

Second World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

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INTERPOL statement

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INTERPOL deals with the areas of international crime that preoccupy the police services of its [179 member countries](#) throughout the world. Many people understandably think of international crime in terms of terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, firearms trafficking, financial and hi-tech crime and are aware of the existence of criminal organisations that operate ruthlessly in this field for profit and advantage.

As a sign of the progress that has been made in improving police awareness of the gravity of, and the need to be responsive to, the commercial sexual exploitation of children, INTERPOL has re-prioritised its activities to counter trafficking in human beings as one of its four most important crime programmes. Trafficking in human beings is thus given the same level of priority as those other forms of serious crime that I have just listed. One of the two major elements of the trafficking in human beings programme is to encourage and promote best practice in prevention and law enforcement in order to protect children from all forms of neglect, abuse and exploitation.

INTERPOL became involved in the issues of crimes against children in 1989 at the personal request of the then President of the Republic of France, Francois Mitterrand. This request was made when President Mitterrand inaugurated what was then our new headquarters building in Lyon, France.

At that time a single officer at INTERPOL's General Secretariat was assigned to those duties. By 1996 when the 1st World Congress took place in Stockholm, Sweden, we had managed to mobilise significant collaborative activity in and between our member countries.

At the time of this 2nd World Congress we have made further advances. Whereas even in 1996 we had only one officer working on these issues, we now have a dedicated department – we call it our Trafficking of Human Beings sub-directorate - and the combating of crimes against children is afforded the highest priority by the Organization.

Furthermore, the INTERPOL Specialist Group on Crimes Against Children - which was formerly known as the Standing Working Party on Offences Against Minors and is a truly international group of experts - continues to meet twice a year bringing together law enforcement officers from every continent to exchange information, develop working relationships and agree and implement operational issues. These meetings now attract in excess of 100 officers from some 40 countries. The group has met on 18 occasions and has defined theme areas aimed at focusing on and developing and promoting best practice in specific crime areas.

These specific themes are: child prostitution, child pornography, missing children and trafficking in children and the recently added management of sex offenders, which reflects the realisation and reality that known sex offenders need to be prevented from re-offending in order to protect children.

The Specialist Group has also produced the INTERPOL Handbook of Good Practice for Specialised Officers Dealing with Crimes Against Children. This handbook has been circulated to all 179 of the Organization's Member States. Its value as a training tool is demonstrated by the fact that many countries have translated it into their own language. First published in 1998 it is continuously under review by an editorial committee of law enforcement officers, and the latest edition is due to be distributed next year.

INTERPOL has also been increasingly involved in facilitating training at the request of our Member States, who recognise the necessity to increase the resources and level of knowledge their law enforcement agencies have in these crime areas. In addition, INTERPOL continues to support the work of other governmental, non-governmental and international organizations that are developing initiatives to protect children from commercial sexual exploitation.

One area of crime involving the sexual exploitation of children that has developed at an alarming rate since 1996 is the production and distribution of child pornography, especially via the Internet. The numbers of images, now in circulation, are increasing on a daily basis.

In order to support law enforcement to focus on identifying victims and offenders, the General Secretariat has installed an automated image comparison data base which is capable of linking series of images to assist in providing investigators with the tools necessary to rapidly analyse data seized from those suspected of being involved in these types of crimes.

INTERPOL is aware of its unique position within law enforcement, as the only global policing organization capable of co-ordinating an international response to what is now probably the largest crime area facilitated by the Internet - the exchange of child pornography. We have embraced that challenge, identified the tools required and as a result we are now providing the international response demanded by our customers.

International crime can only be solved and offenders brought to justice through international co-operation. No aspect of crime demonstrates this more clearly than the distribution of child pornography through the Internet. I am pleased to be able to confirm that in recent years there has been a number of international operations - initiated by individual countries and co-ordinated through INTERPOL- which have produced significant successes in terms of identifying and prosecuting those who are active in this field. I take this opportunity to thank all those professionals from a range of disciplines – this is not law enforcement acting alone – who have contributed to those successes.

INTERPOL will continue to move forwards, focusing on both the victims and the offenders. Our aim is to have all INTERPOL Yellow notices – these are INTERPOL publications alerting police and the public to the details of missing children and which can be viewed on the INTERPOL website - produced in all 4 of INTERPOL's official languages and published within 72 hours. INTERPOL Notices relating to individuals wanted for crimes against children will be given the same priority as notices for those wanted for terrorist acts.

INTERPOL is committed to continuing to focus on children as victims of crime. We are planning to further increase the current human resources establishment of the Trafficking in Human Beings sub directorate. This is to make more hands available and to extend our skills base. We will also install new technology in order to ensure that we remain in a position to provide the best possible service.

INTERPOL's goal is to make the world a safer place to live, and that statement applies none-more so than for our children.