

Opening remarks

by [Mr Jackie Selebi](#), INTERPOL President
34th INTERPOL European Regional Conference
Nicosia, Cyprus (25-27 May 2005)

Dear colleagues, friends and fellow police officers,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to welcome you to the [34th European Regional Conference](#). On behalf of the organization, I express my heartfelt thanks to the Cypriot authorities for hosting this event. This conference would not have been possible without the many efforts made by our colleagues here in Cyprus. I think I speak for all attending delegations when I say that we value the privilege of benefiting from your hospitality over the next few days. It is also both a professional and personal pleasure to meet so many of you again and have the opportunity to work with you to further our common goal, namely enhancing the effectiveness of international police co-operation and thus our ability to secure our societies.

I also wish to recognise the members of the INTERPOL European Committee. Your guidance and support in setting the agenda for this event have resulted in an ambitious yet highly relevant and useful work programme for this conference.

This is the first INTERPOL regional conference since I was elected President of the organization in October last year. I attach the utmost importance to being here...to participate in the discussions, but first and foremost to listen to what you think is important, what you need from the organization, what you feel we do well and, perhaps, what we should do better.

Regional conferences are, together with the [General Assembly](#), among the most important events in the calendar of our organization. I firmly believe that effective police co-operation at the global level does not only require the invaluable input of each of our [member countries](#) and National Central Bureaus, but also each of the INTERPOL regions. Indeed, our global crime priorities need to take into account the specifics of each region in terms of the crime threats faced. Strong regional police co-operation mechanisms and political willingness are thus vital to ensuring that INTERPOL is responsive to the needs of police worldwide and continues to develop new initiatives where needed, so that INTERPOL's work continues to be directly relevant to police officers investigating crime in your countries.

It is clear that police co-operation in Europe is well-developed, and there exists within Europe and the European Union a clear commitment to work together and develop common strategies and tools to tackle organized crime and terrorism. This is why we need your commitment and support, as well as that of the regional police bodies and countries in the Americas, Africa and Asia, to guide us and to help us focus on those crimes that threaten our collective security most.

It is, however, equally important that in our discussions over the coming days, we look beyond the European region and think about the global dimension of the issues and threats facing us.



INTERPOL President Jackie Selebi welcomes delegates to the 34th European Regional Conference in Nicosia, Cyprus.

Everyone here will undoubtedly agree that Europe cannot protect itself from terrorism without actively working with police in other regions of the world.

Most of you will have heard about INTERPOL's Fusion Project. This project has received the support of 117 of our member countries from all regions and, as a result, the number of terrorists in our database has dramatically increased to reach more than 8,000 individuals, while a few years ago we only had information about some 2,000 suspected terrorists. Similarly, our stolen travel documents database is receiving increasing support from member countries.

These figures are encouraging and indicate to me that INTERPOL's anti-terrorism initiatives are seen as responding to the needs of police.

International police co-operation, in its essence, is a straightforward matter: it is about denying terrorists the opportunity to prepare and carry out attacks or escape justice just by going from one country to another. It is about:

- giving police officers the means to check whether a person poses a danger to society -- no matter how far that person travelled, regardless of the fact that he assumed a new identity -- and thereby save lives
- the ability to communicate directly and securely
- access to vital information, such as names, photos, fingerprints, criminal histories, stolen travel documents and stolen motor vehicles.

At the same time, we have to look forward and prepare for new threats. INTERPOL's latest anti-terrorism initiative is our global programme to enhance the preparedness of law enforcement to prevent and deal with [bio-terrorism](#). Last March, many of you attended [INTERPOL's first global bio-terrorism conference](#) held in Lyon. Two things became abundantly clear during the discussions:

- We, as police, cannot afford to be unprepared for the eventual use of biological agents by terrorists groups. We need to define strategies and develop training programmes to ensure that law enforcement is able to prevent and/or respond to an event that could possibly disrupt society as a whole or, at the very least, inflict mass casualties. Failing in this area is not an option; the consequences of such failure are too dire to contemplate.
- In order to do this effectively, we have to work with public health institutions, the scientific community and other international organizations. It is of paramount importance to build these bridges.

The bio-terrorism conference in March showed that INTERPOL can drive this initiative forward and that the activities which resulted from the conference, notably the regional training that will be provided in the very near future, will go a long way to helping law enforcement address a threat that was underestimated for too long.

INTERPOL has achieved a lot over the last year. At the last regional conference in Ukraine, you were told that 100 countries were connected to the [I-24/7 global police communications system](#). Now this is the case for 144 countries, including all 46 European countries, and efforts to connect the remaining countries are well underway. Some of the discussions tomorrow will centre on how to further realise the potential of this system, notably expanding access to I-24/7. Here again, it is very important you share your ideas and views candidly with us.

I do not think that I can tell you anything about I-24/7 that you have not heard before and will hear in the next few days. However, allow me to say just one comment that makes me believe that INTERPOL was right when it made I-24/7 one of its highest priorities back in 2002. On 26 December 2004, the tsunami that hit Southeast Asia resulted in one of the largest natural disasters in modern history. The international police community found itself confronted with the need to deploy an international disaster victim identification response, an effort that required a level of international co-ordination that had never been planned or envisaged before.

In the first weeks following the disaster, I-24/7 was found to be a crucial communication tool for countries, allowing some of them to share their needs for specific expertise and others to respond to those needs by making staff available. Overall, I believe that INTERPOL made an important contribution in dealing with the aftermath of this disaster. More importantly, the organization has learned from this experience and is actively developing its ability to provide member countries with crisis management support, when and if they need it.

The huge efforts deployed by national police forces and INTERPOL to identify the victims of this disaster show that when the right level of commitment exists, mountains can be moved!

This is, however, not a time for complacency, and this is why I call upon all of you to make this conference successful.

I wish you well in your endeavours, and thank you for your efforts and attendance.

Thank you.