

## 20th INTERPOL Asian Regional Conference

Hong Kong, China, 5 March 2008

Opening remarks by Ronald K. Noble, INTERPOL Secretary General

Mr. Henry TANG Ying-yen - Acting Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR)  
Mr. MENG Hong Wei - Vice Minister, Ministry of Public Security, People's Republic of China,  
Mr. TANG King-Shing - Commissioner of the Hong Kong Police Force,  
Mr. KHOO Boon Hui - INTERPOL Vice President for Asia,  
Conference delegates,  
Distinguished guests,  
Colleagues from the General Secretariat and LOBANG,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me welcome you all to the 20th INTERPOL Asian Regional Conference. We are very fortunate to have the Hong Kong Police Force hold this important event. The Hong Kong Police Force has a well-earned reputation for being one of the finest and most professional police forces in the world. Commissioner, on behalf of all INTERPOL member countries in the Asian region, I thank you for the extraordinary work that you, the organizing committee and your staff have done in putting together this conference.

This year, we celebrate more than 40 years of co-operation between INTERPOL member countries in the Asian region. While the agenda items for the conference today and for our first Asian Regional Conference in Kyoto, Japan, in 1967 differ, the underlying principle remains the same – enhancing law enforcement co-operation in the Asian region.

Asia is pivotal for INTERPOL and the international law enforcement community. The region's diversity offers both challenges and opportunities for fighting terrorism and other serious transnational crimes, such as human trafficking, drug smuggling and cybercrime.

As Secretary General, I have visited 29 Asian member countries to meet with ministers, police chiefs and heads of National Central Bureaus (NCBs). Last week, I visited India, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Republic of Korea, where I gained valuable insights from the dedicated officers in our NCBs into how INTERPOL could better support you.

Vice Minister MENG Hong Wei already mentioned the upcoming Beijing Olympic Games. Our Chinese colleagues have been sparing no effort preparing for the extraordinary security measures such an event requires. They have been working with INTERPOL for a year now to ensure the timely exchange of critical police information between China and all other member countries.

Our network of 186 member countries gives police in Asian countries access to the information they need to fight crime more effectively with their counterparts around the world, or just next door.

INTERPOL's unique ability to link national police was highlighted by the recent arrest by police in Nepal of an Indian doctor who was the subject of an INTERPOL Red Notice and believed to be behind hundreds of illegal kidney transplants in India .

Other examples that illustrate the operational value of INTERPOL's network are Operation Soga, targeting illegal soccer gambling in Southeast Asia, and Operation Jupiter-Southeast Asia, targeting pharmaceutical counterfeiting in the Greater Mekong sub-region.

Operation Soga involved NCBs and sub-bureaus in China, Hong Kong-China, Macao- China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and the INTERPOL General Secretariat and our liaison office in Bangkok. It led to the arrests of 432 individuals and the closure of 272 underground gambling dens which handled more than 680 million US dollars in illegal bets.

Operation Jupiter-Southeast Asia, carried out by police in China and Myanmar with INTERPOL's support, resulted in the arrests of four key suspects in the distribution of fake anti-malarial medicines across the China-Myanmar border and the seizure of at least 24,720 boxes of counterfeit drugs.

These successes underlined the importance of a comprehensive, collective approach to serious transnational crime. They also exposed the greater challenges for fighting transnational crime today. Now more than ever, timely international coordination and information-sharing are essential to disrupting these criminal networks.

INTERPOL has devoted tremendous effort and resources to developing the technical tools police in our member countries need to stay one step ahead of criminals.

Today, all 186 INTERPOL member countries are connected to our state-of-the-art I-24/7 global police communications system, giving all our NCBs direct access to INTERPOL's databases and the ability to exchange information in real-time – the most basic condition for truly effective international police co-operation.

During the 1st Asian Regional Conference, participants expressed their vision of an effective radio communications network for enhanced police co-operation between INTERPOL member countries. Forty years later, we have not only advanced way beyond radio communications, but with the final connection of Somalia to I-24/7, this ideal has become reality.

And we are taking both this concept and the technology a step further. Our priority now is to further extend connection to the I-24/7 system beyond the NCB and provide officers in the streets and at border control points with direct access to INTERPOL databases and services. Currently, 60 member countries have already expanded I-24/7 beyond their NCBs, while 21 have implemented MIND/FIND – INTERPOL's technology that enables law enforcement to instantly screen travel documents against INTERPOL's databases.

This has resulted in explosive growth in the number of database searches and hits. For example, in 2007, INTERPOL member countries conducted 300 per cent more searches of the SLTD database than in 2005 and 2006 combined – and recorded 92 per cent more hits. Our member countries in Asia alone have reported 39 per cent more lost and stolen travel documents since the last Asian Regional Conference in Jakarta, Indonesia, in March 2006, bringing the global number of records in the database to more than 14 million.

Singapore is now conducting final tests to implement the MIND system at its international airport and seaport. And, during my recent visit, South Korean authorities also committed to implement the system this year.

We know from experience that this will enable them to identify many more stolen passports, stolen cars and wanted persons – which will encourage other countries to follow.

Yet, still more is possible. Currently, only 27 Asian member countries contribute records to the SLTD database, while only 20 are active users. Lost and stolen travel documents reported by Asia represent only five per cent of the global total.

I ask all of you as a matter of priority to continue your efforts by submitting more records to INTERPOL, by extending I-24/7 access beyond the NCB, and by making full use of INTERPOL services.

INTERPOL is committed to helping each member country attain the technological capacity needed to fight crime effectively, because the reality of policing today is that any major investigation will likely require the involvement and assistance of police in multiple countries and across regions.

With financial support from the European Commission, we are expanding access to I-24/7 in five Central Asian countries. A similar project with the European Commission is planned for the ASEAN region to help enhance border security to fight human trafficking.

We are also reinventing the way we exchange information within the INTERPOL community. In the near future, our I-link automated information management system will enable investigators and analysts in member countries to compare and cross-check investigative data against criminal information from all over the world.

We are working with ASEANAPOL to have its crime data automatically included in the I-link central database. This project follows our historic agreement with ASEANAPOL to make select police information in its own database system accessible to law enforcement worldwide via I-24/7. We expect this to help Asian police forces develop more crucial leads in their major international investigations.

INTERPOL also continues to adopt non-traditional approaches to fighting international crime, including engaging the general public and media as direct partners. INTERPOL's experience with Operation VICO – which targeted a suspected international child abuser – showed us the untapped potential for support from the public and worldwide media in helping police identify dangerous criminals.

In close coordination with NCBs and our Bangkok liaison office, INTERPOL will shortly launch another global appeal for help in identifying an unknown sex offender. I am confident that we will receive the same level of support from you as we did during Operation VICO.

Dear colleagues, since member countries in Asia met for the first time more than 40 years ago, the threats facing us have become more varied and severe. Our task now is to build an INTERPOL for the 21st century by providing all member countries with the necessary infrastructure, tools and operational capabilities to protect their citizens.

Let this be our challenge for this 20th Asian Regional Conference.

Thank you