

## Bio-Terrorism Conference

1st INTERPOL Global Conference,  
Lyon, France, 1-2 March 2005

by Jackie Selebi, President of INTERPOL

Distinguished guests,  
Distinguished speakers,  
Dear colleagues,

I would like to observe a minute of silence for all those who have died as a result of the tsunami disaster. I would also like to salute all law enforcement people from the different countries who have responded so positively to this call. This once again reflects the need for a co-ordinated response to natural disasters and possible acts of terror.

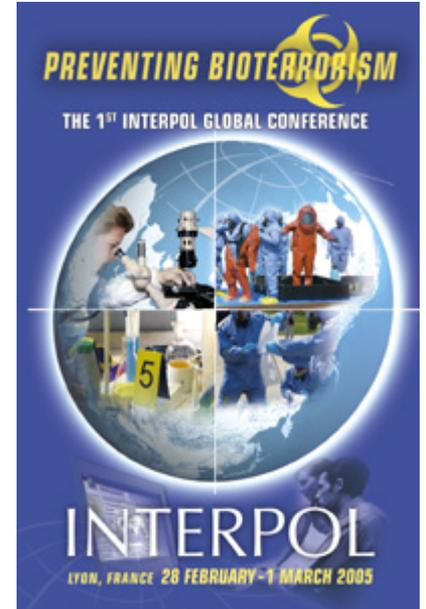
Right now, thousands of scientists around the world are working on research and experiments to cure diseases and improve our lives. Right now, criminals without conscience are also attempting to figure out how these same technologies, which are designed to alleviate suffering and to cure, can be transformed into powerful instruments of aggression and death.

Biological weapons and sophisticated terrorist networks are a dangerous combination. There are indications that these networks see biological and chemicals agents as viable weapons for achieving their goals. With the prospect of terrorist groups' gaining the ability to launch biological and chemical attacks, the issue at hand is that we need to have a profound understanding of this potential threat. This conference must deliberate the issue in order to have a common co-ordinated response in regards to preventing such catastrophes. We have assembled experts and academics to share knowledge and experience in this field.

Threats of biological and chemical terrorism suggest that major panic, temporary paralysis of government functions and private businesses and even civil disorder are all likely outcomes of such an attack. We also need to explore the consequences of a real threat or a perception of a threat that would have similar consequences.

Countering the proliferation of biological weapons is an extremely difficult task for national police organizations, especially when considering the inherent dual-use nature of biological agents. This means that materials, equipment, skills and facilities designed for peaceful endeavours can also be exploited for hostile purposes. Credible and easy to read scientific and technical manuals circulate on the Internet, and the required equipment is easily available. A terrorist group that can combine the capability and motivation to use biological weapons must quickly become the target of security and police forces around the world.

Biological weapons can get at us from different ways. Our food chain is also at risk. Although the consequences of a bio-terrorist attack against livestock would be substantial, relatively little attention has been focused on the threat. In January 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of a 'real and current' threat by terrorists to contaminate food supplies. Moreover, after announcing his resignation in



December 2004, the United States Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson commented that only 'a minute amount of food' imports are inspected and that he fears an attack on the food supply 'every single night.'

Beyond the immediate economic and political impact, such attacks could also elicit fear and anxiety among the public. In some circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine the threat to the continuity of governments' operations.

This is not science fiction. That a high-damage attack has not occurred yet is not a cause for complacency but a call for urgent prevention. The impressive crowd gathered here is a strong testimony to the importance that the international community attaches to the bio-terrorist threat.

In the past few years, INTERPOL has worked relentlessly to enhance the capacity of member countries to combat terrorism and, with the support and help of many of you, INTERPOL has been able to make great progress in this area. As of 1 January 2005, there are now already **117 countries contributing to INTERPOL's global database of names and photographs of suspected terrorists**. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of suspected terrorists recorded in our database. Currently, it contains 8,127 suspected persons involved in terrorist activities, while in 2001 only 2,202 persons were known to INTERPOL.

Another key initiative in our efforts to fight terrorism is our stolen travel documents database. The misuse of fraudulent travel documents constitutes a major risk to international security. Indeed, possession of a stolen travel document allows any terrorist or criminal to travel freely throughout the world under any identity he or she wishes to assume. This ability is essential for terrorists in order for them to plan and carry out their attacks. INTERPOL has therefore called upon its members to share information about stolen and lost passports. Our database has the potential to deny criminals the means to circulate freely under false identities, provided that a large number of countries participate in the database. The results speak for themselves:

At the inception of the INTERPOL stolen travel documents database in October 2002, there were only 3,150 documents recorded.

As of 21 January 2005, there are already more than five and a half million stolen travel documents recorded into the ASF-STD database, coming from 67 member countries.

Yet, despite our significant progress in the area, many more challenges lie ahead of us. This conference gives us the collective opportunity to tackle them. In my belief, INTERPOL's initiative in the area of bio-terrorism is particularly important, because no such initiative has been developed before by police.

It is a great honor for me to welcome you to the First INTERPOL Global Conference on Bio-Terrorism. Over the next two days, speakers will identify the many challenges lying ahead of us, and with your active participation, they will propose solutions to improve the law enforcement response to the threat of bio-terrorism.

We will build bridges with the life science community and discuss how to enhance the role of the scientific community in preventing bio-terrorism through sustained communication with the international law enforcement community to mitigate the risks we are facing.

Bio-terrorism is not a problem that any country, even the most advanced, can or should face alone. That is why INTERPOL exists. INTERPOL can provide police forces with instant, secure global access to databases, not only of police information, but scientific and technical information. This can prove invaluable during investigations and for first responders having to manage the consequences of a bio-terrorist attack. When a major disaster strikes, police and other first responders must act quickly and effectively. Any threat to their safety diminishes the efficiency of their actions. It is not difficult to imagine that safety conditions during a large-scale bio-security crisis would be unfamiliar and unpredictable, and standard approaches to consequence management could therefore fall short. A major disaster requires

that many different trades join forces to safeguard first responders - both during an event and while preparing for the next one.

Participants will discuss the risk, case studies, prevention of attacks, preparation and training of law enforcement personnel, and the related legal and political framework. But the main objective of this conference is to seek your assistance in developing comprehensive training and information packages for law enforcement, particularly for countries in need of capacity-building in the appropriate responses to a bio-terrorist incident.

For the next two days, I am challenging all of you to think outside of your respective box. I am challenging my own INTERPOL officials to come up with innovative proposals. INTERPOL's global secure police communications network enables joint-venture, real-time collaboration among police officers, intelligence analysts and scientists. This integrated business model capitalises on the respective strengths of the police and scientific community, and it optimises resources, allowing us to help each other more effectively. Use this effectively and INTERPOL becomes the centre of an integrated response to the threat, co-ordinating and analysing bio-terrorism threats and supporting member countries' police services.

At the same time, I should, however, underline that INTERPOL and the police services around the world must be part of a broader integrated response by the international community to combat the threat of biological weapons. It is essential that the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) also continue their endeavours with regard to disease response and the monitoring of diseases around the world. Such endeavours should, inter alia, be aimed at rapidly identifying and responding to suspicious and unnatural outbreaks. Furthermore, the states party to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) should again look at establishing and strengthening mechanisms to underpin the effective implementation of that convention. We must all play our part.

I wish you a productive conference, and trust in you to recognize and deal with this threat to collective security and trust.