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REMARKS

by

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**G8+ Ministerial Meeting on
Transatlantic Cocaine Trafficking**

***“The role of INTERPOL as a global platform for
operational intelligence exchange”***

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Honourable Ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

Once again, it is an honour to represent INTERPOL in a forum rightly seen as a key source for global guidance and impetus.

Today, we are called upon to discuss how to best counter a seemingly old foe, yet a very present threat to the well-being of the world's citizens.

International cocaine trafficking.

We have all heard the figures, and they are astonishing

With an estimated global trade amounting to 88 billion US\$, more than half of which supplying markets in Europe and North America, we are looking at a global menace to economic and social stability.

Particularly so, in a world that has seen global GDP and global trade shrink by more than 2% and 14% respectively just two years ago.

But it is in the impact of the phenomenon on the ground, and on how it affects the daily lives of many, that we can comprehend the full significance of this threat.

Its mechanics are as simple as lethal.

Its appeal seemingly inescapable.

Its appearances often deceiving.

I say this, based on my personal experience.

Let me take you to the Eastern coast of the United States.

Here lies Virginia Beach, a well-known resort city listed in the Guinness Book of records for having the longest pleasure beach in the world.

Needless to say, luxury houses and fastboats are a frequent sight in town. What you see in these pictures are two examples dating back to the early 1980s.

What may be more difficult to perceive, is that these assets were purchased with proceeds from cocaine trafficking.

A fresh graduate from medicine school and a respected dentist from Pennsylvania, Larry Lavin did not exactly fit the typical international drug trafficker profile.

However, you are looking at the head of an organization operating across 15 states and the US-Canada border, worth 50 million US\$ and able to distribute more than half a ton in cocaine a year.

All this had started simply to finance the drug habit of two college mates.

The case, known as the “Yuppie Conspiracy”, was one of my first as a young prosecutor in the United States.

A chance for me to see the beast in its deadly simplicity.

20 years later, as INTERPOL’s Secretary General, I see the same features, and I see how many of our member countries are impacted by them.

Let me give you an example, moving to the other side of the Atlantic.

Just a few days ago, a sailboat carrying a substantial amount of cocaine was successfully intercepted in Atlantic waters.

Shortly after that, Spanish police contacted INTERPOL’s 24/7 command and coordination center, indicating that two key figures involved in the shipment - a French and a Spanish national – were likely based in Cape Verde, ready to flee.

Rapid coordination between INTERPOL, Spain, Cape Verde and France allowed to ensure the location and arrest of the subjects, one of whom already known by France for drug trafficking.

A successful maritime interdiction, a shipment seized, two fugitives apprehended.

Many would call this a happy ending.

But this is only the beginning of a pivotal process that should be the focus of our discussion today, and our future efforts.

To make my point clear, let me move a bit closer to the Equator, to Guinea-Bissau.

The year is 2008. Local judicial police requested INTERPOL's assistance in the investigation of the landing of a private jet near the capital Bissau. The

suspicion was that the flight – originated in Venezuela – had smuggled cocaine into the country.

A multinational Incident Response Team assembled by INTERPOL with the support of the United States, France and Portugal, was deployed to the scene.

Forensics confirmed that cocaine had been unloaded off the plane and smuggled out of the airport.

Checks by US agents on one of the pilots of the plane positively identified him as wanted by Mexico, in connection to a 5.6 tonnes cocaine seizure dating back to 2006.

Seized phones and computers provided almost 1,000 pages in raw intelligence. This included banking information, imagery, flight plans and phone numbers linked to 14 countries across Africa, Europe and North America.

Let me remind you: all this, from a case which did not even see the physical seizure of any amount of cocaine.

And this is only one example from a series of IRTs deployed by INTERPOL across the past 5 years. In turn, these cases covered only a minimal part of seizures occurred in Western Africa since 2005.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My point is straightforward.

Successful interdiction and seizures are important components of an effective anti-cocaine trafficking strategy.

But today, we need a major decision to be made by this forum.

Should we stay content of stopping select shipments, put a small dent in daily cocaine supply, and call it a day?

Or...

Should we make sure that each seizure, each interdiction, each national investigation brings us closer to our vision of disrupting a global threat?

Behind every dose sold in the streets of Europe, there is violence fuelled, corruption encouraged, terrorist groups supported and economies hijacked across three continents.

Our response should be equally borderless.

Last week, for the first time an INTERPOL Secretary General visited Venezuela on an official mission. I did so, precisely to ensure that a key actor in the region would maintain its trust in INTERPOL's global information exchange model.

Our common vision should be that of a world where intelligence is gathered at the scene, and then systematically shared via existing global police platforms to trace trafficking networks and dismantle them.

Yet we are facing a landscape where regions chosen by traffickers often lack fundamental capacity to rapidly store and share intelligence.

Important steps are being taken to address this gap.

The West African Coast Initiative (WACI) currently sees INTERPOL working with the United Nations and ECOWAS specifically to create inter-agency Transnational Crime Units, able to conduct cross-border intelligence-led investigations.

In parallel, thanks to the support of Canada and the European Commission, project AIRCOP will see the United Nations, INTERPOL and the World Custom Organization combine their strength to create Joint Interdiction Task Forces at key airports across major cocaine trafficking routes.

The progress in these initiatives tells us we are on the right path.

But to truly succeed, they need to be followed by a paradigm shift.

In President Sarkozy's words, by "*New ideas for a new world*".

Yet when it comes to drug trafficking, we have often operated in a new world maintaining old mindsets.

These include the reluctance to share information and intelligence across national borders. We are still far from a world where seamless threats are countered with seamless and systematic operational communication.

But only this new paradigm will one day enable us NOT just to catch up, after the next shift in trafficking routes - but to even foresee it and strike first.

No doubt, this is an ambitious vision. One implying a complex journey ahead of us.

And to ensure that its destination remains always in sight, any such journey - whether by air or sea - requires a powerful beacon.

Our beacon is before us: the great nations represented here today.

Your endorsement to this vision, your call upon the international community to make the systematic international exchange of police intelligence a top priority, will lead us closer to our goal.

Honorable Ministers,

In 2004, you unanimously endorsed the ambitious vision of populating the first global Stolen and Lost Travel Document Database. Today, more than one million searches a day are conducted at entry points across the globe against this database.

In 2003, you supported the creation of the first automated International Child Exploitation Image Database. Today

it connects 29 countries, and has so far led to more than 2,000 victims and 1,200 offenders being identified.

The lesson to be learned is clear: ambitious goals – together with great leadership - can only bring success.

Thank you.