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**21ST AFRICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE
(GABORONE, BOTSWANA – 16 FEBRUARY 2011)**

REMARKS

BY

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INTERPOL SECRETARY GENERAL**

Excellency, Acting Minister of Defence, Justice and Security, Mr Edwin Jenamiso
Batshu,
Commissioner of the Botswana Police Service, Mr Thebeyame E. Tsimako,
President Khoo and esteemed members of the Executive Committee,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you. It is a pleasure to welcome you today. It's nice to see so many familiar faces as well as many new ones since we last met in Cairo.

We are gathering here in the heart of southern Africa for our 21st Regional Conference at a time of sweeping change across the continent, from the north to the west to here in the south.

Transitions of any sort are fraught with some degree of uncertainty. So now more than ever, we must remain united in our resolve, concerted in our approach, unwavering in our response.

During this period of both great hope and anxiety, the business of international police co-operation will carry on – our work will carry on, INTERPOL's work will and must carry on.

INTERPOL was created during a different time of historic change, in 1923, with the express purpose of facilitating co-operation between police from different countries where none other might have existed.

The world is no less dynamic today – and so we remain, and will always remain, true to our mandate.

Botswana underwent its own major transformation some 45 years ago when it became independent. A new country was born.

Since then, it has grown into one of the most stable, fastest-growing economies on the continent. This didn't occur by happenstance. It took visionary leadership, determined citizens, and vibrant institutions.

I will give you one example to prove this point. Its law enforcement bodies are now world leaders in protecting some of our planet's greatest natural resources: our animal diversity.

Last year, Botswana won INTERPOL's annual award for outstanding achievement in combating international wildlife crime.

Botswana was also a partner in an operation we carried out last May named after Professor Keitirangi Mogatle, the late assistant director of the country's Department of Wildlife and National Parks and a strong proponent of conservation.

The two-day operation led to the seizure of almost 400 kilos of ivory and rhino horn, worth more than one million dollars, and also led to the arrests of 41 individuals. And it brought together nearly 200 officers from various agencies across Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

It was one of many operations we have conducted recently in Africa together with our National Central Bureaus and Regional Bureaus and your law enforcement services targeting drug trafficking, human trafficking, vehicle trafficking, pharmaceutical counterfeiting, maritime piracy and many other crimes affecting this region and the world.

These operations represented international police co-operation at its most fundamental – officers working side-by-side, across borders and even across disciplines.

But they were also aided by technology, to train the officers and to help them exchange information and conduct checks at remote sites such as border crossings.

As so many places, the African continent continues to be shaped and re-shaped by technology.

Rural farmers in Uganda are monitoring grain prices on the Internet and receiving weather forecasts via text messages on mobile telephones. Rwandan educators are using databases to allocate educational resources more efficiently. Energy-saving technologies are making Kenya greener and its communities stronger.

And social media is creating social change in many of your countries.

Here in Botswana, they are using engineering technology to turn sand from the Kalahari Desert into building blocks for construction and the sun's rays into electricity for their homes. The desert covers 84 per cent of this country and solar power is an inexhaustible resource. That is the essence of sustainability; that is ingenuity.

This technological wave has implications for all of us. We have to make sure technology continues to help us, not harm us.

At our last General Assembly, we unveiled a strategy for ensuring that INTERPOL always had access to the latest technologies to respond to current and future challenges as well as opportunities.

We expect to be able to devise cutting-edge solutions to some of the toughest cybercrime and cyber-security challenges through the INTERPOL Global Complex that we are currently developing in Singapore.

Shortages of resources and expertise plague even the most advanced nations. With this INTERPOL Global Complex, we expect to be able to build much-needed capacity in this field to the benefit of our member countries in all regions, including here in Africa.

In this same vein, we hope the innovations we have fostered through the creation of the INTERPOL Travel Document will help you to make your next-generation documents more secure.

The state-of-the-art INTERPOL Travel Document will enable INTERPOL staff, heads of police and heads of INTERPOL National Central Bureaus carry out their official duties to

travel internationally without undue delay or hindrance, allowing rapid operational and investigative assistance.

Last week, the Democratic Republic of Congo became the latest country to grant special visa status to holders of the INTERPOL Travel Document, joining Cameroon, Egypt, Senegal, Seychelles and Swaziland here in Africa, as well as Afghanistan, Brazil, Pakistan and Singapore.

For those countries that have recognized the Travel Document, I ask you to encourage your neighbours to do the same, to show them how you did it and how doing so can enhance national security.

And for those countries that have not yet recognized it, I ask you to consider for a moment whether you believe that you are really doing everything you can to ensure the security of your communities and your citizens.

The Global Complex and the Travel Document address what we believe will be some of the most critical issues for global policing and global security in the future. They are cutting-edge tools and technology and infrastructure.

But these matter little in the end if the police in our member countries cannot make the most of their outputs.

That is why capacity building remains at the top of our agenda. Our current emphasis is not only supporting the police of today, but also developing the police of tomorrow.

We are now working with three UN partners and the Economic Community of West African States to fight drug trafficking and the organized crime networks that are destroying communities and threatening peace up and down the western coast of Africa.

The initiative, which is currently under implementation in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, will result in better-trained police officers, stronger NCBs, tighter borders, and sustained enhancements in operational and analytical capability.

In another project, with the World Customs Organization and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, we are creating joint teams of police, customs, border guards and airport security at airports in Africa and South America to intercept cocaine shipments by air on major drug-trafficking routes.

And in the area of human trafficking, operations carried out by INTERPOL, our NCBs and police in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon have led to hundreds of child trafficking victims being rescued and more than 50 suspects arrested.

Just as importantly, the officers involved received training that will help them better respond to this type of crime in the future.

Many of the operations I have mentioned were carried out through INTERPOL's OASIS programme funded by the German government.

I just returned from a conference in Naples, Italy, that looked at enhancing co-operation between Europe and Africa in tackling crimes of mutual concern.

Through initiatives like OASIS, we will continue to match needs to resources; we will continue to deliver what our member countries require of us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Brothers and sisters,

Taken alone, the achievements I have discussed are great successes. But they also point to something bigger: we are casting a wider net and we are limiting the opportunities for the criminals to move and function in our member countries.

All of us here know that when one door is closed, the criminals will try to open five more until they finally get in. We know that is happening with maritime piracy.

That is why we cannot work in isolation. We cannot make distinctions between drug trafficking or human trafficking or wildlife crime.

Not when the criminal networks behind these crimes don't work in isolation.

Not when the same individuals can traffic children across a border, or weapons from one conflict zone to the next, or kilos of cocaine halfway around the world.

A common theme in all of this is the importance of securing your borders, and better securing them is one area where we all have to work together to do more.

Most of the countries here still do not conduct systematic checks of our database of stolen and lost travel documents containing 24 million records. Of the almost half a billion searches of the database performed last year, Africa unfortunately accounted for less than .10 per cent. We've seen great progress year after year, and in Africa Senegal is a leader in this area with more than 160,000 checks last year, but renewed urgency in expanding access to this and other INTERPOL databases to your frontline officers is the order of the day.

In closing, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge our President, Khoo Boon Hui, and Delegates for Africa, Magdy ElShafey of Egypt and Adamu Abubakar Mohammed of Nigeria who have joined us today. Vice-President Mostapha Mouzouni of Morocco was unable to make it because of unforeseen circumstances, but I am delighted that Delegate Petter Dyhre of Norway is with us.

Let me also thank the staff from the General Secretariat and our Regional Bureaus here for making this conference possible. But most of all, let me express my deep gratitude to our hosts for their hospitality and professionalism.

We have a lot of ground to cover over the next three days, so let's get to work! Thank you.