

REMARKS

by

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**1<sup>st</sup> MEETING ON  
COMBATING IRREGULAR & ILLEGAL SPORTS BETTING**

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IOC Headquarters  
Lausanne, Switzerland

- Honorable Ministers;
- International Olympic Committee President Jacques ROGGE;
- Distinguished delegates;
- Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning.

First, let me thank the International Olympic Committee for its invitation to INTERPOL to participate in this groundbreaking meeting.

In 2008, I had the opportunity to witness the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing, China.

I still recall with great emotion the moment when China's Zhang YINING took the Olympic oath on behalf of all competing athletes, solemnly committing to protect the integrity of sport.

Today, we are gathered precisely because illegal and irregular betting are major threats to the integrity of sport competition - be it at the local, national, or Olympic level.

Without our collective commitment and action against these threats, the confidence in fair play by the public – and even more importantly, by our youth – will be eroded and eventually vanished.

This would represent the loss of a global treasure.

Two years ago, 4.7 billion viewers followed the Olympic Games in Beijing. Andres INIESTA's goal in the 2010 FIFA World Cup Finals was witnessed by more than 700 million people worldwide.

National championships like the NBA in the US or the Premier League in England have respectively more than 30 and 60 nationalities represented in the field every week. The current ten best scorers in the French Top 14 Rugby championship include players from four different continents.

We live in a time where sports can be lived and enjoyed by a global audience, like never before.

This also means that betting can now access a myriad of events globally, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Distance has ceased to be an obstacle.

But we know far too well that this applies also to illegal and irregular betting, constantly looking for the most profitable targets globally.

Already in 1998, the Floodlight Scandal saw European football targeted by Asian organized crime involved in illegal betting. Similarly, syndicates involved in illegal gambling in North America often showed ramifications reaching Southern and Eastern Europe and even Asia.

When widespread, illegal and irregular betting will create a shadow economy possibly enormous in size and depth. In Asia alone, illegal betting is estimated to provide revenues for almost 500 billion US\$.

And it was precisely in this region that INTERPOL recently brought together several member countries, who acted forcefully upon their shared will through international cooperation.

It all started from their determination to put a check on illegal soccer gambling controlled by Asian organized crime syndicates, and its proliferation in the region.

Those countries were perfectly aware that such a threat could hardly be faced solely within national borders.

That is how INTERPOL came into the picture in their support.

That is how a series of extremely successful cross-border operations against illegal soccer betting were launched and coordinated across Asia.

Under the codename SOGA, we developed an integrated package to assist our member countries

- from threat assessment;
- via operational planning and dedicated training;
- to coordination and intelligence sharing in the field through a secure global communication network.

Operation SOGA I was thus launched in 2007 bringing together China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

With our Liaison Office in Bangkok providing operational support around the clock, in just four weeks more than 260 successful raids were conducted, resulting in more than 400 arrests. Close to 700,000 US\$ in cash were seized, and almost 700 million US\$ in bets were on the table at the time of the operation.

Those results told us we were on the right path.

One year later, Operation SOGA II was executed with Indonesia also joining participating countries.

In two months, during the high betting period connected to the final stage of major European championships and the beginning of UEFA EURO 2008, more than 1,000 raids led participating countries to about 1,300 arrests. 1.4 billion US\$ in bets were interdicted, and almost 17 million US\$ in cash were seized.

Finally, with the FIFA World Cup 2010 approaching, a third SOGA operation was planned and executed with four participating member countries last year.

In just one month, it resulted in more than 5,000 arrests from 850 raids, close to 10 million US\$ in cash seized and 155 million US\$ in illegal bets prevented.

It is my conviction that just like the exceptional results of Operation SOGA were replicated across time in Asia, they can be replicated and

become a reality in other regions, against other offences against the integrity of other sports, and with the involvement of even more countries.

The tools for effective international cooperation already exist and have already proved to be effective. It is a matter of supporting their systematic use and making them a cornerstone of our common strategy.

We must act now, and we must act fast.

The stakes are high, and they are getting higher.

The figures I mentioned earlier tell us why illegal and irregular betting can potentially undermine public security.

Early this year, 14 members of the Gambino Organized Crime Family pled guilty in the United States to charges including illegal internet- based sport betting. These same subjects were involved - in parallel - in offences ranging from extortion to drugs and sex trafficking of minors.

Last July in Japan, a top Sumo champion was banned from professional practice for his alleged involvement in illegal betting connected to Yakuza figures.

In Italy, more than 30 active investigations on illegal gambling - including sports betting- directly connected to organized crime were reported in 2010 alone.

Organized crime will always look at illegal and irregular sport betting as appealing business, providing high profit for limited risk

Without proper deterrence, this could likely lead to other lines being crossed.

Match-fixing is the most powerful example.

One of the most famous match fixing episodes dates back to 1919, when several Chicago White Sox players were banned from baseball for fixing Game 8 of the World Series.

In recent times we have seen sports as diverse as basketball and soccer fall prey of corrupted referees seeking illicit profit from irregular or illegal betting.

Only last month the ancient sport of sumo wrestling was hit by allegations of match-fixing involving several wrestlers.

We are hardly facing a new phenomenon.

But it is one that in its potential impact has prompted INTERPOL and FIFA to engage in close dialogue in the realm of soccer.

And because of the evolution of the global sports landscape, combating these phenomena will hardly become any easier.

Remote betting, particularly thanks to the internet, has revolutionized the market almost overnight in terms of reach and speed. Cybercrime can now overlap illegal betting, creating more potential targets and more challenges for law enforcement.

Pressure to violate sports integrity will increase, diversify and come from anywhere in the world at any given time.

In a world that by 2015 will see 2.5 billion people able to access the internet, we are in dire need for effective responses.

They must mirror the threat they seek to address: rapid and global.

They must involve all stakeholders, each in their respective strengths, to preserve the integrity of sports and its survival across the next generations:

- **Law enforcement**, as the best suited actor to interdict criminal threats against sports integrity, because of the unique skills, mandate and authority required by this task;
- **National and international sports associations**, whose monitoring of competitions and enforcement of strict codes of conduct can ensure deterrence among athletes and prompt action by authorities;
- **The private sector**, whose daily involvement in global legitimate betting offers unique insights into the nature of the threat;

and of course

- **National governments**, whose strong will and continuous support are preconditions for success against any challenge to integrity and security alike.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Gold medalist Jesse OWENS once defined his work as “a lifetime of training” to be ready for those 10 seconds”.

Let’s work today, together, to be truly ready and effective when called upon in defense of sports.

Thank you.