought for arrest in connection with a terrorist bombing. Even though I am an American, I was not surprised that Iranian authorities asked me to engage in shuttle diplomacy on their behalf on this issue, because they believe in INTERPOL and the way we work.

In less than three weeks I will open a conference of the Heads of INTERPOL National Central Bureaus from Economic Cooperation Organization member countries in Tehran, Iran.

In the 87 years since the establishment of INTERPOL, greater international police cooperation, particularly in investigation, pursuit, arrest and extradition procedures, has been embedded into all we do.

Now, nearly a century later – national barriers of any kind – whether marked by guard post, ocean or ideology – do not stand in the way of police co-operation.

As most of you cover the UN or have a vested interest in its activities as employees, I would like to take a moment to discuss how our two organizations, born on different continents following different World Wars, co-operate in areas of mutual concern.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has called the UN and INTERPOL ‘natural partners’ in boosting peace and security.

I would go one step further and say that we are essential partners. We each bring to the table unique competencies, and our strong cooperation enables us to leverage these comparative advantages into critical gains.

INTERPOL’s formal relationship with the UN goes back to 1997 with the signing of a Cooperation Agreement. Since that time, we had steadily strengthened our ties with the UN, its various organs and specialized agencies, including the Security Council and its related bodies like the Counter-Terrorism Committee, Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate and Sanctions Committees, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Safety and Security, among others, as well as with the international criminal tribunals.

One of the most tangible results of our cooperation is the INTERPOL-UN Security Council Special Notice created in 2005. Prior to the creation of this notice, the UN Security Council did not have access to enough information for law enforcement to determine whether someone on the 1267 Committee’s Consolidated List was or was not the person seeking to board a plane, open a bank account or purchase a weapon.

There are now more than 370 valid notices for individuals and entities associated with Al Qaeda and the Taliban and subject to UN sanctions, including asset freezes, arms embargoes and travel bans.

INTERPOL is the only non-UN entity that sits on the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force established by the UN Secretary-General in 2005. Through our membership on the CTITF, we participate in various working groups – acting as one of the lead entities for strengthening the protection of vulnerable targets – and contribute to the formulation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

We also work closely with the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate to conduct expert assessments of member countries’ counter-terrorism capacity and facilitate technical assistance.

With the Department of Safety and Security, we cooperate on issues affecting our personnel and offices. Our two 24-hour command centers complement each other, and we are about to engage in a pilot project to incorporate stolen or lost UN Laissez-Passers into our database of stolen and lost travel documents.

Our two organizations are moving ahead with the development of the first-ever Action Plan for International Police Peacekeeping, which will bolster our efforts – and those of our member countries – towards not only keeping the peace in post-conflict and fragile states, but also fostering durable and sustainable security throughout the world.

INTERPOL has launched an ambitious initiative to enhance the capability of police in West Africa to address the alarming growth of cocaine transiting through the region en route to Europe's streets with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs.

In co-operation with the tribunal prosecuting perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide, 14 Rwandan suspects who were the subjects of Red Notices requested by either the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) or our National Central Bureau in Kigali have been arrested, with five of the suspects transferred to the ICTR to face trial.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Everything I have just discussed is tied to why we are here today: to take a closer look at the issue of virtual borders and global security.

Our tools and services are part of the solution. In addition, we need to be able to quickly identify those who could pose a risk to our safety and, conversely, we need to be able to quickly identify those who pose no risk to our safety so they can pass without any unnecessary or invasive examinations.

Fortunately, our partnership with the private sector through Entrust has facilitated significant progress in this area, and we are particularly pleased to share with you today those developments with INTERPOL and potentially with law enforcement and other agencies throughout the world.

This is a complex and truly revolutionary concept at a time when most governments are requiring all of us to go through the same security clearance measures. This one-size-fits-all approach takes up time and some would say wastes resources, but does not necessarily translate into proportional gains.

Changing current practices will require more common sense and the right technology.

In the end, we believe that INTERPOL and Entrust's pilot initiative will help governments, international organizations and businesses to work more effectively and efficiently at differentiating persons of 'no-risk' and 'potential risk.'

A problem for INTERPOL is no universal visa currently exists. No matter the officer's nationality, there is some country somewhere that will require a visa for INTERPOL officers asked to respond to a terrorist attack, to help apprehend a fugitive or to assist with urgent crises. We need to be able to cross borders easily and without undue delay

It is at best ironic and at worst dangerous that INTERPOL officials sometimes have a more difficult time crossing borders than the criminals we are pursuing.

Entrust has created and equipped for INTERPOL's use a global smart e-ID and visa card which INTERPOL is currently testing in South Africa during the World Cup. This ID card will transform the way that INTERPOL and – I would dare say – the UN and other organizations will one day work.

Already a handful of countries including Brazil, Pakistan, Senegal and Swaziland have determined that if you're holding an INTERPOL ID card, then you should not be required to lose precious time before being able to travel to their country on INTERPOL-related business. More than 20 other countries have expressed an interest in granting the same consideration.

This is a common-sense approach that will enhance both national and global security. We are calling the secure ID card developed by Entrust our official Travel Document.

In closing, I have attempted to demonstrate just how diverse and multi-dimensional INTERPOL's activities are in response to the most pressing crime and security challenges we face today.

We will continue to pursue stronger ties with the private sector and with the UN to better support police in our member countries through enhancing our technology, our expertise, our global reach.

This is the essence of connecting police for a safer world.

Thank you for your attendance and your attention.