

5th Heads of NCBs Conference

Lyon, France, 3-6 March 2009

Keynote speech by Khoo Boon Hui, INTERPOL President

Dear Secretary General,
Chiefs of Police,
Heads of NCBs,
And colleagues,

I am very pleased to be here among you for this important meeting. I am also happy to acknowledge the presence of Dr Juergen Stock, Chairman of the Strategic Development Sub-Committee and Mr Petter Dyhre, Chairman of the Finance Sub-Committee. This is the first time that I am participating in the Heads of NCBs Conference in my capacity as INTERPOL President. I would like to affirm your key role within the INTERPOL family and to thank you for the good work that you do. I will also take this opportunity to reflect with you on what we have achieved over the years; share with you some of thoughts on our future and how we should get there.



INTERPOL President, KHOO Boon Hui, told delegates that it was important that all member countries contributed their knowledge and expertise to defining the Organization's actions.

On the INTERPOL website, under 'INTERPOL Information', we read that "the NCB is the designated contact point for the General Secretariat, regional offices and other member countries requiring assistance with overseas investigations and the location and apprehension of fugitives." This indeed makes NCBs the key nodes of the global INTERPOL network. However, the expression "point of contact" could give the impression that the NCBs' role is somehow limited to being a sort of "post box" with the implication that our Regional Bureaus are post offices and the General Secretariat itself serving as the general post office.

No – we all know that the post box and post office image of INTERPOL is wrong just as the James Bond type of secret agent portrayed in movies. The truth is that you work in remarkable and unique ways to interpret, validate, and transform raw data into actionable information that is shared with colleagues at home and abroad, including INTERPOL officers at the General Secretariat and Regional Bureaus. More importantly, you facilitate the work of operational officers in investigating, arresting and extraditing fugitives, arrange for the sharing of best practices and assist in capacity building.

This pivotal facilitating role is vital to INTERPOL. Linked through INTERPOL's I-24/7 communications system and just as importantly through face-to-face contacts through meetings such as this, NCBs truly constitute the backbone of international police cooperation.

Last week I was invited to speak at the Bahrain Security Forum and Exhibition on Transnational Threats to Homeland Security along with other presenters such as Sir Ian Blair, the recently retired London Metropolitan Police Commissioner and Michael Chertoff, former US Secretary for Homeland Security. I took the opportunity to also visit the Bahrain NCB and found out that in the last 6 months alone, they had repatriated a wanted Filipino terrorist who had been responsible for the most deadly terrorist attack on sea. The NCB had also arranged for the handing over of 5 Somalian pirates from the Danish Navy to the proper civilian authorities through the Dutch NCB. When I cited the 2 cases during my opening address, the Prime Minister of Bahrain looked up from his seat and smiled at me. This is the sort of work

being done by you to make the world safer that too often goes unnoticed.

When I subsequently visited Saudi Arabia, I was also able to see for myself how NCB Riyadh worked. It put my own NCB to shame with its own Command and Coordination Centre, computerised processing of requests and 24/7 operations. Our Secretary General as mentioned the Orange Notice for 85 individuals suspected of plotting terrorists attacks against Saudi Arabia from abroad. The 83 Saudis and two Yemenis are wanted by Saudi Arabia on terrorism-related charges, including for links with al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, as well as in Iraq and Afghanistan. Never before has INTERPOL been asked to alert the world about so many dangerous fugitives at one time.

By sharing such sensitive information with us they are asking for our assistance not only to better protect Saudi citizens, but also to help all of us better protect our own citizens. We know all too well that the suspected 85 terrorists named in the list may travel to third-countries to train, prepare or carry out terrorist attacks. When I met the Deputy Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia a few days ago, he told me that NCB Yemen had arranged for the handing over of one of the Saudi Arabian fugitives. So we have 84 left. Have you checked whether any of them could be in your country and if so what they are up to? What do you need to do to make our world safer?

Considering the vital importance of your role, you are naturally at the heart of our Organization's strategy.

And this is why I would like to discuss the future of our Organization with you today. And to better understand what the future should be like, let me just reflect with you how we got here.

Since Secretary General Noble took office in 2000, INTERPOL has gone through remarkable and spectacular changes. He has already given compelling examples of the outstanding results of these changes. Let me give you my perspective and elaborate on what he eluded to.

When I became Commissioner of the Singapore Police Force in 1997, INTERPOL had no Command and Coordination Centre, no Incident Response Teams, no Stolen and Lost Travel Documents database, no technical solution to bring database information to officers in their stations of duty, no training roadmap for specialised officers ...and these are but a few examples!

Today, INTERPOL is a highly dynamic and proactive Organization that creatively devises all sorts of innovative solutions to support police worldwide in our day-to-day work. Yes I know that there are still problems to be resolved, for example, there are still disputes between members, unhappiness that not all members or even IPSG or regional bureaus are sufficiently responsive to individual member's needs. But all this does not detract from what INTERPOL as the only truly global police Organization offers.

'How to be more relevant' was – and continues to be – at the core of our Organization's transformation. And looking at what INTERPOL has become over the past decade, I can only say that this not only truly revitalised our Organization, but it has also made it more relevant for global security than it ever was before.

To achieve this, Secretary General Noble had to implement a significant cultural change and, having led the Singapore Police Force through a similar transformation, I know just what kind of challenge that must have been.

Secretary General Noble, I congratulate you for this remarkable success. But of course, knowing you well enough, I know you have higher aspirations for our Organization and have therefore embarked on yet another phase of our transformational journey.

After such a fertile period of changes and achievement of the vision that has led to the four core services we cannot live without, there always comes a moment when an Organization needs to consolidate its gains, reassess its direction and push forward again. This is even more relevant in today's context when

even domain experts seem to be caught by surprise by new developments. Gone are the days when incidents occur in isolation and in linear predictable forms, easily addressed by ad-hoc, on-the-fly planning, which law enforcement officers are very good at. More often than not, they hit us when we least expect it and with far reaching consequences. What is needed more than ever now is to hone our ability to anticipate the unknown and make sense of what is happening before it impacts us. Thus prepared, we are better able to respond in the best possible way, bringing back order and some form of normalcy to our lives as quickly as possible. Hence, the need to plan for tomorrow has never been greater than before.

For example, with the exception of very few fortunate countries, all of us are feeling the effects of the current economic crisis. I dare say that none could have predicted the severity of the recession and we cannot escape the pain of our fellow citizens being retrenched, of companies going out of business and of our assets dropping in value. However, would you not rather be a citizen of a country which has built up its reserves so that measures are being taken to save the economy. Better still, these are not going to be paid for by your children and grandchildren but from the savings the government has kept for a rainy day. Or indeed where the social fabric has been strengthened and stability established such that the risk of social unrest and political turmoil is minimised. These are the countries that in good times have prepared themselves for bad times and are now able to devote more and not fewer resources to ensuring the security of their citizens.

Most of us are soccer fans here but Secretary General, as a New Yorker and a big sports fan, I am sure that you know Yogi Berra, the famous New York Yankees baseball player and manager. Many of his words have become legend, but my favourite is: "If you don't know where you're heading, you're likely to end up somewhere else." And as we can all add, somewhere you don't want to be.

I think this to be particularly true for an Organization like INTERPOL that does not work in isolation but with 187 members and a myriad of other partners. And what every Organization periodically needs to examine is its vision, which is its desired state for the near or more distant future. In other words, a vision basically defines how an Organization should be like after a certain number of years. It describes what will be achieved if the Organization is successful and, as such, it is a guiding source of inspiration.

As President of INTERPOL, I realised upon my election at the last General Assembly in St Petersburg that our Organization, having achieved so much, was at a point where it should ask itself 'Where do we go from here?'

This observation led to discussions with Secretary General Noble and Dr Stock. Eventually the idea of creating a Strategic Planning Group was crystallised. Our Canadian colleague and former Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Giuliano Zaccardelli, has been chosen to lead this very important effort and he will share with us later today in greater detail about what the Strategic Planning Group is about. A point of note is that in parallel, Directors within IPSP will also be actively planning within their own areas of responsibility. It is important that they do so as the strategic priorities being fleshed out will need to be converted into actionable business plans. In the meantime, our core activities must continue to be planned for and services delivered.

At the last General Assembly in St Petersburg, the Global Security Initiative also received overwhelming support from member countries. As much as the Strategic Planning Group will critically influence INTERPOL's future, so too will the GSI. While the Strategic Planning Group will chart where INTERPOL will go from here, the GSI will be the seeker of opportunities. The GSI will actively explore new areas of growth, seize new opportunities and sources of funding and be an incubator of new projects. It will complement the work of the Strategic Planning Group by actively pursuing its activities in line with the overall direction endorsed by IPSP leadership, the Executive Committee and the General Assembly. With the GSI, we would have effectively opened up another avenue for us to think out of the box and look at possibilities from another perspective. Elaine Dezenski will be presenting the work of the GSI team later today. The teams' efforts will allow us to achieve even greater sensing of the unknown and the challenges lurking beyond.

While nobody can predict the changes in the future, I am certain that the planning processes instituted by the Strategic Planning Group and the opportunities opened up by the Global Security Initiative, will allow INTERPOL to sense its environment better, to react more nimbly to changes and allow us to continue to stay relevant to the world.

How do we get there?

So where does INTERPOL go from here? I will certainly not try to answer this question right now, but from the outset I feel that one element is crucial — that answers to that question will have to come as the result of a wide consultation process.

While I was trying to nurture a new Organizational culture in the Singapore Police Force, I realised just how important it was to think and act collectively and found the greatest leverage was the adoption of learning Organization principles and tools that have since permeated the Singapore Police Force. The learning Organization approach enables us to more effectively tap on collective wisdom for problem solving. I have learned that only with continuous feedback and consultation with all stakeholders can we get a holistic understanding of the challenges we need to surmount to push ahead.

So when I said at the beginning of my remarks that, considering the importance of your role, you are naturally at the heart of the Organization's strategy, it was not mere rhetoric. NCBs need to be an essential part of our strategic development plan if we are to choose the right future course for INTERPOL. Ultimately, planning cannot be restricted just within IPSP or the EC. We will need to leverage on the knowledge and expertise residing within the NCBs, our member countries and the Regional Bureaus as well as the outcomes generated from the regional conferences and other gatherings where security-related matters are discussed. Dr Stock and I have agreed that at least one of us will be present at such meetings to hear your views.

Only through broad horizon scanning can INTERPOL stay well-tuned to the drivers of change in the global policing and security environment.

Only through generative dialogue with all our stakeholders and partners will INTERPOL be able to efficiently and effectively plan and manage resources to optimise the impact of its infrastructure and operations.

Only a shared vision generated through consensus can bring the unswerving support of our member countries.

And, finally, only shared ownership of initiatives and actions can convince us all that collectively we will be able to achieve more, much better than working in isolation.

Collective thinking is above all about ownership. It is about every member of our Organization at all levels contributing to define the vision that will guide our action and set us on a steady course through uncharted and unfamiliar waters.

This clarity of vision is also what will make us stronger when facing hardship and enduring the sacrifices that come with our duty to serve and protect our citizens.

Of course, clarity of vision and direction does not imply rigidity. Good strategy always includes a degree of flexibility. Unexpected natural disasters and other crises require from the international police community, and particularly INTERPOL, to stand alongside our NCBs and member countries and to provide urgent support in any way possible.

Solidarity, without a doubt, is an essential component of INTERPOL's vision.

Dear Secretary General Noble,

Dear colleagues,

I am proud to be standing here today as the President of INTERPOL, just as I know that all of you are proud of representing your country at this meeting. But for all of us who share this noble profession, duty always comes first. As we face a highly unstable and quickly evolving international security and economic situation, it is my duty to humbly share with you one final point that I have learnt from leading the Singapore Police Force for the past 12 years.

As I progressed through the ranks, I have come to realise that the most effective leader is often not the one who was best at giving orders, but most often the one who listened best.

So I encourage all of you to attentively listen to one another during these three days and to share with the Secretary General and with me and with everyone present your concerns and ideas. We will be all ears. I look forward to a fruitful and generative dialogue.

Thank you very much.