

Global Conference on Asian Organized Crime

Singapore, 23-24 January 2008

Opening remarks by INTERPOL Secretary General Ronald K. Noble

Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and Law,
the Honourable Mr. HO Peng Kee,
Commissioner of the Singapore Police Force and INTERPOL Vice
President,
Mr. KHOO Boon Hui,
Distinguished Members of Singapore's Government and the
Singaporean Police Force,
Dear Colleagues from INTERPOL Member Countries and from
INTERPOL's General Secretariat,
Ladies and gentlemen,



Law enforcement has to be adaptable to track organized criminals who are opportunistic and mobile, said INTERPOL Secretary General Ronald K. Noble.

Thank you all for participating in INTERPOL's Global Conference on Asian Organized Crime. I am always happy to visit my friends and colleagues here in Singapore.

Honourable Minister HO and Commissioner KHOO, you and your fellow citizens and colleagues from Singapore have much to be proud of. Singapore's enviable quality of life and low crime rate are the result of the combined commitment of your government, citizens and, of course, the dedicated men and women of the Singapore Police Force.

Singapore has shown its commitment to tackling regional crime issues through its strong leadership role in ASEANAPOL, the chiefs of police body of the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. In addition, Singapore has constantly played a leadership role at INTERPOL and will host INTERPOL's General Assembly next year. So you can see why Singapore is the ideal venue for INTERPOL's global conference on organized crime in the region.

Organized criminals are adaptable, opportunistic and mobile. They will transcend language barriers, ethnic differences and national borders in the singular pursuit of financial gain. Law enforcement has to be as equally flexible through cooperation at the regional and global levels – to not only facilitate the exchange of expertise and intelligence on suspects and modus operandi but to carry out joint operations when possible.

To illustrate this point, I would like to elaborate on Commissioner Khoo's comments on Operation Soga, which was launched in October 2007 with INTERPOL's coordination and support.

The operation was initiated at the urging of the eight (8) heads of organized crime units that make up INTERPOL's Asian Expert Group. They are, in alphabetical order, Australia, China, Hong Kong-China, Macao-China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

I am focusing on illegal soccer gambling because INTERPOL and the Expert Group members identified it

as a major organized criminal activity in their jurisdictions, but it is of course not the only one. All of [organized crime](#) groups' illegal activities – murder, extortion, money laundering, corruption, trafficking in drugs and people – feed into one another, facilitating and financing the commission of other crimes.

Gambling on soccer matches might seem as harmless as placing a small bet on your favourite team, but these illegal operations are often controlled by organized criminals who frequently engage in loan sharking and use intimidation and violence to collect debts. If that doesn't work, they force their desperate, indebted victims into drug smuggling and the family members of victims into prostitution.

One must remember that organized crime never loses money in gambling operations – one way or another, they make a profit.

From the years 2003 to 2005, police in Hong Kong-China alone seized more than 10 million US dollars' worth of cash and betting slips related to illegal soccer gambling in the special administrative region alone.

The dangers associated with this type of organized crime have been noted not just in Asia, but in Europe as well. Last year, European soccer's governing body, UEFA, asked police in Europe to investigate the results of at least 26 matches it believed were manipulated by overseas betting syndicates.

The matches covered every major European soccer competition and involved countries from almost all corners of the continent. While it is difficult to determine the exact amount of money involved in the match-fixing, UEFA claimed an overseas syndicate made 5 million US dollars on one championship match alone in July 2007.

What was most notable about Operation Soga was not only the results – which were impressive enough – but also the extraordinary level of collective preparation, cooperation and participation of INTERPOL member countries in the region.

The operation was carried out by police officers from INTERPOL [National Central Bureaus](#) and Sub-Bureaus in China, Hong Kong-China, Macao-China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, with support and coordination from the INTERPOL General Secretariat and our Liaison Office in Bangkok.

And our joint efforts met with even greater success than we could have possibly hoped for. The figures have already been mentioned but are worth repeating: more than **430** individuals arrested, and **272** underground gambling dens, which handled an estimated **680** million US dollars in illegal bets worldwide, identified and shut down by police.

More than **40** officers from seven (7) jurisdictions received training to investigate this type of crime during the two workshops we organized prior to the launch of the operation.

Operation Soga demonstrated what could be achieved by police in our member countries working side-by-side towards a common goal, with INTERPOL providing all of the tools necessary to support their investigative and operational efforts.

Based on this success, we hope to use Soga as a model for future initiatives between INTERPOL and national and regional police forces. We have already started planning for the second phase of Soga.

Another operation you will hear more about in the coming months is 'Vipera'. Members of our European and Asian Expert Groups on organized crime met yesterday to discuss the issue of people smuggling.

One possible target of the operation our Expert Groups have identified is the ringleader of a network that smuggled Asian nationals to countries throughout Europe. He and his associates are thought to have orchestrated more than 20 illegal entries involving almost 300 individuals in recent years.

I know all of the figures I have cited represent only a fraction of the number of criminals and victims involved and the amount of illegal gains earned, which brings me to my next point.

Asia and the South Pacific comprises more than 60 percent of the world's population, yet, in many instances, countries in the region rank near the bottom in the number of records contributed to INTERPOL's databases and the number of searches of those databases conducted.

But this region and INTERPOL demonstrated that when advanced technology, dedicated police work and the public's interest are directed towards the same goal, this region becomes a world leader.

In October 2007, the world witnessed how police in this region and in Thailand in particular were able to locate and arrest the world's most widely hunted suspected child sex offender. In just 11 days, a formerly unknown man was identified, photographed entering Thailand and then found thanks to the fine contribution of citizens and the hard work of police. A remarkable feat accomplished at breathtaking speed.

By making more active use of INTERPOL databases, the impossible becomes possible.

During last year's ASEANAPOL conference, held right here in Singapore, our two organizations signed an historic information-sharing agreement that will link ASEANAPOL's regional database with INTERPOL's [I-24/7](#) global police communications system.

Any searches made of ASEANAPOL's database will be automatically run against INTERPOL's databases of names, stolen and lost travel documents, and stolen motor vehicles, benefiting both police in Southeast Asia and in INTERPOL's [member countries](#) throughout the world.

Another technological innovation that will greatly enhance police cooperation in the region is I-link, the next generation of INTERPOL's central database management system. The system will automate and centralise criminal information and queries sent to INTERPOL by our 186 member countries, putting the wealth of information stored in INTERPOL's databases directly into the hands of criminal investigators and analysts.

It will help them establish essential links between pieces of data submitted by police in different countries that might otherwise go unnoticed, yet are vital for enabling investigators to develop leads in major international organized crime investigations.

Through I-24/7, investigators will have instant access to databases containing information on internationally wanted persons and suspects, and records on a broad range of crimes often linked to organized criminals, including the theft of passports, [motor vehicles](#) and [works of art](#), and cases of [drug trafficking](#), [money laundering](#), [cyber attacks](#) and [credit card](#) fraud.

I-link can be easily integrated into all of your daily investigative and analytical activities related to fighting organized crime in your countries and in the region. This is why I urge all of you to enlist the help of INTERPOL as a matter of standard operating procedure for the way in which you investigate international cases and check the background of non-national suspects.

The wealth of police knowledge available in the Asia-Pacific region and all other regions of the world, combined with INTERPOL's tools and services, the full resources of our Liaison Office in Bangkok and strong cooperation with key partners such as ASEANAPOL, means organized criminals in the region will have few places to hide and even fewer places to run.

Let me now conclude by thanking you again Honorable Minister HO Peng Kee, Commissioner KHOO Boon Hui and all of the men and women of the Singapore Police Force for organizing this conference and extending their warm hospitality to all of us. And, of course I also wish to thank my dedicated staff from INTERPOL's General Secretariat in Lyon and Bangkok led by Emmanuel Leclaire for your never-ending

dedication and efforts at enhancing international police cooperation worldwide. Finally, I thank the Heads of Organized Crime Units and all of the delegates worldwide for your participation in this important Global Conference on Asian Organized Crime.

I hope each of you will gain valuable new knowledge and insights over the next two days.