

3rd International Witness Protection Symposium: Witness Protection/Security a Key Partner in the Judicial Process

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Opening speech by INTERPOL Secretary General [Ronald K. Noble](#)

Mr. John Clark - Director of the United States Marshals Service (USMS)

Mr. Sylvester Jones - Asst. Director, Witness Security Division, USMS

Mr. Carl Alexandre – Director, Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT), US Department of Justice (DOJ)

Mr. Steve T'kach – Asst. Director, Office of Enforcement Operations, Criminal Division, US DOJ

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the INTERPOL General Secretariat and to Lyon.

Today, I am greatly honored to address the professionals whose job I consider as one of the toughest in the world - where the stakes are high; the responsibilities are enormous; the tasks are undervalued; the accolades are few; and yet, instrumental in bringing some of the most dangerous criminals to justice. I am referring to all of you, witness protection specialists, attending this 3rd International Witness Protection Symposium.

Witness protection is an effective tool for law enforcement in combating crime, particularly [organized crime](#) and [terrorism](#). It is a crucial tool both for prosecutors in the filing of criminal charges against suspected criminals and for the police in clearing investigations and securing successful prosecutions. The theme for this third symposium "*Witness Security/Protection, a Key Partner in the Judicial Process*", adequately reflects the increasing importance of this particularly demanding aspect of law enforcement work – and the need for judicial authorities and law enforcement to work closely together in this area.

Of equal importance is the opportunity for those directly involved in witness protection, whether they are police, prosecutors or judges, to meet with their counterparts from other countries to learn from each other, address common issues, and compare and improve upon best practices with regard to witness protection.

As in the case for so many aspects of police work, witness protection is no longer an issue that can be effectively addressed at the national level alone, but increasingly demands international cooperation.

This is why INTERPOL, in cooperation with the US Marshals Service, is pleased to host this important gathering here at our [General Secretariat](#) for the second time.

I would therefore like to express my gratitude both to the Director of the [US Marshal Service](#) (USMS), Mr. John Clark and to the Director of the [US Department of Justice](#) (DOJ) [Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training](#) (OPDAT), Mr. Carl Alexandre, for sponsoring and organizing this event.

Looking at the agenda of this year's symposium, I expect exciting and rewarding discussions among all of you in the next two days. While different key topics are discussed during the conference each year, the underlying objective remains unchanged – protecting an essential element (credible witness) in the effective administration of the criminal justice system. Most importantly, this conference enables countries that are in the process of developing Witness Protection Units to learn from the actual experiences and challenges of those that already have an established witness protection legislation and programs. Initiatives such as this symposium will hopefully also encourage those countries that have neither appropriate legislation in place nor developed the necessary expertise with their police force to establish witness protection programs as a matter of urgency.

Indeed, all of us here today know that successful prosecution of crime cases, particularly against organized crime groups and terrorists, greatly depends on credible witnesses being able to provide their testimonies without fear of retribution. Ensuring, therefore, the safety and welfare of witnesses sends a strong message to our citizens that the justice system is effective, and demonstrates the commitment to bring criminals into the folds of the law. This is true for all of [INTERPOL's 187 member countries](#).

As a former prosecutor, I always believed that keeping our witnesses safe is as important as bringing wanted fugitives to justice. Developing effective witness protection programs is a complex undertaking, requiring specific expertise and a significant amount of resources. Take for example the [US Marshals Witness Security Program \(WITSEC\)](#), since its inception in 1971, it has successfully protected over 8,000 witnesses and almost 10,000 of their family members, and obtained an overall conviction rate of 89 % as a result of protected witnesses' testimonies. These results speak for themselves.

But as I mentioned, while witness protection is an important issue for the law enforcement community, not all countries have formal witness protection programs. More often than not, the local police provide ad-hoc protection to witnesses during the trial. These temporary arrangements in securing witnesses may be adequate to less serious cases, but this is definitely not the case when it involves major organized crime groups and terrorists.

This is a challenge for many of us, because an increasing number of witness protection operations in this day and age transcend national borders and this brings additional challenges to law enforcement – securely moving foreign witnesses so they can safely testify in another country. Compounding this challenge is when relocation to another country is the only viable option in securing witnesses.

During this conference, a representative from the [International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#) will share his experiences and present the challenges involved in securing witnesses in international investigations and prosecutions. This will provide us with a global perspective on witness protection operations and allow us to consider the potential added value of a closer international cooperation in this area:

The need to strengthen international cooperation in securing witnesses of international crimes and terrorism. Increased cooperation is not only vital for the work of the international war crime tribunals, but also provides (geographically) small countries additional avenues in protecting witnesses' anonymity, much needed due to their limited possibilities for relocation.

The need to develop common standards and promote best practices that would serve as guides to law enforcement and prosecutors in protecting high-risk witnesses worldwide.

And while fully recognizing that witness protection is a specialized area within law enforcement, I do believe that INTERPOL and its tools can play a role in facilitating your work.

INTERPOL is all about effective global police cooperation against international crime and terrorism. I believe that INTERPOL's experience, the services we provide and the network we established within the INTERPOL community could be of great value to all of you when developing global standards and mechanisms with regards to international cooperation on witness protection. Later, my colleague Mark BEAUCHEMIN, a seconded [FBI](#) Federal Agent to INTERPOL, will elaborate the different [INTERPOL tools and services](#) that enhance global police cooperation among our 187 member countries and partner organizations.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we strengthen international cooperation in the investigation of crimes and terrorism, similarly, we should also reinforce and develop global mechanisms that ensure the safety of our witnesses. Effective international witness protection programs are crucial in our collective fight against international crime and terrorism. Credible witnesses result to successful police investigations and criminal prosecutions. Painstaking efforts to build strong cases against terrorists and other serious criminals will be put at risk if we fail to secure our witnesses and safely present them in courts anywhere in the world.

I also want to express my admiration for the work you do in this area. To an even higher degree as other police work, the jobs you do require enormous personal sacrifices, are psychologically demanding and even the slightest error can result in the loss of human life.

I hope that your work of the next two days will be fruitful and result in new and innovative approaches that will enable you to further improve and enhance your current practices and procedures.

I also wish everyone a fruitful and enjoyable stay here in Lyon.

Thank you