

The INTERPOL–United Nations Ministerial Meeting

Welcome address by Wong Kan Seng, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs
Singapore – 11 October 2009

*Excellencies,
President Khoo Boon Hui and Secretary General Ronald K Noble of
INTERPOL,
Under-Secretary General Alain Le Roy of the UN,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*



Good evening,

Let me extend the warmest welcome to all of you to Singapore.

This meeting is the first time a Ministerial Meeting has been arranged to precede the INTERPOL General Assembly. I congratulate INTERPOL for its positive initiative to elevate discussions on international law enforcement co-operation to a higher level.

Wong Kang Sen, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs, welcomed the Ministers and senior law enforcement officials to the INTERPOL-UN Ministerial meeting.

Of great significance is the participation of the United Nations in this landmark meeting. The coming together of UN and INTERPOL, two bodies which champion global peace, bodes well in the fight against crime and terrorism.

In the past, UN Peacekeeping missions were exclusively fronted by the Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministries of member countries.

This inaugural meeting would focus the spotlight on the roles of their Home Affairs, Interior and Justice Ministries, and the important contributions of civilian police, so as to inspire more concerted efforts in these humanitarian endeavours.

As we are all acutely aware, globalisation and technological advances have facilitated the conduct of transnational crime. Criminal syndicates can target victims across continents without having to leave their homes. Others have taken advantage of open borders and false identities to commit crimes in other countries.

This trend increases the need for international cooperation to disrupt such activities and arrest the perpetrators.

An example which comes to mind is the infamous international jewel thief network known as the "Pink Panthers". Key members of the "Pink Panthers" gang are suspected to have carried out a series of jewel

robberies over the past decade all over the world. Their loot was estimated to be more than 100-million-euro.

Fortunately, several members of the network have been arrested in different countries over the years through mutual cooperation and sharing of information facilitated by INTERPOL.

Countries around the world have come to recognise the global dimensions of their local problems and realise the need to work with other partners to solve these problems.

Hence, many seek bilateral cooperation agreements with their neighbours and form regional and international networks to work out solutions.

Singapore is amongst those that has undoubtedly benefited from regional and international cooperation.

The Singapore Police Force works actively to develop strong ties with its counterparts overseas. For instance at the regional level, the Singapore Police Force has been a member of the ASEAN Chiefs of Police or ASEANAPOL since its inception in 1981. In the international arena, Singapore joined INTERPOL in 1968.

Not only do countries need to band together, international organisations must come together in areas where priorities and strategic objectives align.

I am pleased that the UN and INTERPOL are on the verge of entering into a strategic partnership to promote state stability, and in turn, global law and order.

Since the 1960s, the UN has been deploying civilian police officers on its peacekeeping missions around the world. Today, more than 12,000 civilian police officers drawn from more than 90 countries are deployed on UN peacekeeping missions worldwide, carrying out a multitude of functions ranging from community policing to ensuring human rights compliance.

The focus of the civilian police functions has also changed from one of advising and training the local security forces to capacity building – where local forces are reformed and restructured into sustainable organisations.

Given that security forms the bedrock of communities, it is hardly surprising that the civilian police requirement in UN peacekeeping missions has been growing.

INTERPOL, on the other hand, has increasingly been called upon to deploy its member countries' experts at locations devastated by natural disasters or terrorist attacks. A sterling example of the work that INTERPOL has done is the large scale disaster victim identification effort which took place in the aftermath of the devastating Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004.

The internationally accepted disaster victim identification protocol developed by INTERPOL allowed the teams of experts, coming from different INTERPOL member countries, to compare the data that they had gathered more effectively and efficiently. This contributed to the eventual identification of the victims in the disaster.

The UN, with substantial operational experience gained from the deployment of civilian police components on its peacekeeping missions, is well placed to identify the challenges civilian police officers would face and the resources that are needed to better equip the officers.

By entering into the partnership, INTERPOL brings with it the backing of its 187 member countries and their collective expertise and resources, which includes training and operational technical databases to enhance the roles of civilian police in peace-building operations.

Both sides add strategic value to the partnership by complementing each other's strengths.

I am optimistic that the partnership between INTERPOL and the UN will be successful.

With the unstinting commitment of the international community, the partnership will grow and flourish.

In closing, I hope that you will find time during this meeting to enjoy the warm hospitality that Singapore has to offer. I invite you to also take time off your busy engagements to enjoy the sights, sample our cuisine and experience our culture.

I wish all of you a fruitful meeting and enjoyable stay in Singapore.