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Remarks

By

Mr Shri Sushilkumar Shinde

Honourable Home Minister, India

81st INTERPOL General Assembly

5 November 2012

Rome, Italy

Mr President, Mr Secretary General, my fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great honour for me to address this Assembly and I thank the INTERPOL General Secretariat for having given me this opportunity.

Countering violent extremism, and in particular terrorism, is a key global challenge today. Terrorism by its methods and content rejects democratic and peaceful means of engagement. It attacks pluralism and multiculturalism. Thus, for a liberal, democratic and diverse society and country like India, terrorism and terrorist groups pose a challenge which has to be countered and effectively defeated.

India continues to face a high degree of terrorist threats on several fronts, in particular cross-border terrorism. Terrorism in South Asia has increasingly emerged as an effective strategic weapon. Terrorist groups have demonstrated that with simple tactics and low-tech weapons, they can produce vastly disproportionate results, as happened in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. Terrorist attacks have exacted a heavy toll of life and property. Terrorists have tried to disrupt our way of life by attempting to initiate the element of fear. Fortunately, the Indian society has time and again shown its resilience and refused to be overawed by the terrorist acts.

The Indian Government is committed to combating terrorism/extremism in all forms and manifestations as no cause, genuine or imaginary, can justify terrorism or violence.

Further, the Government of India is committed to ensuring that perpetrators of terrorist acts, their masterminds and conspirators are brought to justice and that prosecution and sentencing to the fullest extent of the law is ensured.

India has adopted a system to counter terrorism that gives primacy to dialogue, democratic political processes and the rule of law, and we deal with terrorism within the ambit of this structure. Post 26/11, we have raised the level of preparedness to meet the increasingly sophisticated terrorist threats. Secondly, we have enhanced the speed and decisiveness of the response to a terrorist threat or a terrorist attack.

At the international level, India has been supportive of all efforts, particularly in the UN, to combat terrorism and has played a leading role in shaping international opinion and urging the international community to prioritize the fight against terror. Our consistent and basic stand before the international community has been that there could be no justification for terrorism on any grounds: religious, political, ideological or any other. To be effective, the fight against terrorism has to be long term, comprehensive and sustained. Strengthening of international cooperation is vital to ensure that action is not restricted simply to the perpetrators but also encompasses states which sponsor, support or provide safe haven to terrorists.

International cooperation on matters relating to terrorism is also effected through the mechanism of INTERPOL, of which India has been a member since 1949.

The specific dimensions of the fight against terrorism in which INTERPOL can be of immense value are the links of terrorism to organized crime, its emerging links with counterfeiting and the ability of fugitives to simply evade jurisdictions.

Be it the Mumbai bomb blasts of 1993, the 26/11 attack in Mumbai or the 9/11 attacks in the USA, the inter-state nature of planning involved in all of them underscores the need for increased cooperation and coordination amongst intelligence and investigative agencies. It is indeed very heartening to note that a lot of progress has been made in this regard, but a lot more can be done and needs to be done. It is here that I feel the International Criminal Police Organization has to play a pivotal role.

This institution has been diligently working towards forging strategic and operational partnerships amongst various stakeholders and member states to tackle the scourge of international crime and terrorism. It has succeeded as a hub connecting the law enforcement agencies of various member states, and the wide range of operational and analytic support provided by INTERPOL is proving very helpful in making the world a safer place. The various international notices published by INTERPOL based on requests from the National Central Bureaus of the member states has helped in tracking of fugitives and alerted the agencies to imminent threats and dangers. India alone has 138 pending Red Notices of terrorists who are

absconding and are likely to be in some foreign state. In all, we have 670 INTERPOL notices of various kinds pending, of which 577 are Red Notices.

At the same time, let me remind you that unless the international cooperation leads to visible results, our objectives may remain unachieved. I am constrained to point out that in spite of regular dialogue and credible evidence, the masterminds of one of the most heinous acts of terror of last century, i.e. the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts in which 257 people died and 713 were injured, are still sitting in safe heavens and yet to be brought to book. Their presence in a neighbouring country is well known and INTERPOL Red Notices against them, who are Indian nationals, are pending since 1993.

It is a cliché to say that terror funding is the lifeblood of terrorism. Credible intelligence suggests that terrorist outfits are investing in stock markets through spurious companies, setting up fictitious businesses and laundering money. The utmost importance of detecting the sources of such finance including the fake currency variant, its conduits, modus operandi and staunching its flow cannot be lost on us. Here again, INTERPOL has to play a very crucial role.

And may I underscore what is common knowledge of all the agencies involved in investigation of terror cases. Most major terror attacks, successful or aborted from its stage of conceptualization to execution, have their footprints in different countries. The investigative agencies get confronted with issues of jurisdiction, both international and inter-nation when they try to collect relevant evidence and connect the dots. The investigations do not reach their logical conclusions or get inordinately delayed if they do, due to fuzziness involved in the protocols to be followed in soliciting cooperation. Here too IPSG has to play a bigger role in facilitating the law enforcement agencies to coordinate amongst them. May I venture to suggest that INTERPOL should study the feasibility of having some mechanism for getting informal investigation-related requests like those for subscriber details, IP addresses, executed expeditiously through the companies holding such information.

I would also urge the Honourable Secretary General of INTERPOL to help in capacity building of the law enforcement agencies of the member states. Best practices of prevention,

investigation, prosecution and several other specialized dimensions of enforcement work can be collated and shared. Information on resources which may include best training institutes for different kinds of training, resource persons, trainers and the like can be shared with member states. Here, too, I feel INTERPOL, through its Legal Division, can play a vital role in studying, analysing and sensitizing the member states to bring their procedural and substantive laws dealing with terrorism and its instrumentalities in consonance.

May I also take this opportunity to suggest that INTERPOL may facilitate investigation and prosecution of terror-related cases. It would also be better if it collects and makes available for the benefit of its member states an online compendium of rules to be followed in various nation states for assistance in arrest, search, seizure, extradition, deportation, surveillance, collection of material evidence, examination and recording of evidence of witnesses, examination of suspects and the various agencies and departments involved in the process. This will go a long way to bring the perpetrators and planners of the most heinous crimes to justice.

Our best wishes to the President of INTERPOL, its Secretary General and all its officers in their endeavors.