

Press conference marking the first 10 DNA-assisted identification of Typhoon Frank ferry disaster victims

17 August 2008 Cebu City, Philippines

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

Mayor Tomas Osmeña
Vice Mayor Michael Rama
Dr Renato Bautista
Director General Kathyne Bomberger
General Ronald Roderos
Head of INTERPOL National Central Bureau Manila

Today marks a very important day in our joint efforts to identify and reunite with their families the victims of the 21 June 2008 Typhoon Frank ferry disaster.

This day was made possible by the commitment of Dr Bautista, his colleagues from the Philippines National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), from the INTERPOL [National Central Bureau](#) (NCB) in Manila and INTERPOL's General Secretariat headquarters, from the [International Commission for Missing Persons](#) (ICMP), from Cebu City's Mayor's Office, from the Philippines National Police, and from the entire Philippines Civil Defense, humanitarian community and volunteers throughout the entire country who have all worked non-stop, I repeat, non-stop, to put in place a system that would lead to the dignified, efficient and accurate identification of the Typhoon Frank ferry disaster victims.

INTERPOL has been a partner in this process from the very beginning. As you know, it is the world's largest international police organization with [186 member countries](#) worldwide. INTERPOL NCB Manila itself -- which is headed by Rolando Garcia -- is a significant member of the INTERPOL family.

You'll recall that [INTERPOL's Incident Response Team](#) (IRT), including experts from the ICMP, was deployed here after NCB Manila accepted INTERPOL's offer of assistance.

Why did INTERPOL offer to help? When Typhoon Frank struck you here in the Philippines, it struck all INTERPOL member countries around the world just like the 2004 Asia Tsunami struck all INTERPOL member countries. We knew from our experience with the Tsunami and other major disasters that your law enforcement authorities would need help. And when a police officer anywhere in the world needs help urgently, we respond immediately. That is what we were created to do, and that is what we train and prepare ourselves to do.

Disasters like the [Tsunami](#) and Typhoon Frank cannot be handled alone by any one country. They cannot be handled alone by any one government, whether federal, regional or local. Nor can they be handled alone by any one country's civil defense or law enforcement structure. Disasters like these require global support.

Not even INTERPOL -- with its 186 member countries' police services and headquarters -- could respond to such a disaster alone. That is why we regularly work in partnership with the International Commission on Missing Persons. They have in my view the world's largest and best experienced and trained personnel in the handling, collection, processing and analysis of [DNA](#) specimens in large volumes.

The ICMP was present on the ground with INTERPOL following the Tsunami; it was there in the US following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and it is with us here. So, when people ask why DNA specimens taken in the Philippines are being sent to ICMP headquarters in Europe (Sarajevo), my answer is that INTERPOL works with only the best! I am therefore honored that Director General Kathyne Bomberger agreed to fly here with me this weekend to explain to you in detail the careful manner in which the ICMP has been working on the DNA specimen matching of Typhoon Frank ferry disaster victims.

I also wanted to take a moment to recognize Dr Bautista and INTERPOL's Incident Response Team who are here with us today. I am holding up an example of a case file for the identification of just one victim. Just look at the amount of information that has to be collected and analyzed to make just one positive identification! This has been done for each of the 10 victims who were reunited with their loved ones today, and it will be done for each of the victims whose bodies are processed by Dr Bautista and the INTERPOL Incident Response Team.

Let me quote what one of my dedicated staff members said to me just yesterday when I asked what INTERPOL's goal should be in identifying victims. "We want better than 100 percent identification accuracy!" I am very proud of that response because it shows the level of commitment of my staff.

I close by thanking Mayor Tomas Osmena for the support that we have received from his office and the people of Cebu City, I thank Vice Mayor Rama for facilitating our work, and I also thank General Ronald Roderos, the Philippines National Police and NCB Manila for their constant support. I thank all local and national authorities too.

But, most importantly, I thank the surviving family members of the victims for their courage and willingness to provide us with the DNA specimens and with the information that has made it possible to identify these first 10 victims and the many more that we will identify in the days, weeks and months to come.

I promised them the first time that I met them that INTERPOL would be with them until the last victim who can be identified has been identified. That is a promise that my staff and I will be honored to fulfill.

Thank you