

74th General Assembly

Speech by Secretary General [Ronald K. Noble](#)
Berlin, Germany, 20 September 2005

Mr President
Members of the Executive Committee
Chiefs of Police
Heads of NCBS
Fellow staff from the General Secretariat around the world
Distinguished colleagues
Ladies and gentlemen

Almost five years ago, I stood before you asking to be confirmed as Secretary General. At that time, I spoke about the Ron Noble whom you could not see by reading my resume. I shared with you the deep influence that my parents have had on the lives of my brother and me. The speech I gave on that day spoke about the sacrifices my parents and family made so that I could be educated. It was without a doubt the most heartfelt speech I have ever given in my life.

I believe I struck a chord with many people because I spoke about my parents and family. My speech allowed the minds and hearts of those in the audience to drift back to their own personal experiences. And for just a brief moment we were one, despite our differences in nationality, age, race, religion or gender.

When people comment on that speech and I ask them, 'What did you like most about the ideas that I proposed for INTERPOL's future?', the response I always get is: 'I don't remember anything that you said except what you said about your mother and father.' Well, God continues to bless me. My mother and father are again here with me today.

You might recall that my mother is German and that my parents met and fell in love in Germany following World War II. So this is a special occasion for me for another reason. The last time that my mother was in Berlin was in 1945 when she fled the city as a young woman, 20 years of age, to return home to her parents in Bavaria, which is located in the southern part of Germany.

That was 60 years ago, when not only the world was divided but even INTERPOL was divided. Today she is here with me to see [184 countries'](#) police forces united under one organization's flag and sharing one purpose – to bring security and safety to people around the world.

The circumstances of her return to Berlin could not be more different or more positive than her departure. Today, Berlin is a powerful reminder that from the ruins of conflict can come unity, security and beauty.

Shortly after being nominated Secretary General by the [Executive Committee](#) in 1999, I gave a magazine interview in which I spoke about what INTERPOL needed to do to survive and become more relevant to police in your countries. I said then that INTERPOL's major focus must be terrorism. At the time, the need to fight [terrorism](#) was not shared by the entire world community, though many of your countries suffered greatly from it.

But, during my first term as Secretary General, a brutal and shocking set of events shook the civilised and free world into reality.

Less than one year after my confirmation, Al Qaeda terrorists used US soil and US targets to murder thousands of US citizens and citizens from more than 70 of our member countries spread around the globe. On September 11, 2001, the entire world's attention was finally drawn to the importance of the anti-terrorism fight. On that day, we as a world community were put on notice by Al Qaeda that our personal and national security could never again be taken for granted.

It does not matter where you were. It does not matter what you were doing. Each and every one of you can remember where you were when you first learned about or first saw images of the terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Center on the 11th of September 2001.

For INTERPOL, the 11th of September was a moment of reckoning. It was the time for us to decide what kind of international police organization we wanted INTERPOL to be.

Although INTERPOL had been created over 80 years ago by police chiefs to provide operational police support internationally, something had happened to INTERPOL over the years. INTERPOL had become so slow, so unresponsive that in many police circles around the world INTERPOL was considered irrelevant to their day-to-day needs.

But, it was on September 11th, 2001 that INTERPOL went operational and that we committed ourselves to working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year to support our NCBs and police services. And it was on that day that we first began reaching out to you in times of crisis, rather than waiting for you to ask for help.

One can say that INTERPOL was reborn on the 11th of September 2001.

On that day, our INTERPOL staff let it be known around the world that INTERPOL was and could be relevant to provide significant and real-time operational police support in times of crisis. We did not wait to hire new paid staff or to get additional resources. Our staff just did what had to be done, and they and their families made the necessary sacrifices. On that day, I promised that the lights would never again be turned out at INTERPOL, and they have not been.

Since then, our NCBs and member countries' police forces have seen a rejuvenated INTERPOL. When a terrorist attack, significant criminal event or national or international disaster occurs, INTERPOL is not only one of the first organizations to offer our police partners assistance, but we are one of the first to deliver on those offers and one of the few prepared to remain with you until the job is done.

We have also, I'm proud to say, further developed our relationship with the United Nations, as you heard yesterday. You also will be asked during this General Assembly to approve a resolution to provide support to the UN's mission in Liberia.

It is in times of crises that a President, Executive Committee members, a Secretary General, heads of police and NCBs can see the kind of organization to which they belong.

On 26 December 2004, a [tsunami](#) struck Southeast Asia. Thirty INTERPOL member countries' DVI teams responded immediately. Responding to a tsunami or such an emergency was not something INTERPOL or our personnel at the General Secretariat were ever expected to do. On December 31, New Year's Eve, 2004, I flew to Phuket, Thailand, and two days later, a full INTERPOL Incident Response Team followed. Our office in Bangkok allocated equipment and personnel to Phuket to provide immediate on-scene support.

Thereafter, I and an Incident Response team flew to Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Indonesia to offer our police colleagues in those countries INTERPOL support as well.

Recognising that much of the co-ordination needed to occur from the General Secretariat, we established a Crisis Support Group in Lyon.

INTERPOL General Secretariat staff and some of your staff have been on the ground working side-by-side with our member countries' police services in Southeast Asia since January 2, 2005. Yes, we have made some mistakes; I have made some mistakes in the process; and, yes, things have not been perfect. But if you want to know how relevant and helpful our support has been, ask the police chiefs from Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

I reaffirm this morning that we will remain there until the job we started has been finished. The President, the Executive Committee and I will find the resources somewhere to make sure that happens.

I also said in the 1999 magazine interview that we needed to bring INTERPOL into the 21st century as far as technology was concerned. Let me repeat my quote in the article: 'If INTERPOL doesn't adopt a state-of-the-art, web-based system to communicate with local police, INTERPOL will die out.'

Look at how far we have come together just during the last few years.

As amazing as it sounds, the most advanced global communications system in the history of international policing, [I-24/7](#), was designed in 2002. And in January 2003, Canada was the first country connected, and yesterday we connected our 167th and 168th member countries.

To give you an idea as to the significance of this achievement, the old X-400 system was put into place in 1992, but in the 11 years between 1992 and 2003 we had connected fewer countries to it than we have connected to [I-24/7](#) **in less than two years**.

On a more personal note, I must be honest and say that the last five years have taken a lot out of me. Being the head of an organization whose mandate is to react to emergencies 24 hours a day around the world is, to say the least, very, very stressful in today's world. Every major terrorist attack, criminal event or disaster is not only 'news' to us; it also represents one of you and one of us being attacked or being put in danger. My staff and I have to react with the speed and dedication that you react with when it is your own country under attack. We strive to do this each and every time.

In addition to the pressure of being there for you each and every time you need us, a Secretary General must balance many things, but two are worth emphasising. He must balance his desire to go to each of your member countries to support you and to see the conditions under which you work with his obligation to lead and manage the General Secretariat, which he could not do without the most dedicated group of colleagues, which I have.

The image behind me shows that in the last five years I have traveled on 192 missions to 90 out of our 182 [member countries](#). The police chiefs and NCB heads of the countries to which I traveled know that, in each country, I went to help you get the support that you needed for the police and NCB in your country. Frequently, my missions permitted me to bring the necessary focus on your needs, and frequently we were successful in getting you additional resources and support.

In each of those countries, I have talked to the police chiefs and ministers about an issue that I consider vital for the present and future of our organization: to have strong NCBs in each and every INTERPOL country.

I have attended numerous ministerial and regional chiefs of police meetings in eastern, southern, western and central Africa, Asia, throughout all of Europe, the Middle East and the Caribbean, and on each of those occasions, I have tried to leave with them making a greater commitment to INTERPOL and its NCBs than before.

Let me say something now directly to the heads of NCB gathered here: I believe that your importance in your own countries will grow exponentially in the next few years. We are not there yet in most of our member countries, but the day will come when the heads of NCBs will be as appreciated outside

INTERPOL as they are appreciated inside INTERPOL. You are the indispensable link to successful international police co-operation.

A Secretary General must also bring as many member countries' police officers and personnel under the same roof as possible.

I'm proud to say that staff from 76 countries now work at the General Secretariat in Lyon, an astonishing diversity and a substantial increase since I took over as Secretary General, when we only had 54 countries represented.

Of equal significance is that for the first time in the organization's history, INTERPOL now has directors from every INTERPOL region of the world, while just five years ago, Asia, Africa, South America and the Caribbean had no representation at INTERPOL's most senior management level. Assistant Directors have also been appointed from all the regions for the first time over the last five years. Some people said to me privately that it would not be possible to have senior staff representing all of our regions and still achieve success. I did not believe them, and the results that our President and Executive Director for Police Services Jean-Michel Louboutin demonstrated yesterday prove that we not only could do it, but we did do it.

In conclusion;

Over the last five years, I have devoted every fiber of my being to INTERPOL and each of our member countries. I can also assure you that I have said what I believed. I've often said it emphatically, but I have always respected the will of the organization's leadership.

What has made INTERPOL successful is not a person and is not tangible – even the power of [I-24/7](#) cannot be touched.

INTERPOL is the ideal that if a police officer anywhere in the world needs help, INTERPOL will be there.

The ideal that the BKA and Germany reminded us about this week with the pin they designed showing how our national flags must be crossed with our INTERPOL flags.

The ideal that we must help one another and work together as police professionals irrespective of nationality, race, gender or religion.

The ideal that despite the differences our governments might have, we as police professionals must find a way to do what the [President](#) has so often said: "To talk police to police."

The ideal that we can and must work together to keep one another's countries and citizens safer than they otherwise would be.

The ideal that if you criminally attack one of us and one of our countries and citizens, you attack us all.

In short, the ideal of INTERPOL is a story of commitment to a vision through the eyes of police of how the world should work. It is a story of a dedicated and visionary INTERPOL President. It is a story about a committed Executive Committee. It is the story of extraordinary NCBs and police services around the world. It is the story of my devoted Directors, Assistant Directors and INTERPOL General Secretariat staff all around the world.

The true story of INTERPOL cannot be seen in movies or read in novels; the true story of INTERPOL must be lived each and every day. I have been living this story each and every day as your Secretary General for almost five years now, and I would be greatly honoured and privileged to be able to live the story of INTERPOL with your continued support for an additional five years.

Thank you.