

## Fusion Task Force-Project Middle East Third Operational Working Group Meeting

Damascus, Syria – 18 June 2008

Speech by [Ronald K. Noble](#) Interpol Secretary General

Syrian Deputy Minister of Interior, Major General Sakr Khair Bek,  
Members of the Dais,  
Distinguished colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the third operational working group meeting for INTERPOL's [Fusion Task Force](#) - Project Middle East. Let me begin by thanking Syria's Minister of Interior Major General Bassam Abd-al-Majid and all of his colleagues at the Ministry of Interior and the INTERPOL National Central Bureau in Damascus for having agreed to host this meeting. Your hosting this meeting helps us all to form our independent opinions of the people of Syria, whom I have found to be very warm and welcoming.

Because INTERPOL embraces virtually all of the world's countries, we know that terrorism is not inherent to any one group of people, nation, region or religious belief. At each Fusion Task Force meeting that we have held around the world, we have heard from member countries whose citizens and visitors have suffered from terrorist attacks.

We know that terrorists, especially their leaders, speak a common language: one using threats and acts of violence to strike fear in the hearts of our citizens at the national, regional and global levels. They make false and insincere claims of allegiance to a greater cause, but their complete disregard for human life and the law reveals who they truly are: dangerous criminals who need to be investigated, identified, located and brought to justice.

INTERPOL knows that often – in fact, much too often – people, even our brothers and sisters in law enforcement, wrongly believe that the world's terrorist problem comes only from people who look like you or who look like me. Some people believe that a dangerous terrorist looks a certain way.

But we at INTERPOL know better. In Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, we have seen and see terrorists who look just like the people in those regions; terrorists who live in the same communities, who have the same nationalities and who often practice the same religion as those whom they attack.

This region is all too familiar with the harm that terrorists can wreak. Indeed, the citizens and law enforcement bodies of the North Africa and Middle East region have suffered from extraordinary levels of terrorism. For example, more than 500 people were killed or wounded in 13 separate bombings and other incidents in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in a one-year period, which culminated in the attack on the UN offices in Algiers in December 2007.

We at INTERPOL know there is no "us" and "them" based on nationality, ethnicity or religion when it comes to terrorism. Nor do we believe that countries' police services should be isolated or excluded from the world's anti-terrorism fight. Police need to be able to reach out to other police at any given moment and at any given location in the world, because the threat can come from anywhere.

As your Secretary General I have worked hard in this region to make sure that countries like Syria, Libya and Iran know how important their efforts are, especially within the INTERPOL framework, to help fight terrorism. I have travelled to each of these countries to meet with ministers and heads of police to encourage even greater co-operation than we already experience at INTERPOL.

We at INTERPOL's General Secretariat have worked hard to ensure that all of our [National Central Bureaus](#) and law enforcement officers in all of our [186 member countries](#) have the tools and support to protect your citizens and the many people who visit your countries. When sanctions against some of your countries made acquiring certain commercially available software impossible, we helped to custom-design the necessary software for you.

INTERPOL has worked over the years to make sure that all of our member countries have had the same state-of-the-art tools, the same level of operational police support and the same number of possibilities as other countries – irrespective of their nationality, race, religion or wealth.

This same philosophy underpins why the Fusion Task Force was created. We had one overriding principle in mind: "There are suspected terrorists that are so important or so dangerous to us back home that we want each and every country in the world to be alerted and warned about them."

The Fusion Task Force challenged our member countries to share the names of these suspected terrorists with police in each and every INTERPOL member country.

It has not always been easy. At the first Fusion Task Force meeting in 2002, most of the law enforcement officers who came brought their notebooks and pens. It seemed that the main motivation for participating was to get the names of other countries' suspected terrorists, not to share their own names.

And here we are six years later. Today, all 186 member countries have access to the names and details of 8,900 more suspected terrorists than the 2,030 we had in 2002, when the Fusion Task Force was launched. This means that you have 8,900 more possibilities of identifying a suspected terrorist than you had six years ago. This makes us all safer!

The global network of participating Fusion Task Force countries has grown from 30 or so in 2002 to more than 100 member countries in 2008. We now have a network of over 200 contact liaison officers when we had none before! At this meeting alone, we have representatives from 24 member countries, not just in the North Africa and Middle East region, but also from the Americas, Asia and Europe. This is proof that our 21 st-century and revolutionary approach to combating terrorism within and across INTERPOL's regions is working.

Gradually, we are replacing our skepticism and hesitance to share sensitive data with an enhanced spirit of co-operation. Co-operating internationally helps your own country stay safer. We want all of our member countries to be as active as possible in the fight against terrorism, and the Fusion Task Force provides an excellent opportunity for countries to do so.

We welcomed the willingness of Iranian authorities to host last month's operational working group meeting for Project Kalkan, which is our Fusion Task Force project for Central Asia. During that meeting, the Iranians committed themselves to providing INTERPOL with the names, photos and other identifying information of suspected terrorists about whom INTERPOL member countries had little or no identifying information.

This follows the bold example of Pakistani authorities who recently shared with INTERPOL profiles containing identity information, aliases and photos of 169 of Pakistan's most wanted terrorists belonging to Al Qaeda and its affiliates. So far, searches of our databases conducted by member countries have produced 22 positive matches with the names provided by Pakistan.

Such high levels of collaboration in terrorism investigations would have been unimaginable even a few years ago.

For these reasons, we cannot stop challenging the biases and old attitudes that people have had about how law enforcement should fight terrorism. Instead, we have to think about what we can do to take our current efforts to fight terrorism to the next level.

We have to ask ourselves: What can we learn here this week and what can INTERPOL provide for you in the future to ensure that we will have more successes to discuss when we meet again next year?

We have some well-tested ideas. INTERPOL has developed the technological solutions and resources to facilitate greater information-sharing.

For example, in this region, Syria and Algeria are now moving to implement INTERPOL's [MIND/FIND](#) system to provide remote, instant access to our database of stolen and lost travel documents at airports and border crossing points. The expansion of access by Syria and Algeria should lead to a significant increase in database usage and thus contribute to enhancing border security within North Africa and the Middle East and in other regions as well.

Coupled with this expansion of access to [INTERPOL's databases](#), we need the North Africa and Middle East region to establish an INTERPOL Sub-Regional Bureau, as has been done in Africa, the Americas and Asia.

We need more countries from this region to send their police officers to the INTERPOL General Secretariat for training and to work with us side-by-side. This would lead to enormous synergy – for us at the General Secretariat to benefit from the specific terrorism expertise of officers from the region, and for your officers to learn first-hand about INTERPOL's many tools and services and about international police co-operation at the highest level. As a result of my last visit here in December 2007, we now have one officer from Syria participating in the training programme at the General Secretariat.

In closing, what I have attempted to show you is the steady progression of the Fusion Task Force, from an untested idea in 2002 to a dynamic and successful reality in 2008 – one that responds effectively to the changing complexities of fighting terrorism in the 21st century. I have tried to demonstrate that we need and welcome the participation of all countries in the Fusion Task Force's work. Finally, I have tried to remind us all of the principle that brings us together this week: "There are suspected terrorists that are so important or so dangerous to us back home that we want each and every country in the world to be alerted and warned about them."

Let us work together to identify them, locate them and bring them to justice. If we commit ourselves to doing this, then all of our countries and indeed the entire world would be much safer. This must be our ultimate goal!

Thank you.