

5th INTERPOL International Symposium on Fingerprints

IPSG, Lyon, France, 4 June 2008

Opening remarks for the opening ceremony by [Ronald K.Noble](#) Interpol Secretary General

Heads of NCBs and Delegations,
Heads of Fingerprints and Forensic Units,
Members of INTERPOL's Fingerprints Experts Working Group,
Distinguished Participants,
INTERPOL colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 5th INTERPOL International Symposium on Fingerprints here at the INTERPOL General Secretariat.

This year INTERPOL is celebrating its 85th anniversary. Back in 1923 at our first meeting we had fewer than 20 countries. As I stand here before you we have [186 member countries](#), and this year the State of Vatican City will seek to become INTERPOL's 187th member country.

Since INTERPOL's beginnings, the use of [fingerprint](#) analysis to fight serious international crime has been an important factor. During the International Criminal Police Congresses in Vienna, Austria, in 1924 and in Berlin, Germany, in 1926, INTERPOL member countries promoted the use of fingerprint comparisons to prevent the counterfeiting of passports and cheques.

It took almost until the end of the 20th century in 1996, however, before the [65th INTERPOL General Assembly](#) in Turkey adopted a resolution for the acquisition and installation of an [Automated Fingerprint Identification System](#) (AFIS) at the INTERPOL General Secretariat. This transformed the way that INTERPOL worked. Suddenly it became possible for the systematic sharing of crime suspects' fingerprints using the NIST. This of course reduced the time needed to conduct a fingerprint search and improved the identification rate for fingerprints.

Ten years later in 2006 we held the [4th INTERPOL International Symposium on Fingerprints](#). At that symposium we had modest goals. We wanted to increase the number of countries, the number of fingerprints and the number of searches via INTERPOL using an internationally compatible standard. I am proud to report that since 2006 we have seen an increase from 107 to 148 in the number of countries participating in the fingerprint database, which amounts to an increase of 38 per cent. We have increased the number of fingerprints by 46 per cent. With regard to the use of INTERPOL's network to search our fingerprint database, the number of searches conducted from January to May of this year increased by more than 80 per cent from the same period in 2006, which has resulted in 32 per cent more positive hits this year.

So, one can draw the same conclusion for fingerprint comparison that we saw with the other databases shown to you this morning. An increase in relevant police data in [INTERPOL databases](#) and an increase in the number of countries that consult them will lead to more hits and will enhance both the efficiency and effectiveness of your law enforcement activity at the national level. Better law enforcement at the national level will help to keep not only your country safer, but your region and the world safer as well.

At this week's symposium, we have an ambitious goal for you and for us. As you can see, INTERPOL has what an honest critic must call an extraordinarily small database on fingerprints. As a result 80 per cent of the comparisons that we are asked to make result in a negative response.

Yet, we know from experience that more and more international criminals are leaving their finger marks at crime scenes throughout the world. Take for example when police in Monaco checked an unknown finger mark recovered from an armed robbery crime scene against the INTERPOL fingerprint database last June. It resulted in a positive match to a serial offender who was wanted for violent crimes in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Serbia and Switzerland. The suspect, whose fingerprints and nominal data were submitted by Serbian authorities to INTERPOL in June 2004, had escaped from a Serbian prison in October 2005 while serving a sentence for attempted murder. This link would never have been made if other INTERPOL member countries such as Serbia had not submitted the suspect's fingerprints to the General Secretariat. So, I return to my earlier conclusion. The more fingerprints that are added to INTERPOL's database or that are able to be consulted via INTERPOL, the more likely it is you will be able to identify an international criminal.

So, what is our ambitious goal for INTERPOL and for this conference? We would like to see your international fingerprint comparison via INTERPOL to grow from 76,000 to in excess of a million by the time we meet again. That is right, from 76,000 to in excess of a million. In order for this to be possible, our experts' group, IPSP and the private sector have been working to ensure that a universal international standard for fingerprint comparison could be agreed upon. We have done this.

All countries now agree that the [INTERPOL Implementation ANSI-NIST](#) standard must be met when comparing fingerprints internationally via INTERPOL. The private sector, for example, Sagem, Cogent and Motorola has ensured that each of their fine AFIS systems are compatible with the INTERPOL standard. In March 2009 we will be introducing a new [AFIS](#) system. When fully operational, it will allow us to conduct more searches – 1,000 per day. Currently we can only do 160 per day and 80 per cent of those are negative. The new AFIS system will only generate likely matches. Thus, the increase in numbers to search and the fact that we will be searching likely matches will raise our chances of generating positive matches. Furthermore, the new system will enable us to perform automated fingerprint searches and compare palm prints and marks, and will also include facial comparison software. It could also allow you to get immediate responses of likely matches rather than waiting three days to hear from INTERPOL. Certainly, this more advanced system will significantly boost the crime-fighting capabilities of law enforcement in our member countries and improve inter-operability between police, wherever they are located in the world.

I speak whenever I can about the importance of using 21st Century technology, tools and techniques to fight crime in the 21st Century. I cannot think of any area where increased speed, accuracy and efficiency could have a greater impact in crime fighting than in fingerprint comparisons. I close by thanking our experts group, our colleagues at INTERPOL, the private sector, but most importantly all of you for significant contributions to helping INTERPOL keep its member countries safer than they otherwise would be.

I wish you all a successful conference and a pleasant stay here in the beautiful city of Lyon.