

76th INTERPOL General Assembly

Marrakesh, Morocco, 5-8 November 2007

Address by His Excellency, Chakib Benmoussa, Minister of the Interior, at the Opening Ceremony of the 76th ICPO-INTERPOL General Assembly session.

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

Mr President of the ICPO-INTERPOL
Mr Secretary General of INTERPOL
Distinguished Members of the INTERPOL Executive Committee
Heads and Members of participating Delegations
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to open the 76th ICPO-INTERPOL General Assembly session.

This session will enable us to study the increase of organized crime as a global phenomenon, which takes advantage of modern technology, and which requires pro-active, concerted measures to keep pace with the development of organized crime in order to address the problem and reduce its dangers.

Considering the global nature of this phenomenon, we need to make international co-operation a strategic option, in order to preserve the peace and security of our citizens, societies and property, and to ensure their protection. Choosing this option means that information plays an important and vital role in combating organized crime.

As organized crime networks are present in many countries throughout the world, we consider that INTERPOL – with its international dimension – is the most suitable forum for co-operation and exchange of information. This is particularly important, as these networks and the areas targeted are witnessing considerable expansion, which makes the timely exchange of information vital for an effective international partnership in this field.

Morocco's attachment to the universal values of freedom and peace, its integration in the international economy, and its awareness of its responsibility to contribute towards the preservation of security and stability at the regional and international levels, show that our country is fully committed to this Organization, and keen to play its role in supporting it actively, and work to rigorously fulfil its international commitments through practical strategies to combat organized crime.

Ladies and Gentlemen,



International co-operation in fighting crime is a strategic choice for peace and security, Moroccan Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa told the Assembly.

Our work should focus on combating crime in all its forms. Such forms include, for example, trafficking in human beings and immigrant-smuggling networks, as well as drug trafficking and terrorism.

With regard to traffic in human beings and immigrant-smuggling, we can say that criminal networks are taking advantage of economic, social and cultural factors to lure victims and facilitate immigrant flow from countries of the South to countries of the North.

Because of its strategic position at the crossroads between Africa and Europe, and conscious of its responsibility towards its partners, Morocco has taken a range of measures to combat these criminal networks.

The most significant of these measures is new legislation concerning the entry and residency of foreign nationals in the country, and the boosting of human and material resources to prevent Morocco being used as a transit country by trafficking networks, and to eliminate the areas where their operations take place.

At the international level, Morocco has signed a number of Technical Co-operation Agreements with states of the European Union – the main destination for illegal immigrants passing through Morocco – and with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

These measures have produced positive results, and contributed to the dismantling of a number of networks specialized in human trafficking, which has led to a considerable reduction in the flow of illegal immigrants.

In tackling this problem, Morocco gives consideration to its human dimension and provides first-aid services to the victims of illegal immigration, and offers them aid for their voluntary return to their native countries, with full respect for Humanitarian Law, and in conformity with current national legislation and the international conventions ratified by Morocco.

In this respect, we should note that, in July 2006, Rabat hosted the Ministerial Euro-African Conference on the theme of Migration and Development, which could be considered as an important quality change and new trend to contain this phenomenon.

This Conference concluded in the need to link the security aspect with economic and social development in the immigrants' countries, and called also for a European contribution in providing development projects for these countries, technology transfer to allow candidates for immigration to stay in their native countries, and to dismantle illegal migration networks which have connections with organized crime groups and traffickers in drugs and weapons.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the same determination, Morocco has mobilized all its capacities to address the scourge of drugs which impedes economic and social development.

Indeed, Morocco has worked hard to implement a strategy aiming at reducing the area of cannabis cultivation in the northern regions of the country. This strategy has produced good results that have been applauded by specialized international organizations, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime which confirmed in its Annual Report for 2006 that cultivated areas had been reduced from 134,000 to 76,000 hectares, which accounts for a reduction of 46%.

In the context of this strategy, alternative crops were promoted in spite of scarce resources and social complications. Furthermore, social and economic programmes and projects have been implemented in the northern region to create job opportunities.

Simultaneously, the government conducted large eradication operations aimed at dismantling drug-distribution networks and arresting their members and bringing them to justice.

To consolidate these measures, Morocco has provided seaports, airports and land border-control points with the necessary logistic facilities which meet international standards and requirements. The country has also developed co-operation with international bodies specialized in combating illicit drugs.

If, in the past, the focus was limited to traditional drugs, the networks dealing in "hard" drugs – such as cocaine and synthetic drugs – have started to use the coastal area, the Sahara and West African countries as a new transit area to smuggle these drugs to large consumer markets in Europe and the United States. We therefore call for greater international co-operation to combat these networks and prevent them from becoming established in the region, and for the development of regional co-operation strategies, by co-ordination between specialized services and units, exchange of information, fostering of direct contacts, and monitoring drug movements through land borders, airports and seaports.

The strategy adopted by Morocco to combat drugs has begun to bear fruit, and our partners in Europe should therefore increase their efforts to reduce the demand for these substances through enforcement and prevention policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Organized crime constitutes, without any doubt, a source of quick profits, and these profits are being invested in other forms of crime, the most notable being terrorism, which threatens the security and stability of nations and their people. Terrorism is more dangerous in large, open areas, such as the coastal regions and the Sahara, where some countries lack the necessary resources to carry out proper controls. Criminal organizations take advantage of this situation and opportunity to set up rear bases for their operations in these regions.

Faced with this critical situation in these countries, we must, all of us, in a context of international co-operation and solidarity, work together to strengthen these countries' capacity to combat the scourge of terrorism.

At the national level, aware of the importance of tracing the activities of terrorist organizations and their organizational structure, targets or financing, Morocco introduced legislation on money laundering that criminalizes the possession, exchange and transfer of money for the purpose of concealing its origin and using it in illegal or suspicious activities.

Morocco is aware of its responsibilities towards peace in Europe, which is why our country is making huge efforts in its strategy to combat organized crime. Morocco is taking its moral responsibilities towards Africa, since it belongs to this continent and since it is also concerned about stability in the region and the worrying situation of the coastal and desert regions.

On the basis of Morocco's accumulated experience in combating organized crime, the country is still open in a positive spirit to all initiatives aimed at ensuring development and stability in the region, with due respect for the diversity of the region's countries, their sovereignty and their territorial integrity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is of the utmost importance to follow the development of organized-crime methods, which are changing as fast as scientific and technological developments, and to take new approaches in searching for, investigating and verifying the identities of these criminals, and in tracing them. It is also important to train the heads of security services and make use of modern technology, so that these services are supported by experienced staff, qualified in all the scientific fields and capable of monitoring crime and infiltrating criminal organizations and networks.

In this respect, I would like to announce that the Kingdom of Morocco has prepared a five-year plan, to be implemented between 2008 and 2012, aimed at consolidating the material and human potential of its security services, in order to face the crucial changes in their fields of work. The aim is to develop scientific and technical police working methods, and keep up to date with the procedures and techniques used by criminal networks and terrorist organizations.

Morocco has also created a special unit whose mission is to monitor the intrusion of electronic websites and computer networks. This unit has helped to detect and prevent numerous crimes and violations in this vital and complicated field.

At the same time, Morocco has set up training programmes with its partners for people working in the different security departments, and for some judges specialized in combating computer piracy.

The Moroccan Parliament has ratified a law concerning the issue of biometric national identity cards, in order to ensure that its citizens can circulate with secure identity cards which cannot be counterfeited or altered.

In this context, and in the framework of international co-operation, Morocco is preparing to issue a biometric passport, and drawing on the experiences of countries in this domain.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is certainly no contradiction or divergence between ensuring security and applying wise governance and democracy on the one hand, and extending public freedoms and human rights on the other: they are complementary to each other. Stable security is the foundation and the main condition for global economic and social development aimed at serving citizens, protecting them and preserving their dignity.

The Kingdom of Morocco is adopting this approach through a modern, integrated social project initiated by His Majesty Mohammad VI. This project consolidates a state of justice and law and builds bridges of trust, co-operation and credibility between the citizens and the different law-enforcement agencies. We are also aware that fighting organized crime is a huge responsibility on your Organization's shoulders, and a noble mission that you are pursuing.

Finally, I would like to thank the President of INTERPOL , the Secretary General and the members of the Executive Committee, without forgetting the technicians and experts, who have contributed towards the preparation of this session. I would also like to welcome the heads and members of delegations, and wish them a pleasant stay in our country and an effective contribution to the session.

May God help us all to bring welfare to our people who aspire to a stable and secure society, with favourable conditions for sustainable development and the preservation of human values.

I wish you every success for this conference, and hereby declare the 76th INTERPOL General Assembly open.