

## 78th INTERPOL General Assembly

State of the Organization address by Ronald K. Noble, INTERPOL Secretary General  
13 October 2009, Singapore

INTERPOL President, Mr. [Khoo Boon Hui](#),  
Honourable Ministers,  
Chiefs of police,  
Esteemed members of INTERPOL's [Executive Committee](#),  
Director of Europol, Mr. Rob Wainwright, who we all know but who is here for the first time in this capacity,  
Heads of delegations,  
Heads of National Central Bureaus,  
Dear colleagues from the INTERPOL General Secretariat and Regional Bureaus,  
Delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,



Every country, regardless of size or power, has an important part to play in the global fight against transnational crime, INTERPOL Secretary General Ronald K. Noble told delegates.

Thank you. First of all, I think I can speak for everyone here when I say that our thoughts are with the families of the victims of the earthquakes and floods that have struck Indonesia, Philippines and, as we heard, Samoa recently.

Tragedies like these are constant reminders of the delicate balance between humans and their environments. But they also serve to remind us of the amazing resilience of the Asia-Pacific region, which has seen more than its share of natural disasters but whose citizens persevere with dignity in the face of whatever nature unleashes upon them.

Despite the calamity that destroyed whole parts of their country, Samoan authorities held firm to their commitment to international police cooperation by moving to join INTERPOL. We are glad they could be with us for this milestone.

All of you gathered here have just made our organization even stronger by welcoming Samoa as our 188th member country. I would like to recognize Australia for having supported Samoa's candidacy.

Fifteen years ago, I participated in my first INTERPOL General Assembly in Rome and sat where you are sitting now. Back then, I oversaw four of the eight largest US federal law enforcement agencies: Secret Service, Customs Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigation Division.

Back then, I was responsible for a combined budget of US\$2.4 billion and had a staff of 30,000 people. Although federal law enforcement officers under my responsibility were stationed around the world and even at INTERPOL's General Secretariat in Lyon, France, my primary perspective and my primary interest was that of my country.

But when I first took my oath as your Secretary General my perspective changed.

Suddenly, I had to think about every issue from the perspective of all of our then 179 INTERPOL member countries. I had to think of myself as a citizen of each and every one of our member countries because I was your Secretary General.

In my capacity as Secretary General and on my visits to 126 INTERPOL member countries, I had to be as proud to be a citizen of your country as I am proud to be a citizen of the country of my birth.

Of course, my being an American of bi-racial and bi-cultural heritage has given me a different perspective. Coming from a country where anyone can be or become an American means that I believe anything is possible and that you cannot know who someone is or what they believe based on how they look.

Having a mother and blood relatives who are white and German and who have nurtured and loved me means that I have no racial or cultural prejudice. It also means that I have a luxury that not many African Americans have. I have a country of one of my parent's heritage to which I can point with pride and say, "Ich bin halb Deutscher," or when I am really being candid with German speakers, I can say, "Ich bin halb Bayer."

But to those of you who know me – and many of you do – I have been most deeply influenced by my African-American heritage. When I go back to the "motherland," not knowing from which country my forefathers and foremothers were forcibly taken as slaves centuries ago, I am embraced by and I embrace all African countries. You know that I frequently call everyone "my brother" or "my sister", but when I say it to my African brothers and sisters you all know what I am saying and what I am feeling.

My bi-racial and bi-cultural heritage did not end with my parents. My eight-and-a-half-year-old son Max is also bi-racial and bi-cultural. Having him changed my life and gave new purpose to my desire as INTERPOL's Secretary General to strive to make the world safer for everyone.

My son's mother tongue is Spanish and since he was five or six years old his Spanish has been better than mine. For me, the experience of having a son who comes from and lives in a culturally different environment from mine has been the most humbling and enlightening experience of all.

Knowing the feeling and thinking about what life is like for people, and especially for police, of different backgrounds; knowing the feeling of functioning in different racial, religious, cultural, legal and political environments; knowing what it is like for police to possess different levels of financial, infrastructure or governmental support; knowing that for you – for each of you – your primary perspective and primary interest is that of your country; and knowing that as your Secretary General I must lead a staff and an organization whose mission is to identify a multitude of ways for international police cooperation to be enhanced and the best interests of the organization to be fulfilled while you are looking out for the best interests of your country has made me the Secretary General that I am.

I know that every country, regardless of size or power, has an important part to play in the global fight against transnational crime.

I know, now more than ever, that we must stay the course given the enormous challenges we have witnessed in recent years: the single greatest terrorist attack in modern history...a tsunami of epic proportions that affected many countries in this region and throughout the world...the worst global economic crisis in eight decades.

But INTERPOL has never forgotten that where there are obstacles, there are also opportunities. We have seized every challenge to take a hard look at ourselves and re-assess the way we functioned as an organization, with the goal always being to better support law enforcement in our member countries.

The September 11 attacks dramatically changed the rules for INTERPOL; we knew we could no longer continue with business as usual. One of the most ambitious developments was the creation of our

Command and Co-ordination Centre to assist our member countries 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. The INTERPOL General Secretariat would never again go dark.

The systems we put in place to assist with the massive global effort to help identify the thousands of victims of the tsunami in 2004 have enabled us to provide enhanced support to any member country during a crisis situation or in need of specialized expertise.

The global economic crisis, from which the world still has not fully emerged, made clear the necessity to identify areas where we could have the greatest impact tackling the increasingly complex crime threats we face today with the fewest resources. Just two examples:

We have helped Kenyan authorities expand access to INTERPOL databases from our National Central Bureau (NCB) in Nairobi to the port city of Mombasa to process suspected piracy offenders handed over by naval forces that operate in international waters in the Horn of Africa.

We are also deploying equipment, including machine-readable travel document readers, to countries in Africa through our OASIS programme to bolster their border-security efforts. For this, we must publicly recognize Germany for their financial support of our OASIS initiative.

We can be sure there will be new and greater challenges in the coming years. But we cannot be afraid to make the tough decisions and take the bold steps that are necessary.

There is no fight worth fighting that comes quickly, or easily, or painlessly.

Otherwise, we would never have a secure global police communications network that reaches every point on the globe, or a 24-hour Command and Coordination Centre, or teams that can be dispatched at a moment's notice to support a member country in need anywhere in the world, or an ambitious police training and development programme.

Otherwise, we would never have an INTERPOL that is so relevant for an uncertain today and ever more critical for a secure tomorrow.

The success of the meeting of ministers that we just convened is proof that our value is being recognized at the highest levels of government – as it should be. The task now is to leverage this momentum towards reaching loftier heights. We all need to commit to exploring ways in which police can take on a greater role in peacekeeping. I would like to pay special recognition to Joël Sollier (INTERPOL's Director of Legal Affairs) and his team for organizing the successful event.

But there are a few other critical issues on which I wish to focus right now. Thank you, Mr. President, for your endorsement of a third term for me as INTERPOL's Secretary General. If I am confirmed, these issues will take up the bulk of my focus and energy over the next few years.

As the President mentioned in his remarks, we have created a Strategic Development Directorate, and we need to openly and candidly examine what we must do now to secure both our and the world's future. Training will be a fundamental part of this.

We will look to forge greater partnerships with the private sector, like we have seen with companies like EDAPS, Pluss Data and Microsoft. I am so pleased to announce that Motorola has pledged its support to INTERPOL of US\$100,000 over two years.

We also need to make sure that when an INTERPOL Executive Committee member or Head of NCB travels anywhere in the world on official business, he or she can do so without any country's visa requirements impeding their travel.

To that end, we have selected an international consortium of countries led by EDAPS, whose Chairman of the Board is here with us, to produce the first-ever INTERPOL passport.

This company and our staff have worked so quickly and diligently that following my remarks the passports will be presented to our President and members of our Executive Committee, accompanied by the head of NCB or head of delegation from their country.

Some people have asked why do we need this? Some people have said it would take years for this happen. So I am proud to announce that two countries, Pakistan and Ukraine, have already authorized giving the INTERPOL passport visa-waiver status. I ask all of you to go back to your countries and encourage your governments to do the same.

We must also focus on finding ways for the organization to grow without raising member countries' dues.

Finally, we need to make sure that our presence is as strong in other regions of the world as it is in Europe. We need to do this step by step. It is clear that Asia's importance is growing, and INTERPOL needs to make sure its presence is felt in Asia in a greater way. We have to build up capacity in this region. I am committed to doing so, and I am committed to doing so without increasing the organization's financial burden.

My dear colleagues,

Let me say it is such a great pleasure for INTERPOL to be holding this conference in the home country of my friend and our President, Singapore Police Commissioner Mr. Khoo Boon Hui, as he presides over his first General Assembly.

President Khoo is a true visionary who has been so generous in sharing his time, wisdom and insights with us, and the organization is stronger because of it. He juggles two very demanding jobs – how, I do not know – but his energy never seems to flag; his commitment never wavers.

In other words, he is very much a product of the country he so proudly serves. Our hosts have been nothing but efficient, meticulous and professional every step of the way. The essence of this great nation and its people were captured in the book by its first Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, which chronicled the rapid transformation of Singapore following its independence more than 40 years ago into one of the most vibrant economies and cosmopolitan countries in East Asia.

His son, the current Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, gave such kind praise to INTERPOL in his address yesterday, and we will continue to work hard to live up to it.

The concerted determination, collective spirit and boundless ambition that built a nation have given us what I think will be a most memorable General Assembly and one that sets a very high bar for all future hosts!

In closing, I would like to recognize the Executive Committee members whose service is continuing and those whose terms end at the conclusion of this General Assembly. They have left their marks on this organization and on me personally as the Secretary General.

I would like to also acknowledge the chiefs of police and heads of NCBs who have been appointed since our last General Assembly. They are now part of the INTERPOL family. This is just the beginning of an exciting journey we are about to embark on together.

Finally, as I have said many times before, INTERPOL's greatest strength is its people. I could not be prouder of the staff with whom I work each and every day. Their dedication and commitment are constant sources of inspiration for me. I ask them all to stand and be recognized.

Thank you. I wish you a productive conference.