

Trans-Pacific Symposium on Dismantling Transnational Illicit Networks

Remarks by [Ronald K. Noble](#), INTERPOL Secretary General
Honolulu – 10 November 2009

Esteemed fellow panelists,
Dear colleagues,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you. It is a great pleasure to be here.

In 1994, a Croatian man and two accomplices robbed the “Golden Boutique” inside the Moana Surfrider Hotel just a few blocks from here, making off with eight luxury watches.

Ten years later, the man was arrested in California on separate charges of burglary and grand theft. He was using an alias at the time, but fingerprint checks by U.S. authorities revealed he was the subject of an outstanding federal warrant and he was removed to Hawaii.

Now, fast forward to June 2009, three men claiming to be watch collectors visit several jewelry shops in Monaco. They arouse enough suspicion that police in Monaco detain them for conspiracy to commit robbery.

It turns out they were, in fact, casing stores to rob.

This time, the fingerprint analysis of the criminal suspect included not only a check of the national database but also of INTERPOL’s global database via our secure global police communications system called I-24/7.

And, guess what, this global check by Monaco revealed that one of the three men detained was implicated in the robbery right here in Honolulu that had occurred 15 years earlier!

We now have a clearer picture of his activities during the 15 years separating his first and last known potential international criminal links: he was a central figure in an international network of armed jewelry robbers we call the Pink Panthers.

We know the Pink Panthers are dangerous. In Dubai, they drove their cars through an enclosed shopping mall and crashed them into the front of the store. In Tokyo, they used tear gas on the store’s employees. In Europe, they brandished weapons.

We know that this transnational criminal network is mobile. Its members have carried out more than 160 confirmed armed robberies in the U.S., Europe, Japan, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates – 28 different countries in all. The estimated value of thefts they have committed is thought to far exceed 300 million euros.

And we know how to best fight this and any other transnational illicit network: by harnessing the relevant data, expertise and resources of law enforcement in INTERPOL's 188 member countries.

Operational meetings facilitated by INTERPOL have brought together investigators from countries hit by the Pink Panthers to share intelligence and have resulted in key breakthroughs.

Previously unknown or unlinked DNA profiles and fingerprints submitted to INTERPOL databases by our member countries and disseminated to our global membership have led to the arrests of several suspected Pink Panthers.

Could these same results have been achieved bilaterally? Absolutely not! Bilateral links allow more profound development of previously unlinked cases, but they cannot be used effectively to establish links between cases that appear unrelated at the start of an investigation.

For example, when the Dubai police sent DNA profiles following the jewelry robbery that occurred in their shopping mall, they had no idea who the suspects were and they did not have bilateral relations with every country in the world.

When the criminals operate in multiple countries throughout the world, we must cast as wide a net as possible to catch those valuable pieces of information that will allow us to identify and apprehend those responsible.

This is our best defence against transnational illicit networks, whether they are involved in armed robbery, drug trafficking, terrorism, human smuggling or any other crime.

This is the power of our member countries working through INTERPOL.

The 21 member economies of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation alone account for more than 40 percent of the world's population and total global trade.

It is in all of our shared interest to facilitate the legal flow of goods and people across this great ocean, while shutting the doors to the criminals who wish to exploit this freedom for profit; to strengthen fundamental policing, while continuing to innovate in response to the increasingly challenging threats we face.

We cannot be afraid to try new ideas...to take bold steps...to sometimes venture outside of our comfort zones.

The path to sustainable security is fraught with risks. Just two weeks ago, Taliban insurgents killed five UN employees in Afghanistan. They were there supporting the election, helping to lay the foundation for a stable society to take root.

We must move out of our comfort zones when we consider how to confront transnational crime groups operating in areas of conflict or post-conflict but with ultimate global markets for their illegal goods.

In particular, I am speaking about the heroin that is trafficked from Afghanistan by the Taliban to finance its terrorist activities. Both you and I know that this heroin is finding its way to countries all over the world.

Late last year, a shipment of about 15 tons of a key precursor chemical used in the processing of heroin was seized by Pakistani authorities, in one of the largest-ever such seizures.

With the support of the INTERPOL General Secretariat in Lyon, France, our National Central Bureaus in Japan, Korea and Pakistan were able to establish the modus operandi of the criminal group behind the trafficking and subsequently identify the major suspects involved.

It is not just the Taliban and heroin. Asian gangs co-operate with Eastern European criminal networks in human trafficking; organized criminals engage in pharmaceutical counterfeiting; traffickers switch seamlessly from weapons to drugs depending on where the biggest and easiest money is.

We will not always know where the threats will originate, but we can be better prepared by making sure that there are no gaps in our collective ability to respond.

Last month, INTERPOL welcomed its newest member country, Samoa. As the regional hub of the Pacific Transnational Crime Unit Network, the country manages and co-ordinates law enforcement intelligence provided by the network and regional law enforcement agencies. Its joining INTERPOL will significantly enhance crime-fighting efforts in the region, but will also bolster our global initiatives.

There is a Hawaiian proverb that goes, “Pupukahi i holomua” – my apologies to any Hawaiian speakers in the audience for my pronunciation! – which translates as: “Unite to move forward.”

At some point, an international terrorist or organized criminal will need to take a plane or cross a border to carry out their crime or escape justice. And to do that they will probably need a passport, which will most likely be fraudulent.

This is a grave, but needless, threat to the security of our borders and our communities. As the 9/11 Commission wrote in its final report: “For terrorists, travel documents are as important as weapons.”

We must make sure the tools that are already available to secure our borders are used and are used to their maximum effectiveness, like INTERPOL’s database of stolen and lost travel documents and our innovative FIND/MIND technology that puts this and other databases directly into the hands of officers working at airports and border-control units.

The stolen and lost travel documents database contains almost 19.5 million records submitted by 147 member countries. The number of passport records has grown from just a couple thousand to almost 11 million in a few short years. This year, it has helped countries uncover more than 2,000 suspect travel documents each and every month.

Before the widespread adoption of FIND/MIND at all international airports and seaports, the U.S. performed 900 searches of the stolen and lost travel documents database annually. This year alone, the U.S. has conducted more than 64 million searches. The number of searches of nominal records has grown times a thousand.

It is one of the most easily implemented tools in countering all forms of transnational illicit activity and one of the most effective.

Our Dismantling Smuggling Networks (DSN) project connects officers at airports and border-control posts to the database of stolen and lost travel documents through FIND/MIND. It also provides border security agencies with the necessary investigative and analytical resources to target, identify and disrupt smuggling activity.

This project originally targeted the organized smuggling of Iraqis into North America. While the evidence suggests most smuggling victims are traveling to seek asylum or a better way of life, the smuggling networks and the loopholes they use to move migrants are often used by other criminal elements, like terrorist organizations, and used for other crimes, such as the smuggling of drugs or weapons.

Based on the success of an operation we conducted in Peru last year within the framework of our DSN project, we have engaged authorities in additional countries in this region, including Fiji and the Philippines, to participate in similar exercises next year.

Finally, if you scratch the surface of most acts committed by illicit transnational networks, you will often find a thick layer of corruption.

Corruption breeds more crime and crime fuels more conflict – and the vicious cycle continues.

This is why INTERPOL has made fighting corruption a cornerstone of all of our activities. With the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Austrian government, we are creating the world's first International Anti-Corruption Academy in Vienna.

The Academy, which is scheduled to open next year, will educate and inspire a new generation of law enforcement officers, government officials and business professionals to fight corruption in all of its forms.

We are counting on your support in making our Anti-Corruption Academy a success!

Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you to the U.S. State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement for organizing this symposium.

I, and two of my most trusted and able colleagues, traveled literally halfway around the world to be here because of the importance of this symposium. I believe that you will find the presentations and insights of Jonathan Evers, who is the Assistant Director for our Trafficking in Human Beings Unit, and Frederick Lord, who is the Assistant Director for our Anti-Corruption Unit, to be most useful.

Thank you to our Hawaiian hosts for their gracious hospitality and true aloha spirit.

The noted travel writer and novelist Paul Theroux said: "Hawaii is not a state of mind, but a state of grace."

We have a full agenda ahead of us for the next three days. Thank you all for being in here while the beautiful Pacific beckons outside. Nonetheless, on behalf of my Hawaiian brothers and sisters, I do hope that you also find the time to enjoy this "state of grace."

I wish you all a productive conference. Thank you.