

INTERPOL African Regional Workshop in the prevention of bio-terrorism

Speech by INTERPOL Secretary General [Ronald K. Noble](#)
21 November 2005

Mr President

Chiefs of Police from the African region

Heads of INTERPOL National Central Bureaus from the African region

Distinguished police colleagues from Africa and around the world

Experts in the health sciences, bio-safety, bio-security and legal communities

Distinguished colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen

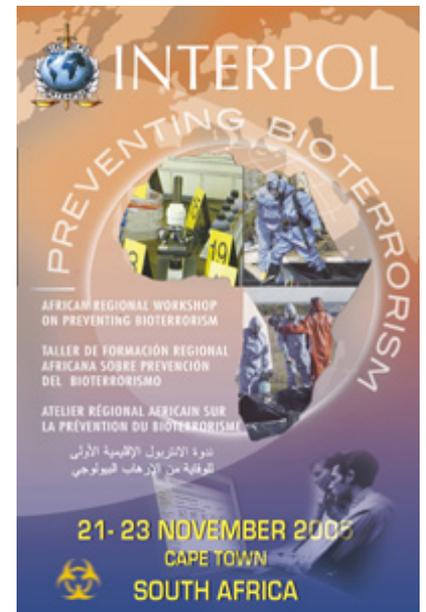
Diseases due to natural outbreaks have savaged humankind on a horrific scale, inflicting wide-scale death and causing social, political and economic upheaval. In the 20th century alone, more people died of smallpox (over 300 million) than in both World Wars combined, and an influenza epidemic claimed more than 40 million lives. Even a disease that afflicts only animals can have devastating consequences. The outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the UK in 2001 took months to control, required the slaughter of millions of animals and caused billions of dollars in losses. Now we are bracing ourselves for the possibility that the Asian avian flu could become a pandemic affecting us all directly or indirectly.

These are risks that humankind faces from naturally recurring diseases and epidemics. Imagine now compounding this risk because an individual terrorist or terrorist group decides to deliberately cause the spread of diseases or deadly bio-agents at their chosen time and place to kill as many of us as they can, to frighten us and to destroy the ordinary freedoms that we enjoy. The consequences of such dangerous terrorist acts would be catastrophic for us all.

The threat of bio-terrorism is real because the threat of [terrorism](#) is real and the damage that terrorists seek to inflict on us defies one's imagination, as we saw on 11 September 2001. Therefore, the [bio-terrorist](#) threat must be confronted and reduced on all fronts.

My statement that the bio-terrorist threat is real goes against a natural tendency to operate under the assumption that no one will use biological weapons in the future on a large scale because they have not been used much in the past on a large scale. Some would prefer not to think about such deadly terrorist acts. Yet, we cannot avoid the danger by ignoring the danger. Both the assumption that it won't happen because it hasn't happened and the tendency to want to avoid a danger by not thinking about it are dangerous to our safety and well-being.

Why do I say that the bio-terrorist threat is real? Al Qaeda has openly claimed the right to kill four million people using biological and chemical weapons. Al Qaeda has posted instructions on how to make such weapons on its website. When Khalid Sheik Mohammed, a key Al Qaeda operative, was arrested in Pakistan in 2003, authorities discovered and seized documents and computer hard drives and terrorist



training materials that discuss the use of bio-weapons. If that is not enough to persuade you, then you might be interested to know that Khalid Sheik Mohammed's arrest occurred in the Pakistan home of Abdul Quddos Khan, a bacteriologist from Pakistan.

No region in the world is safe from Al Qaeda. This has been demonstrated right here in Africa with the American Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. The Americas region suffered the 11 September 2001 and other attacks. In addition, Asia and the Middle East have witnessed numerous terrorist attacks at the hands of Al Qaeda. Simply put, Al Qaeda is willing, able and patient enough to plan and prepare to execute terrorist acts that would have been considered unrealistic or fantasy prior to Al Qaeda's having perpetrated them. In my view, Al Qaeda's global network, its proven capabilities, its deadly history, its desire to do the unthinkable and the evidence collected about its bio-terrorist ambitions ominously portend a clear and present danger of the highest order that Al Qaeda will perpetrate a biological terrorist attack.

But the danger of a biological terrorist attack is not only from Al Qaeda; it is from any individual or group that wishes to support Al Qaeda by striking at us anywhere and everywhere they choose. We must thus be concerned by Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda-like groups and Al Qaeda supporters.

Our task in preventing biological terrorist attacks is thus formidable when we think about the terrorist group involved, its track record and its intentions.

But what about access to the necessary biological agents or technology? There are many ways for terrorists to obtain lethal pathogens. They can buy or steal them from universities, research labs, pharmaceutical companies, military stockpiles or commercial supply houses. They can acquire them from 'friendly' states or other sympathisers or buy them on the black market. Finally, they can create them on their own.

Once they have the pathogens, making a crude device for dissemination is easy for just about anyone with a bioscience background. The information and materials for creating biological weapons are publicly available. They could even cause a so-called martyr to become infected and act as a suicide bio-weapon. Or they could adopt the approach used by the anthrax terrorist in the US, who chose to disrupt the world's economy by targeting and murdering almost 10 US citizens.

As you can see, the terrorists' options and possibilities are endless.

So my dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, how prepared are we to prevent or respond to a bio-terrorist attack?

Simulations have demonstrated the dire potential consequences of a highly 'successful' attack, e.g. the 2001 'Dark Winter' simulation in which pathogens were released in three shopping malls in the US. The results were disastrous. In a 2003 exercise in the US dubbed 'Topoff2', victims of a mock biological attack flooded emergency rooms in a major city (Chicago) complaining of flu-like symptoms and the government response capabilities were overwhelmed. Finally, the 2005 'Atlantic Storm' simulation, in which pathogens created at an Austrian brewery were released at a half dozen sites, highlighted additional areas where we were woefully unprepared. In short, we as a world community did not fare well in any of these exercises or any other exercise conducted to test our preparatory and response abilities to a biological terrorist attack.

But why have we fared so poorly in these simulations and exercises?

It is easy to understand. Traditionally, law enforcement and police services are used to dealing with concrete crimes against the physical integrity of persons or property. Police generally investigate or respond to crimes that occur at a particular location at a particular point in time. For example, following an incident, police move quickly to the scene of a car bomb explosion; the scene where a suicide bomber detonated his belt; the scene of a murder, robbery or rape, etc. There ordinarily is a criminal event and a criminal event location.

The pattern for police in their crime-related work has been well established; police train for it and practice at it. Crime occurs; police respond to the scene of the crime; police secure the crime scene; police investigate the crime, interview witnesses, collect evidence, analyse the evidence, identify suspects, build their cases and provide prosecutors with evidence tying suspects to the crime; judges issue arrest warrants; the defendants or fugitives are arrested; trials are held.

In the case of bio-terrorist attacks the paradigm changes.

There frequently is no one crime event to which the police must respond. There is generally no loud, attention-getting crime that occurs at a specific place or time. To the extent that the crime is the spread of a contagious bio-agent, the crime scene would be ever moving and changing. There could be an initial contamination that is wilfully done, like injecting a person with a contagious disease, and then that person could simply travel the world contaminating anyone and everyone with whom he or she has direct or indirect contact. The chain reaction would continue.

To summarise, in the case of preventing bio-attacks, police remain largely unprepared for several reasons:

- (1) lack of awareness of the evidence collected regarding Al Qaeda's (or others) intentions and methods;
- (2) lack of extensive experience in this area;
- (3) lack of understanding of the nature of the threat;
- (4) lack of relevant training;
- (5) lack of sufficient relevant resources; and
- (6) lack of the most useful legal and regulatory framework in their countries that permits the early investigation of people intending to make bio-weapons.

INTERPOL's [President](#), South African Police Commissioner Jackie Selebi, INTERPOL [member countries'](#) police forces, our National Central Bureaus and we at Interpol's General Secretariat have focused on increasing police training to prevent bio-terrorist attacks because we considered the threat real and the need to improve our preparedness great.

Meeting the threat of bio-terrorism requires capabilities in the following four areas:

- (1) threat assessment,
- (2) attack prevention,
- (3) attack detection and
- (4) attack response – mitigating the damage, apprehending the perpetrators and gaining knowledge and expertise to enhance future capabilities in these four areas.

Threat assessment is required to shape and guide the other three areas. Attack prevention includes tactical intelligence, interdiction, disruption through investigation, facility protection, pathogen control, etc. Attack detection means being able to detect a biological attack as early as possible. Early detection requires an extremely close working relationship with the relevant national, regional or global public health entities. Early detection is critical to save the injured, contain the disease and apprehend the perpetrators before they can attack again. Attack response includes medical services, police services, containment, security, environmental remediation, investigation, apprehension, intelligence-gathering, learning, etc.

To accomplish any and all of these tasks, the relevant constituencies must develop or acquire the requisite skilled personnel, tools and equipment. Simply put, training and exercising through simulations and table top exercises those entities with responsibility for prevention or response. In order to do this, structures, protocols and processes must be put in place at the highest levels of government for all relevant constituencies.

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

Broadly speaking, however, at the operational level, the principal relevant constituencies are the law enforcement and public health communities. These two groups should be working together locally, nationally and internationally to analyse the relevant risks and threats that each sees, to help society enhance its likelihood of preventing a bioterrorist attack and of minimising the damage if such an attack occurs.

Unfortunately, the police and public health communities have a very limited history of working together internationally in a non-emergency or non-crisis context. These two communities have very different constituencies. Police believe that they must be able to have immediate and unhindered access to all relevant information, while the public health community believes that it must be able to maintain the confidence of patients or clients.

In addition, the public health community is concerned with fighting any and all dangerous diseases, whether they are intentionally caused or naturally recurring. Resources are limited, and they are concerned that focusing and giving too high a priority to fighting bio-terrorism could divert many scarce resources. Not surprisingly, police chiefs also are faced with the problem of limited resources and with the pressure to fight visible and concrete crimes affecting their citizens now. Political support and funding for security programmes tend to be oriented towards the 'traditional' and 'concrete' areas of crime that affect citizens on a daily basis such as robbery, rape, murder, etc. Moreover, due to the complex features inherent in the topic of bio-terrorism, most police lack the expertise or awareness about the true nature of the threat.

INTERPOL sought and received outside funding for its bio-terrorism prevention training program from the [Alfred P. Sloan Foundation](#) so that police chiefs and public health experts would not have to worry about an 'either/or' situation as it relates to identifying the resources to be used in the area of bio-terrorism prevention training. We identified the former Director General of the UK National Criminal Intelligence Service, John Abbott, to chair our Bio-terrorism Prevention Steering Committee. We recruited a small but very talented staff led by Adrian Baciu to develop INTERPOL's Bio-terrorism Prevention Training Program. We have regularly drawn on the legal expertise of Professor Barry Kellman for identifying the legislative requirements for a successful bio-terrorism legal framework at the national level. In fact, it was Professor Barry Kellman who first inspired me to make this a priority for INTERPOL and the international police community. Finally, we have formed a very close working relationship with the [World Health Organization](#) and several law enforcement and security experts in order to provide the best possible training for our police on this topic.

INTERPOL strongly believes that the risks of bio-terrorism are so momentous that the police and the public health communities must break down the barriers currently preventing close collaboration, locally, nationally and internationally. The potential consequences of such an attack could be so far-reaching that a lack of action in preventing bio-terrorism poses an unacceptable risk to the safety of citizens and societies around the world.

Through the INTERPOL program on preventing bio-terrorism, we provide strong support – an awareness campaign, capacity-building measures, expertise and knowledge database – to all our member countries' police forces for them to develop an effective and holistic plan to meet the threat of bio-terrorism, including a Bio-terrorism Crisis Response Plan and Response Unit. In return, we urge their respective policymakers to legislate relevant laws and regulations that provide law enforcement units with tools to help prevent bio-terror attacks and to help investigate attacks that occur. We also encourage them to enhance inter-agency co-operation among their national agencies that are or will be involved in the prevention or management of a bio-terrorism incident. We must then integrate these multi-agency efforts with their international counterparts.

We are confident that, as the world's largest international police organization, embracing [184 member countries](#) and their National Central Bureaus, we can fill this significant gap and enhance the preparedness of police forces around the world in preventing bio-terrorism attacks.

In closing, this week's regional workshop on bio-terrorism prevention training for police in Africa, in close collaboration with the public health community as well as the traditional partners of the police such as anti-terrorist, security and safety experts, is an important step in enhancing police preparedness. The fact that INTERPOL's first regional training conference on bio-terrorism prevention training for police is being held on the African continent and is being hosted by the South African Police Service's chief demonstrates that Africa can play an important leadership role in helping to keep the world safer than it otherwise would be from dangerous international crime. Africa and its police chiefs recognise that no region of the world is safe from the threat of bio-terrorism.

Thank you and I wish you all a very successful conference.