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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

by

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Secretary General

81st INTERPOL GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION

MINISTERIAL MEETING

***“CHALLENGES FOR POLICE FACING CONTEMPORARY
CRIMINAL VIOLENCE”***

5 November 2012

Rome, Italy

Your Excellencies, Heads and Deputy Heads of Government from INTERPOL member countries,

Ms Annamaria CANCELLIERI, Minister of Interior of Italy,

Honorable Ministers of Justice, Interior and Home Affairs,

INTERPOL President KHOO Boon Hui,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Prefetto Antonio MANGANELLI, Chief of Police – Director General of Public Security of Italy,

Mr Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol,

Distinguished Chiefs of Police,

Esteemed members of INTERPOL's Executive Committee,

Heads of National Central Bureaus,

Dear colleagues from INTERPOL General Secretariat, Regional Bureaus and Representative Offices, and citizens of our 190 member countries, learning of all your dedicated efforts here today,

Dear members of staff, watching this event live from INTERPOL headquarters in Lyon via live streaming for the first time in history,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am truly honoured to welcome all of you to this extraordinary INTERPOL Ministerial Meeting, which stands as the largest global gathering of Ministers of Interior and Justice in history.

In the almost 100 years since the idea of INTERPOL was born, never has the world witnessed Ministers of Interior and Justice from close to 100 member countries join over 1,000 delegates at any gathering.

Such a remarkable event deserved an equally remarkable setting. And so it was, thanks to our gracious Italian hosts.

Minister CANCELLIERI, on behalf of INTERPOL, let me extend my deepest gratitude to the Republic of Italy, the Ministry of Interior and Italian law enforcement authorities for your outstanding organization, support and hospitality in making this possible.

Madame Minister, INTERPOL and police officers around the world confront reality on a daily basis, so we readily acknowledge that the city of Rome - in its millennial history – also provides us with a hint of a reason of why so many Ministers and delegates are here with us today.

The origin of the magnificence we see around us, in fact, is tied by myth to the violent fall of another city.

As described by the poet Virgil in *The Aeneid*, it was a small group of people fleeing the city of Troy after its destruction, who crossed the Mediterranean to initiate the dynasty destined to give birth – here in Rome – to one of the greatest civilizations ever known to humankind.

Throughout that long journey, historians often recalled how Troy had met its demise:

A single threat from abroad reaching its shores, in the form of a wooden horse statue, forever to be remembered as the Trojan horse, containing a hidden enemy army...

The failure by those in charge of security to identify that threat as such, by ignoring why it had been sent, by not inspecting it adequately...

and

The fatal decision to let it into the city walls – all this helps explain why Troy fell.

We must remember that this occurred when many nations chose isolation as their primary security strategy.

More than 3,000 years later, our world and our security needs have radically changed.

We now see countries worldwide choose cooperation across borders, continents, languages and cultures, in order to better identify and counter threats to the security of their own citizens.

It could never be otherwise, in a world where borders and isolation by countries can often be the best weapon in the hands of criminals.

Countering this threat is what led to the idea of INTERPOL being conceived.

Today we see the tangible fruits of that idea, as every year, international police cooperation enables INTERPOL's 190 member countries to conduct more than 7,000 arrests globally.

But while our strategies have immensely evolved throughout millennia of history, the threats we face today are even more formidable, more complex and more mobile than those that led to the fall of ancient nations.

Represented in this room are the countries responsible for the greatest achievements ever attained in history.

You have succeeded in finding cures to lethal sickness; in unveiling the inner mechanics of matter itself; in inspiring millions with art across generations; in climbing the world's tallest mountains; in exploring space and in employing engineering to link together entire continents and oceans.

But despite all this, we are yet to be free from criminal violence initiated by individuals and groups.

How can this be? The answer is in the very nature of the threat.

A threat that has been constantly changing in shape and form throughout history, to better serve its distorted goals, to increase its reach across borders, and to sink its teeth even deeper into our societies.

Before our eyes is the dramatic result of that extreme evolution.

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development Secretariat estimates that every year, 500,000 people die as a result of lethal violence. But less than one in every 10 of those deaths occurs in conflict settings – the rest are a result of terrorism and other crimes.

Let me repeat this: nine out of 10 violent deaths are not on some battleground.

These staggering global figures say a lot, but they still don't say it all. They actually overlook two key elements.

First, that the price we really cannot afford is that of the next, single life touched by criminal violence.

- It's the 14-year-old boy recruited by terrorists, riding his bicycle before detonating himself to kill innocent bystanders, just like he had been told, or the 15-year-old girl targeted by the same terrorists for advocating the importance of women's education;
- It's the child picked out of the water too late by rescuers, after migrant smugglers leave a boat to sink in the Mediterranean;
- It's the teenager joining a riot downtown, minutes after being invited to do so on social media – or the soccer fan, shot to death by rival supporters minutes before a match;
- It's the mother of three, hit by a rocket grenade in the street in an area invaded by drug cartels.

These are real-life snapshots from the streets of our member countries – the same streets where the police officers INTERPOL supports on a daily basis are deployed. And they tell the same tale.

That of criminal violence of unprecedented force, spreading across jurisdictions at impressive speed. Violence that can be easily seen, communicated and imitated from thousands of miles away.

That is the second key element we would neglect, if we simply focused on the *size* of violence worldwide.

What makes today's violence simply unparalleled in history is the *speed* and *ease* with which it turns from a local incident to a global threat demanding international action. Oftentimes, it simply cannot be contained to one geographic area.

We have all witnessed perhaps its most startling example earlier this year.

It all began with a 14 minutes-long video clip, translated and uploaded on the Internet to be accessible by a global audience.

- Minutes later, the original uploader had deleted the file. But in today's world, it was already too late;
- Within 48 hours, it had already been shared and viewed by thousands across the world;
- In just over a week, it had sparked violent riots in the streets of a single country, 7,500 miles away from where the clip had been produced;
- Six days later, violent protests had already spread to 20 countries across all five continents, threatening not just their intended targets, but anything and anyone in their path.

Excellencies, Honorable ministers, Dear Colleagues,

This violence has brought us all into a new era.

In its 2011 World Development Report, the World Bank said it unequivocally: "21st century violence does not fit the 20th-century mold".

It is now time to build a new mold. To shape the next, decisive strategy against criminal violence worldwide.

This is why INTERPOL invited all of you here today.

And on this occasion, INTERPOL reaffirms its commitment to bring that strategy into action, concretely, to the frontlines, as per our mandate.

As key decision makers from close to 100 nations represented here today, you have faced the challenges of contemporary criminal violence – and you have led your communities and authorities to address them.

We will take your experience, your insights and share them with all of our 190 member countries and their police services.

Police will play a key role in any solution you will design. For its part, INTERPOL will develop the new tools and services this will require, as it supports your police and law enforcement authorities in the field around the clock.

We will work with you to build police capacity through training and enhance their infrastructure, to make sure your police are always connected in real time with each other, and to ensure that whenever criminal violence will strike or even merely threaten your population, they won't be alone against it.

In other words, when the next threat from abroad enters your country undetected, just like a 21st century Trojan horse, you will be able to rely on a 190-country strong network of sentinels, ready to sound the alarm and act locally and globally to help you repel it.

Throughout our history, we have learned that nothing can be more powerful than actionable knowledge shared across borders among nations.

May that thought guide us all through this event.

Let us learn from each other, and become examples to one another.

Let us turn this extraordinary gathering into a milestone in the world's fight against criminal violence.

Your being here sends a clear message to the world: that no matter how ruthless and how powerful criminal violence might be – together, we will prevail over it.

Thank you, MERCI, GRACIAS, SHUKRAN, GRÁZIE.