

BLACK DEATH - INTERPOL Bioterrorism International Tabletop Exercise

3 December 2007 - Hilton Hotel, Cité Internationale, Lyon
Opening statement by [Ronald K. Noble](#), Secretary General of
INTERPOL

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

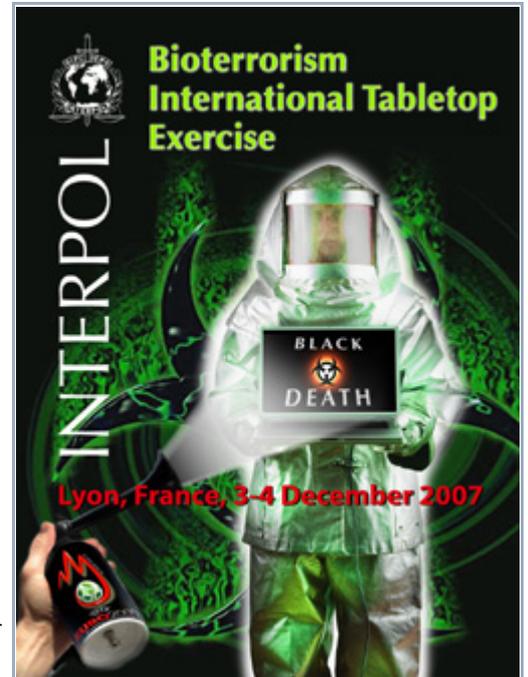
Over the next two days, we will deal with a worst-case scenario of global proportion: terrorists that produce large amounts of a deadly bacteria — plague — and disseminate it using hundreds of simple horns, the kind that children use at sporting events. In their wake are mass casualties and even greater disruption to society.

The attack itself is not particularly sophisticated. It does not rely on advanced scientific expertise, large amounts of money, or elaborate laboratories. This is the truly frightening aspect of **bioterrorism** — it is the perfect storm of opportunity and motivation. Using disease, terrorists can substantially multiply the devastation and societal disruption that they cause, and they can do it without sophisticated infrastructure or state support.

For this very reason, we would be mistaken to treat a worst-case scenario as a remote possibility. Instead, we must deal with this as an eventuality for which we need to be prepared. In a movie that I recently saw there was the line: 'Let's hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.' That expression fits our work in the area of Bioterrorism Prevention.

We know that terrorists have expressed a willingness to use biological agents for large-scale violence. We also know that as biotechnology industries continue to expand throughout the world, new pathogens and capabilities to weaponize them are rapidly proliferating. Many experts believe that advances in biotechnology could lead to genetically engineered pathogens more lethal than any currently known to man.

Given the magnitude of the actual harm that would be caused by a bioterrorist attack where thousands, and even millions of deaths are theoretically possible, but even bioterrorist attacks where less than 100 or even 50 people died could create an international crisis, if we did not know who was perpetrating the attacks, how to stop them or any one of INTERPOL's 186 member countries' citizens could be the target. Therefore, it is clear to me this is one of the most serious threats to international security. Heads of states and governments, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, chiefs of police and intelligence services, counter-terrorism experts and we at INTERPOL all agree that the threat of bioterrorism is real and present. All of us — police, health care professionals, political leaders and experts — must work to stop it, to prevent it if we can and to minimize the consequences and restore order if a bioattack occurs. And I can personally assure you that INTERPOL is doing its part.



Interpol — the world's largest international police organization linking together police in [186 countries](#) — has been active in the area of bioterrorism prevention and response since 2004. Through our Bioterrorism Prevention Program, we provide an awareness campaign, capacity-building measures, expertise, training and knowledge to law enforcement.

INTERPOL hosted the [Global Conference on Preventing Bioterrorism](#) in March 2005 – the largest gathering of international law enforcement in history. We have conducted regional workshops in Africa, South America, Europe, and Asia. More recently, we have initiated 'Train-the-Trainer' programs and convened training sessions in three regions with more planned. This knowledge transfer and training encourages national police forces to become advocates for resources to augment their capabilities.

We encourage policy makers to enact laws that authorize law enforcers to undertake necessary actions. We have created a 'Bioterrorism Prevention Resource Center' that helps police find training materials, online tests, and scientific guidelines.

We have prepared the Bioterrorism Incident Response Guide for use by police around the world. We have convened a board of experts to help build bridges to the bioscience and public health communities and to identify emerging developments and opportunities for enhancing our program.

This week's table-top exercise, ***Black Death***, focuses on increasing our joint understanding of the role and responsibility of each of us in response to a bioterrorism incident as well as identifying possible gaps or redundancies — so that we can draw lessons from them.

Black Death will not merely confirm our separate abilities; we do not expect you to leave on Wednesday feeling satisfied with our level of preparedness. That would do a disservice to the public whose protection is our sworn duty. We all know that the perpetrators of bioterrorist attacks are likely to strike in ways that demonstrate gaps and limits of our preparations. With this exercise, we intend to continue to encourage candid discussions about what we know and what we do not know.

Yet, this exercise should not provoke frustration or dismay. There are positive steps that we can take to deter terrorists from committing bioattacks, to minimize the consequences and panic if an attack occurs, and to swiftly restore order and punish the perpetrators. All of us in this room represent entities with resources and experience. If we remain committed not to let our guard down, this knowledge and experience will enable us to protect the public from a devastating bioattack and prevent terrorists from destroying our societies.

Key is information sharing and coordination among diverse constituencies, principally law enforcement, bioscience and public health. These three communities must forge partnerships to ensure an integrated approach that maximizes the synergy of their complementary skills and resources. This type of coordination is challenging, especially at the international level. Achieving this coordination and critically looking at needed improvements in our response capabilities is the purpose of this exercise.

To conclude my remarks, I would like to thank all of you for having taken the time to attend this important exercise, and I promise that when you leave here you will have learned more about how, working together, we can prevent and respond to bioterrorism.