

20th African Regional Conference

Opening remarks by Ronald K. Noble INTERPOL Secretary General
Cairo, Egypt, 07 July 2009

First Assistant Minister of the Interior and Chief of Public Security Sector,
Major General Adly FAYED,
INTERPOL President, Mr KHOO Boon Hui,
General Secretariat and Regional Bureau staff,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to the 20th INTERPOL African Regional Conference.

Let me first recognize our Vice-President for Africa, Mr Mostapha MOUZOUNI of Morocco; our Delegate from Angola, Mr Eduardo Fernandes CERQUEIRA; and our Delegate from Egypt and head of our National Central Bureau in Cairo, Mr Magdy EL SHAFEY.

We are also very fortunate to have present with us today the Vice-President for Europe, Prof Dr Jürgen STOCK, our Delegate for Europe, Mr Peter DYHRE, our Delegate for the Americas, Mr Thomas FUENTES, as well as Executive Committee candidates from Japan, Spain and Qatar.

The presence of so many INTERPOL Executive Committee members and candidates to this event is a tribute to Africa and reflects just how important is the continent for INTERPOL.

It is a pleasure for me to be back in the country that gave rise to one of the world's greatest civilizations and back in the city where the past and the future co-exist so beautifully. This place is also very special to me personally because Egypt's then-Minister of Justice Farouk Seif El NASR was one of the first government officials to explicitly endorse my candidacy for Secretary General when I first visited here in 1998.

The pyramids – I was surprised to hear that 138 have been discovered in the greater Cairo area – remain enduring symbols of the ingenuity of Egypt and its people.

They also stand as the embodiments of the breathtaking scale – of history, of nature, of ambition, industriousness and perseverance – that is common throughout Africa.

One cannot avoid speaking of this continent in superlatives: home to the oldest modern humans, some of the oldest standing structures in the world, the largest land mammal and the largest desert.

But what about the fact that Africa is the most rapidly urbanizing region on the planet; or that it constitutes the world's fastest-growing mobile phone market; or that it is seeing the highest global growth of Internet usage, up 1,100 percent since 2000?



By next year, an undersea fiber-optic cable will run from South Africa to Sudan. It will revolutionize the way millions of people across the continent live and work by cutting costs significantly and expanding access to high-quality Internet and international communications services.

The speed of change in Africa is incredible, and INTERPOL is working hard to keep up.

Since we last met, INTERPOL has opened a fourth Regional Bureau in Africa, in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The bureau is a great partner and resource for police in Central Africa in addressing the specific crime challenges you face, but, like our other Regional Bureaus, it also plays a fundamental role in our anti-crime efforts throughout Africa and the world.

Our Regional Bureau in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, will be the focal point for an initiative we are developing in collaboration with all involved regional and global stakeholders, including the United Nations and the Economic Community of West African States, to tackle drug trafficking and organized crime in West Africa by bolstering police capacity, both nationally and regionally.

One of the main aspects of this initiative is to strengthen the investigative capacities of police and provide them with the necessary means to more effectively carry out cross-border operations.

Under the plan, a comprehensive assessment of the NCBs in the region will be conducted to provide them with much-needed additional staff, equipment and training. This initiative is a clear recognition of the fact that a sound regional crime strategy requires investing in INTERPOL's NCBs, for, without their expertise, dedication and involvement, no anti-crime plan can be truly operational and effective.

To better support national and international investigations and operations targeting maritime piracy in the Horn of Africa, our Regional Bureau in Nairobi will be instrumental in facilitating the extension of information, equipment and services from our NCB in Nairobi to Mombasa on the Kenyan coast.

INTERPOL is also working with countries in eastern Africa where piracy suspects are currently being detained awaiting trial to make important identifying information on the offenders available to the global law enforcement community.

Kenyan authorities recently agreed to submit the photographs and fingerprints of more than 100 individuals who have been arrested and convicted in connection with maritime piracy to INTERPOL, and our NCB in Victoria, Seychelles, has provided fingerprints and photographs of 23 detained Somali nationals suspected of being involved in this organized crime.

Other affected countries including Ukraine and Spain have also started sharing information on their investigations through INTERPOL channels.

Once entered into our global databases, this information can be accessed by any of our 187 member countries and will provide a reference point for any potential matches of suspects arrested in the future.

INTERPOL will continue to co-operate with all affected countries to ensure that all important investigative leads are followed up on. This is absolutely essential to better our understanding of the transnational crime implications of this phenomenon. In addition, INTERPOL will make every effort to support the Somali Police Force in its efforts to help rebuild the country.

One of your continent's greatest writers and the first Arab to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, Naguib Mahfouz, whose books will be forever associated with this beautiful city, once said: "You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions."

Curiosity drove ancient civilizations to construct fantastic monuments...to invent sophisticated alphabets...to seek out ways to attempt to explain the mysteries of the world around them.

Curiosity is pulling people from your villages to your cities in record numbers. It is driving the installation of that landmark fiber-optic cable I mentioned. It is reshaping the future of Africa.

Curiosity is also what brought you here today. For all of us to succeed, we must never stop asking the questions.

We must never stop thinking about how we can make our work easier, faster and more effective. We must never stop considering innovative approaches to identifying, locating and arresting more criminals...to dismantling more criminal networks...to ensuring our progress is sustained.

Already through our OASIS programme, thousands of officers in the region have received specialized training in criminal analysis, and strategies and techniques for fighting intellectual property crime and various forms of trafficking.

Last year, for the first time in Africa, INTERPOL, with the support of the World Health Organization, coordinated the efforts of multiple enforcement agencies in Tanzania and Uganda to combat the counterfeiting of medical products, in the framework of the International Medical Product Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce (IMPACT).

Operation Mamba led to the opening of more than 80 police cases and seizures of more than 100 different counterfeit and illicit products. At the same time, more than 80 officers from police, customs and drug regulatory authorities in the two countries were trained in investigative methodologies and techniques.

Here in Egypt, this past spring, the police anti-corruption unit carried out several operations that culminated in the arrests of five key suspects and recovery of millions of life-threatening counterfeit medicines worth millions of dollars.

Green Notices have been issued for three of the criminals suspected of links to a large-scale organized network that INTERPOL believes spans at least 12 countries in the Middle East and Asia.

Just as the prevalence of malaria and other illnesses here has made counterfeiting an increasingly lucrative crime for sophisticated organized groups, the wealth of plant and animal species on the continent has raised the stakes in our fight against environmental crime.

More than 300 officers from police, customs, wildlife and intelligence agencies in Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Zambia participated last November in the largest-ever international wildlife law enforcement operation conducted in Africa. Operation Baba led to the arrests of almost 60 suspects and seizure of one ton of illegal elephant ivory.

Likewise, the future developments in communications technology and infrastructure on the continent will also open up more opportunities for criminals and thus a greater need for training and investigative support for police in the region to fight cybercrime. INTERPOL is exploring partnerships with the Council of Europe and private industry to help us in this effort.

These successes I have discussed – all of the progress we have made – will be undone unless we work together to ensure all of the countries in Africa can share in the rewards. This is why we must strive to foster stability in areas suffering from crisis or recovering from conflicts.

Almost 20 years ago, the former Secretary-General of the UN and a powerful voice for Egypt and for Africa, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, introduced the concept of 'post-conflict peace-building,' which he defined as 'action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict.'

Police are a frequently overlooked but vital component of the stabilization process. Within this

framework, INTERPOL has launched a new initiative with the UN and its Department for Peacekeeping Operations to enhance the role of police in peacekeeping operations and to augment the capacity of police personnel deployed worldwide.

The theme of our General Assembly this year in Singapore is: "The Role of International Policing in Building Sustainable Security". I encourage all of you to discuss this matter with the senior government officials in your countries and to inform them of the gathering of relevant Ministers that INTERPOL is organizing ahead of the General Assembly.

Given the current economic situation, we do not feel that we can ask our member countries to assume a greater financial burden, so it has been agreed that your budget contributions will not be raised for the year 2010, except for inflation.

We are also fully aware that we should no longer rely solely on statutory contributions from our member countries to carry out our mission, which has made our work through the Global Security Initiative (GSI) more urgent than ever.

Through the GSI, we continue to seek new partnerships with public and private representatives to help fight terrorism, cybercrime and other transnational threats. GSI is in the process of developing a comprehensive funding strategy that unites INTERPOL with external partners and their resources to bear our shared responsibilities.

Besides the development of a cybercrime strategy and secure travel documents and identity management tools through the INTERPOL e-passport initiative, GSI continues its efforts to bring the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) to fruition through public-private funding partnerships.

In a significant step forward for global anti-corruption efforts, INTERPOL and the Austrian government last week signed a memorandum of agreement for the Academy being created near Vienna.

The Academy will be vital in setting global standards and best practices in working with international law enforcement and organizations to advance professional standards for anti-corruption work.

At the operational level, an INTERPOL Incident Response Team (IRT) made up of corruption and forensic specialists went to Burundi last May to evaluate the police investigation into the murder of a prominent anti-corruption campaigner and to provide forensic support.

Following the IRT's deployment, INTERPOL is now looking at ways to help the police build up their forensic capabilities, formulate anti-corruption strategies for combating such crimes, and enhance internal business structures and processes to assist with anti-corruption investigations.

I know the whole continent is now in a state of "football fever" following the admirable performances of your two representative teams, Egypt and South Africa, during last month's Confederations Cup in South Africa.

That was just the beginning of an exciting year ahead when the continent will welcome the world's best football players for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, the Under-20 World Cup here in Egypt and the Under-17 World Cup in Nigeria.

All of us at INTERPOL share your excitement about having the World Cup in Africa for the first time, and the General Secretariat and our Regional Bureau in Harare, in particular, will do everything we can to help ensure it is the safest the world has ever seen.

The beauty of global sporting events like the World Cup is that they unite us – they help us transcend our differences – in ways nothing else can. This is especially relevant for a diverse continent where 2,000 languages are spoken, where numerous religions are widely practiced; a continent where a multitude of

rich customs and long traditions endure.

Too often, we focus on what separates us, instead of what binds us together. What we all have in common is a basic desire to protect our citizens...to see our children grow up in a world without fear...to ensure our continued development and prosperity.

When I became Secretary General in 2000, I said: "INTERPOL must never forget that its client is the rank-and-file police officer who, in the 21st century, must pursue criminals that often have the upper hand in technology and resources and operate in an increasingly borderless world."

This is as true today as it was almost nine years ago. I have visited 26 countries in Africa since then, and I have seen firsthand the tremendous commitment of police here – even in the face of sometimes daunting challenges.

Your commitment motivates us at INTERPOL to do more. It has pushed us to work harder to better serve you in the past – and it will continue to do so in the future.

Now, all countries on the continent have the secure means to exchange urgent police data or access our databases through our I-24/7 network.

Now, there are four Regional Bureaus on the continent which we have continued to upgrade with staff and infrastructure, allowing us to strengthen our links with the regional chiefs of police organizations here and provide specific regional support.

Now, a call for assistance, no matter when it arrives or where it comes from, does not go unanswered.

And through programs like OASIS and our initiative for West Africa, we are working to build the capacity of the region's police forces to be able to respond to whatever crime challenges may lie ahead. We have come a long way together. We have built the foundation for a brighter future and we will eventually achieve our goals if, as wise men and women, we do not stop asking questions.

Over the next three days, I hope to hear many of those questions.

I would like to close by thanking our hosts, especially Mr. Magdy EL SHAFAY and his staff in the NCB for all of their hard work in organizing this conference and their continued hospitality throughout.

I would also like to express my gratitude to INTERPOL's Director of NCB and Regional Police Services, Ms Julia Viedma Robles, and all of the INTERPOL staff at the General Secretariat and in our Regional Bureaus for making this conference a success and for all of their work each and every day in support of the world's police.

Thank you.