

## INTERPOL Asian Bioterrorism Workshop

Speech by INTERPOL Secretary General [Ronald K. Noble](#)  
Singapore, 27 March 2006

*Senior Minister of State for Law and Home Affairs Professor Ho Peng Kee,  
Commissioner of Police, Singapore Police Force, Khoo Boon Hui,  
Mr Misra, INTERPOL Executive Committee Vice President for Asia, and Mr Boustani, INTERPOL Executive  
Committee Delegate for Asia,  
Distinguished police colleagues from INTERPOL's Asian region,  
My dear colleagues from the INTERPOL General Secretariat,  
Experts in the health sciences, bio-safety, bio-security and legal communities,  
Ladies and gentlemen,*

Let me begin by saying a few words about why it is so important that we are all here. The threat of [bioterrorism](#) is high.

We know from recent events that terrorists remain committed to perpetrating large-scale violence.

We also know that as biotechnology industries continue to expand throughout the world, new pathogens and pathogen-making technologies are rapidly proliferating, increasing the risk that terrorists could get their hands on deadly pathogens or their means of production. This is the so-called dual-use dilemma, and it is not going away anytime soon.

It is also becoming ever more possible for terrorists themselves to produce the weapons, as the volume and sophistication of the necessary information becomes increasingly accessible through publications, the Internet and other sources. In 2002, for example, university researchers created a synthetic version of the polio virus by using a recipe downloaded from the Internet and materials purchased from a mail order supply house.

And there is much evidence that terrorists have a strong interest in the use of biological weapons and are planning to use them:

Following the 11 September 2001 attacks authorities seized equipment, documents, computer hard drives and terrorist training materials relating to the manufacture and use of bio-weapons.

Documents and computer hard drives seized in the 2003 capture of Khalid Sheik Mohammed, a key al Qaeda operative, in Pakistan, for example, indicate that al Qaeda is very interested in biological weapons. The arrest occurred in Pakistan at a home owned by Abdul Quddoos Khan, a bacteriologist with access to production materials and facilities.

The eleventh volume of al Qaeda's Encyclopedia of Jihad is devoted to chemical and biological weapons.

Captured terrorist suspects have admitted that their organizations are plotting potential biological attacks.

In 2001, there was an anthrax attack in the United States. Although the attack was limited, because anthrax is not contagious and it was sent by mail to only a handful of individuals, it still caused five deaths and massive disruptions and losses.

Throughout the past five years, there have been various reports of raids where police have seized the deadly toxin ricin or ricin-making equipment or instruction manuals. There has been some controversy regarding these raids, but it is instructive to see just how much panic and fear these reports have created.

US forces discovered two production facilities in Afghanistan that were abandoned by al Qaeda and that are believed to have been designed to manufacture biological and/or chemical weapons.

In 2004, members of al Qaeda posted on the Internet an article by Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin (Abu Hajir) which called upon supporters to use nuclear and biological weapons in attacks.

At a trial that just opened last week in the UK, in which seven men are charged with planning terrorist attacks, the prosecutor told the jury that one of defendants had discussions with reputed members of the Russian mafia about the possibility of obtaining a radioisotope bomb. And an informant testified that there were discussions about selling poisoned hamburgers from street vending stalls and contaminating beer cans at soccer matches. Now, while those alleged discussions did not come to fruition and are not part of the formal charges against the defendants, such reports are very troubling.

Yet, in the face of all of this, some people still question whether the danger is real. They question whether it is truly necessary to prepare for it. I have no doubt that the threat is real. Moreover, given the magnitude of the harm that would be caused by a bioterrorism attack – hundreds, thousands and even millions of deaths are possible – it is clear to me that this alone mandates that we take this threat seriously. Even if thousands or millions did not die, the panic and the subsequent harm that would follow such an attack would represent yet another set of reasons why we should care about this potential harm and do all in our power to fight against it.

Nevertheless, I want to point out that even if there is never again a disease unleashed by terrorists, there certainly will be diseases unleashed by nature. Of this there can be no question. Every scientist will tell you that natural pandemics have always been a part of life. In the 20th century alone, more people died of smallpox (over 300 million) than in both World Wars combined.

This means that much of the work we do to prepare for bioterrorism will be critically needed one day to deal with a natural pandemic, even if there is never another bioterrorist attack. And, unfortunately, that day may be coming our way all too soon.

The World Health Organization just issued a report on 17 March titled, '[WHO Pandemic Influenza Draft Protocol for Rapid Response and Containment](#).' The very first sentence of that report states: 'Recent experiences with highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza have given the world its first advance warning that another influenza pandemic may be imminent.' This is an extremely serious warning. The influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 claimed 20 to 40 million lives.

Some of the work we are doing at this week's workshop will help us prepare for a pandemic, whether unleashed by nature or by terrorists. And so it is very important that you are all here.

### **What INTERPOL is doing**

Now let me say a few words about what INTERPOL is doing to help police confront the threat of bioterrorism.

Last year, we created a special unit to focus exclusively on bioterrorism. In March 2005, we kicked off the unit's activities by hosting a [global conference on bioterrorism](#). That event was attended by over 500 people from over 155 countries.

In November, we conducted a [regional workshop in South Africa](#) attended by 92 participants from 41 countries. Now we are conducting this regional workshop with over 85 participants from 27 countries. We

will be conducting the next regional workshop in Chile in July. Thereafter, we plan to conduct workshops in the Middle East and in Commonwealth of Independent States republics.

Besides running training and awareness events such as these, we have created a [Bioterrorism Prevention Resource Center](#) on our website that is now at the disposal of the law enforcement community. As global awareness and concern about bioterrorism continue to grow, huge amounts of related information are being generated. The sheer volume of such information makes it difficult to locate the data and assess its usefulness for a specific purpose. The INTERPOL Bioterrorism Prevention Resource Centre has been created to provide member countries with a central point to find links to bioterrorism resources relating to prevention, preparation and response. This includes such things as:

- Training materials
- Online tests and queries
- Scientific documents
- Pre-planning guidelines
- Response and crisis management

We are also developing another area of the website that will be dedicated to training materials that have been provided to us by NCBs and governments. These will show what is being done at national levels in terms of bioterrorism preparedness and response.

In order to ensure that the links provided are useful and relevant, we encourage member countries to submit plans, procedures and assessments for use as models or resources by other member countries.

INTERPOL is developing a Bioterrorism Pre-Planning and Response Guide to be released later this year. We have developed table-top exercises that will be conducted at this workshop. We are planning various 'train-the-trainer' programs and two international interagency exercises.

We are forming a board of experts comprising professionals from the medical and scientific fields, the police and specialised bodies of the United Nations. This board will contribute data and expertise, and it will be a vehicle for INTERPOL to network with diverse scientific and health communities, and to identify and alert INTERPOL to new and emerging developments and opportunities that might enhance INTERPOL's bioterrorism program.

We have a very involved Steering Committee, and John Abbott has been doing an extraordinary job in chairing it. The coordinator of our Bioterrorism Unit, Adrian Baciu, and his team are delivering an outstanding performance in a very demanding environment.

We continue to benefit from the expertise of Professor Barry Kellman, an external legal expert that we have retained to help us in our work, and we have recently added a highly qualified attorney to the Bioterrorism Unit as well. We have also recruited a top-quality intern to the team.

In the future, we also hope to find financing for a police officer rotation programme in which police can rotate through our Bioterrorism Unit, bringing their added expertise to the unit, and then returning home with still greater expertise to share with their national colleagues in building their own programs.

We also hope to formalise an internship program so we can continue to bring in smart, young and dedicated individuals to learn about the importance of preventing bioterrorism early in their careers and to encourage them to specialise in this area.

So, I trust you can see that we are very committed to helping police do all in their power to prevent bioterrorism and to be prepared to respond in such a way as to reduce subsequent harms.

### **Importance of forging partnerships**

Now let me say a few words about how important it is for professionals from the different disciplines that are involved in dealing with bioterrorism and/or natural pandemics to work together in addressing these threats. All of the relevant constituencies must establish and implement protocols and procedures to share information and co-operate in prevention and detection efforts, to mobilise response resources in the event of an attack or natural outbreak, and to co-ordinate all of these efforts and resources.

The relevant constituencies include intelligence services, law enforcement, customs, immigration, first responders, health sciences, bio-safety, bio-security, legal, emergency management offices, military/security organizations, environmental management, agriculture, and other relevant private and public resources (local, regional, national, and international).

These diverse professional communities must forge partnerships in order to ensure an integrated approach. This is required to maximise the synergies of their complementary skills, methodologies, perspectives and resources, and to minimize their conflicts. This means overcoming many formidable obstacles, but it is essential to do so. And that is why it is so important that we have representatives from many of these communities at workshops such as this.

### **Need for legislative changes**

Finally, let me say a few words about how important it is for countries to modify the legal and regulatory frameworks in this area. This includes controlling the possession, storage, transportation, use, trafficking and deployment of pathogens, and the means of their production and weaponisation. It also includes activities relating to intelligence, investigation, interdiction and disruption, as well as the protection of the points of possible pathogen intrusion. And it includes the activities required for attack response (isolation, quarantine, forced medical exams, forced vaccinations, etc.).

In this regard, I applaud Singapore for recently putting into force the Biological Agents and Toxins Act. This law governs the possession, use, import, transportation and handling of biological agents and toxins that could be used in a bio-weapon, and prescribes serious penalties for violations, including up to life imprisonment. Laws like this reduce the risks that pathogens or their means of production will wind up in the wrong hands; they provide police with the authority they need to conduct effective investigations; and they allow for deterrence and incapacitation of wrongdoers through arrest and prosecution.

### **Singapore's handling of SARS**

Having mentioned that Singapore should be applauded for recently enacting the Biological Agents and Toxins Act, I should also mention that it should also be applauded for how it handled the SARS outbreak. It was hit with SARS in March 2003, and by the end of May [WHO](#) declared that Singapore had arrested that outbreak. This was accomplished by a co-ordinated effort of law enforcement, public health and all other relevant constituencies. There was excellence in crisis management in controlling the panic, border control (thermal scanners deployed at entry points), effective quarantining (at homes and centers), effective contact tracing, etc. So we can all learn a lot from Singapore's example, and it is particularly appropriate that Singapore should be our host for this event.

Before I open up the workshop and turn over the running of this conference to John Abbott, Chairman of INTERPOL's Steering Committee on Bioterrorism Prevention, I would like to thank the [Sloan Foundation](#) for its financial support. The Sloan Foundation provided a generous first grant to INTERPOL to operate its Bioterrorism Unit so that events like this could be possible, and the Sloan Foundation is also supporting us for the second phase, following its initial commitment. In total, the Sloan Foundation has committed over US\$2 million to INTERPOL's Bioterrorism Prevention Program. So we owe the Sloan Foundation our appreciation and gratitude. In addition, INTERPOL recently received a sizable grant from the Canadian government (US\$300,000 from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade) for which we are also grateful.

### **Closing**

Again, Minister and Commissioner, let me once again thank you, your police colleagues and the citizens of Singapore for having agreed to host this important Asian regional training conference on bioterrorism prevention.

I wish you all a most successful workshop.