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KEYNOTE SPEECH

by
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Pink Panthers Operational Working Group Meeting

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Dubai Police Officers Club
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Major General Khamis Mattar Al MAZEINA, Deputy Commandant General of the Dubai Police,

Investigators from INTERPOL member countries,

Specialized Officers from INTERPOL's General Secretariat,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you here in Dubai for this 5th Project Pink Panthers Working Group Meeting, bringing together more than 60 investigators from 24 countries and from the European Police Office – Europol.

It is always with amazement that I visit your country and emirate. Dubai in particular has built itself a strong international reputation by proving to the world that with intelligent long-term planning and a coherent vision shared by its leaders, an economy can smartly grow from a trade-based, oil-reliant economy to a modern, globalized and diversified economy.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Dubai Police for organizing this important meeting and also thank Dubai and Emirati authorities for their fantastic hospitality. Anyone who has experienced Emirati hospitality knows why millions of tourists visit the country each year, and why Dubai today stands at an amazing tenth position among the world's cities for international visitors!

I would also like to underline that this Project Pink Panthers meeting is the first one to take place outside of Europe. Despite the fact that most robberies associated with the Pink Panthers have occurred in European countries, countries in North America, Asia and the Middle-East have also been hit.

The first known robbery to have taken place in the region took place in Bahrain in October 2002, when a then-Serbia and Montenegro national and three accomplices stole a Cartier necklace worth 1,500,000 USD and three brilliants in a jewellery exhibition in Manama.

A few years later, in March 2006, the Siddique Jewellery was hit right here in Dubai. Four months later, the Damas Jewellery located in the Emirates Tower was hit.

Then in April 2007, a Pink Panthers team brazenly drove inside the Dubai Wafi City Mall, rammed the front window of the Graff jewellery store and in less than a minute left with approximately 11 million Euros of jewellery and escaped by again driving at high speed through the enclosed mall.

I'm sure every officer present here today knows this case. It is not only remembered because it was spectacular and because persons present in the mall filmed the attack with mobile phones and posted the footage on YouTube, but also because it is the case that helped us understand the scope of action of the Pink Panthers and that triggered INTERPOL to launch a dedicated project targeting this transnational crime group.

Approximately one year earlier, the Liechtenstein Police did the right thing when, following the attack of a jewellery store in the capital Vaduz — they asked INTERPOL to publish Red Notices against the four criminals, thereby sharing identifiers, including four DNA profiles, with police all around the world.

After the Wafi Mall attack, the Dubai Police also did the right thing by sending to INTERPOL 14 DNA profiles for checks against INTERPOL's DNA database.

The subsequent match between the robberies in Vaduz and Dubai led to a real breakthrough in investigating the Pink Panthers.

Eventually, working group meetings were called for, especially by Andre Muhlberger, Chief of Police for Monaco. Together we broke this case wide open and the Pink Panthers became INTERPOL's Public Enemy Number 1.

This demonstrates several things.

First, that even unsophisticated criminal groups like the Pink Panthers today can work across countries and even continents.

Second, that even small countries like Liechtenstein, Monaco and the United Arab Emirates can play a crucial role in defeating international crime.

Third, that in the 21st Century investigating loosely-organized and free-associating transnational crime groups requires consulting global databases and engaging in global police networking.

And this is exactly INTERPOL's mission — to devise the tools and processes that will enable you, investigators in our 188 member countries, to share information, consult global databases and reach out for the assistance of your colleagues anywhere in the world in a timely and efficient manner.

These tools and processes include:

- INTERPOL's Secure Global Police Communications System — I-24/7— which connects all of INTERPOL's 188 member countries and which is backed up 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by INTERPOL's Command and Coordination Centre.
- INTERPOL's nominal and photo database.
- INTERPOL's fingerprint database.
- INTERPOL's DNA database.
- INTERPOL Red Notices for police to alert law enforcement worldwide about fugitives and to request their arrest and extradition.
- Criminal analysis performed by highly-qualified INTERPOL analysts that work at understanding better the global dimension of specific criminal phenomena. And...

- Specialized working group meetings such as this one that bring together officers from member countries concerned by specific crimes to share their information and further their investigations.

But you will hear from our Chairmen about what more is needed. I especially want to know from you about the need for a specialized database on stolen jewellery, high value watches and precious gems.

Dear colleagues,

It is with great satisfaction that I see your efforts to work internationally through INTERPOL paying off.

In 2010 alone, 11 key members of the Pink Panthers have been arrested. In total, 37 individuals subject of INTERPOL Red Notices and Diffusions in relation with the Pink Panthers have been arrested so far, and several others on the basis of European Arrest Warrants.

In May of last year, for example, a Montenegrin national and notorious Pink Panther member was arrested in Rome, after NCB Podgorica shared intelligence on his possible location. Radovan Jelusic was subject of a Diffusion from Spain for a high value robbery in Tenerife committed on 4 September 2008, and a Red Notice and a Diffusion from Cyprus regarding a robbery committed on 28 February 2009 in Limassol. He was also subject of a Blue Notice for the high value robbery perpetrated in Tokyo on 14 June 2007. He had also previously been arrested here in Dubai in relation with and immediately following the June 2006 robbery of the Damas Jewellery that I mentioned earlier and served a jail sentence.

Just two weeks before Jelusic's arrest, Bojan Vuckovic, a Serbian national aged 24, who had previously served a prison sentence for armed robbery in Belgium and was wanted by Austria following his alleged role in an armed robbery against a jewellery store in Vienna in November 2008, was arrested and detained during a check by the Montenegro police at the Montenegrin-Serbian border. Following close liaison between police in Montenegro, Austria and Serbia, supported by INTERPOL'S Command and Coordination Centre and Project Pink Panthers unit, Vuckovic's identity was confirmed by the Austrian authorities.

In yet another case, the man wanted by Bahrain in connection with the 2002 robbery in Manama, Rifat Hadziahmetovic, also believed to have taken part in the June 2006 Damas Jewellery robbery, was recently extradited to Japan for his alleged role in the June 2007 high value robbery in Tokyo, which he is believed to have carried out with his accomplice, Radovan Jelusic.

Finally, on 9 July, Dusko Poznan, one of the men wanted in connection with the robberies in Vaduz and in the Graff Jewellery Store in Wafi Mall was sentenced to 9 years of prison for his involvement in the Liechtenstein robbery.

Thanks to your hard work, perseverance and commitment to international police cooperation, the pieces of the puzzle are coming together. The once seemingly untouchable Pink Panthers are now suffering major losses.

This is possible because of you, because of the hard work and mutual trust of investigators and case officers in the NCBs, who have been cooperating intensively, exchanging information often well beyond normal working hours, in the framework of Project Pink Panthers.

I would like to commend each of you for your dedication.

Before I leave the floor, I would to take this opportunity to send an open invitation to officers specialized in property crime in general and in Western Balkan Organized Crime in particular to come and work with us at the INTERPOL General Secretariat on Project Pink Panthers.

Thank you very much.