

5th International DNA users' conference for investigative officers

Lyon, (France) 14 November 2007

Opening remarks by Secretary General [Ronald K. Noble](#)

Dear colleagues,

It is a pleasure for me to be here with you this morning and to see that 50 countries are here at the INTERPOL General Secretariat to discuss the use of 21st Century technology and to learn about the INTERPOL of the 21st Century which has transformed itself into the kind of modern, dynamic and innovative organization in order to make the citizens of each of your countries safer than they otherwise would be.

For law enforcement, the use of [forensic DNA](#) in solving crime is proving to be as revolutionary as the introduction of fingerprint evidence in court in the late 19th century. And indeed forensic DNA is an extraordinary tool for investigators.

While DNA [fingerprinting](#) or DNA typing (profiling) was first described was first described by the English geneticist Alec JEFFREYS as far back as 1985, it has until the 21st Century been a discovery that benefited mostly the wealthiest of countries. But many of you and other forensic experts from these so-called wealthy countries have worked via INTERPOL to create a global DNA gateway that now gives police worldwide the possibility to share DNA profiles among INTERPOL's [186 member countries](#) via [I-24/7](#) to identify previously unknown suspects, to connect criminals to cases in different countries and to solve otherwise unsolvable crimes.

What is extraordinary about forensic DNA work is that it presents a myriad of possibilities in the investigation of cases. It works in a way that helps to convict the guilty and exonerate the innocent. It can link the same suspect to multiple crime scenes, and it can rule him out. It can help police determine whether one or more suspects are involved in the same crime. It can be used to solve very old cases. It can be stored and consulted in a way to permit the rapid linking of cases and identification of suspects and finally, at the national level, random checks can lead to so-called 'cold hits' linking a person to a crime when he was not even under investigation.

It is no wonder that more and more countries' police forces are using DNA at the national level to help them solve crimes. Today, already more than 50 countries maintain national DNA databases, and this number will keep increasing until one day, all countries will use DNA as part of their standard operating procedure in the investigation of crimes.

The INTERPOL of the 21st Century is trying to work with our member countries to establish what should be or become standard operating procedures for the police or law enforcement officer of the 21st Century. With that in mind we strive to develop the structure, system, policies, practices and support mechanism to permit this standard operating procedure become realizable internationally via INTERPOL.

Our approach and our Network of 186 member countries [National Central Bureaus](#) and member countries' police services has made this possible with regard to identifying [stolen motor vehicles](#). We have established the international standard with the creation of our global database on stolen and lost passports which has over 7 million stolen passports in it. By creating a way for countries to scan passports of visitors in an automated way at airports, borders and indeed anywhere in a country using the same process they currently use at the national level, we have made INTERPOL's network of 186 member countries more secure than they otherwise would be. The countries that as part of their national standard operating procedure routinely send to INTERPOL the fingerprints of non-nationals who have been arrested for any crime are discovering that these same persons are wanted for serious criminal offenses in other countries.

One of the goals for this conference and for my remarks is to get you, your countries and your organizations to recognize that we need to develop standard operating procedures for how crimes should be investigated in the 21st Century. INTERPOL submits that when you are investigating non-nationals and examining identity documents from other countries, police need to consult INTERPOL's databases as part of their standard operating procedures. To do otherwise places your country and its citizens at an unnecessary risk.

For example, tomorrow morning, the delegate of the United Arab Emirates will explain how by consulting INTERPOL's DNA database during the course of an investigation of an armed robbery of a jewelry store in Dubai allowed his police force was able to link two of those DNA profiles to the DNA profiles of two individuals who were wanted by Liechtenstein for similar armed robberies.

Thereafter, these two suspects were linked to an [organized crime](#) network called the Pink Panthers that has committed similar robberies in several European countries. These links and the discovery of the organized crime link happened only because police in Liechtenstein recognized that in the 21st Century one must consult global databases when investigating any serious or violent crime, when investigating non-nationals or when you are unable to solve a case at the national level.

As an organization of a 186 member countries, INTERPOL is very sensitive to legitimate policy concerns about what kind of DNA information should be shared internationally, in what context, and under what conditions.

This is why INTERPOL fully supported the recommendation made by experts worldwide to develop an international profiling standard using non-coding areas of DNA only, thus allowing for the identification of individuals but not for the extraction of other information, such as an individual's eye color. On this basis, we developed the INTERPOL Standard Set of Loci, or ISSOL, as a profiling standard for international DNA exchange.

INTERPOL has gone one step further to safeguard the privacy of individuals and the integrity of investigations, we have encouraged member countries to send us the DNA profiles without the corresponding names of the persons to whom the profiles belong. We encourage member countries to maintain that information at the national level. In that way when there is a hit, we can point Country A to Country B and say that 'Countries A and B have sent us the DNA profiles of the same person; they should consult each other on a bi-lateral basis.'

In part as a result of the successes that you will hear about this week and as a result of our concern for safeguarding individuals' privacy in the way that countries share DNA profiles, more and more countries are becoming more and more comfortable with using INTERPOL's Gateway for sharing DNA profiles bi-laterally, within a small trusted group or multi-laterally.

The Prüm Treaty is a prime example of such enhanced cooperation, as is the G8 countries' initiative to set up a DNA network using INTERPOL's secure global police communications system, a network which today enables police labs in the UK, United States, Canada, and Japan to directly exchange and compare profiles with each other, in a secure manner that meets even the highest judicial and policing requirements of our member countries.

INTERPOL believes that developing and agreeing on common standards to enable police to share DNA profiles globally in just the same way they share fingerprints will have a tremendous impact on the capacity of investigators worldwide to solve cases and arrest criminals and terrorists.

That is why we created the INTERPOL DNA Gateway, that is, to provide the global infrastructure necessary to enable all INTERPOL member countries to share and compare DNA profiles internationally.

In a few minutes, Mr. John Dickinson, the father of Caroline Dickinson, who was tragically murdered in northern France in 1996, will tell us how DNA was crucial in identifying the murderer of his daughter and why in his view it is so important to exchange DNA internationally.

We know that Caroline Dickinson's murderer was convicted for sexual offences both before and after he murdered Caroline Dickenson. We also know the murderer traveled through Europe, North America, and South America. We know that if INTERPOL's Global DNA Gateway had existed back then and if police had as their standard operating procedure to consult INTERPOL's DNA database where unknown crime scene DNA specimens were found or where non-nationals were arrested, Caroline's murderer would have been caught earlier and Caroline would be with us here today.

Mr. Dickinson, let me say in behalf of INTERPOL, its 186 member countries and police worldwide how much we appreciate your efforts to educate us all about the importance of sharing DNA related information nationally and internationally to investigate serious and especially violent crimes. Let me also say how much we grieve for your loss and how we hope that the lessons that you will share with us today will take hold and be implemented worldwide so that other parents and families do not suffer the same loss that you and your family have suffered.

My dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, we know that forensic DNA will continue to grow in importance both nationally and internationally. You and we have demonstrated that we can develop ways for you to consult INTERPOL's global DNA database and one another's DNA databases without compromising your investigation and the privacy of your citizens.

We now need to encourage all INTERPOL member countries that have not yet done so to sign up to the INTERPOL DNA Gateway Charter to have online access to DNA profiles. So far, 17 countries have signed up, but, as I mentioned before, more than 50 countries have national DNA databases. We need to work together to get more and more countries to sign up. Doing so will help you keep your citizens safer back home.

We also need to help all countries develop standard operating procedures for the investigation of crimes in the 21st Century. Unidentified DNA traces found at serious and violent crime scenes should be shared globally via INTERPOL. This raises no privacy concerns, but can play an instrumental role in helping police link cases to the same offenders, as with the example of the Pink Panther robbery of the jewelry store in the UAE.

In addition, I would strongly recommend this group to carefully consider during the conference the need to share with INTERPOL the DNA profiles of non-nationals arrested in your countries. At the national level, this is standard operating procedure and so should it be at the international level in the 21st Century. What would any parent or family member say if their loved one was murdered by a person let out on bail for shop lifting or for some other minor crime in your country when that person was in fact wanted for murder in another country and consulting INTERPOL's database would have revealed this link? They would never forgive us, and they should not.

INTERPOL will make no recommendation or endorse no initiative that involves the use of DNA profiles without first obtaining the guidance and advice of INTERPOL's DNA Expert Group. They are an experienced, talented, dedicated and thoughtful group of advisors who have helped shape INTERPOL's development in this sensitive area, and on behalf of all of INTERPOL I thank you.

Let me close now and give the floor to our next speaker, Mr. John Dickinson who as I have already said has been a strong advocate in promoting international DNA information-sharing. His presence with us today is a reminder of our collective responsibility to ensure that we end this conference with real and tangible outcomes that will lead to the more effective use of DNA technology to protect other children and loved ones in the world like we could have protected Caroline.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let's give Mr. Dickinson a very warm welcome.