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Remarks

by

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Secretary General

European Conference on Integrity in Sport

“Match-Fixing:

the ugly side of the beautiful game”

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Rome, Italy

Secretary General of FIFA, Mr Jérôme Valcke,
Secretary General of UEFA, Mr Gianni Infantino,
Chief of the Italian State Police, Mr Antonio Manganelli,
President of the Italian National Olympic Committee, Dr Giovanni Petrucci,
President of the Football Federation of Italy, Mr Giancarlo Abete,
Honorable Representatives from European and International Law Enforcement and Sport
Institutions,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

Last March, many of us met here in Rome at the inaugural high-level seminar on sports integrity. That event brought together for the first time so many of the stakeholders in match-fixing: law enforcement, sports authorities, players, referees and teams. I am proud to be here again in Rome, less than a year after that historic event, at the first European conference to combat match-fixing. We thank Italy's state police and its chief Antonio Manganelli for their constant support of INTERPOL's efforts in this area.

This conference is not only the first European conference to combat match-fixing – it is also the first time in history that the Secretaries General of INTERPOL, FIFA and UEFA have come together to take a stand against the danger that match-fixing poses to sport and to society. It is a great honour for me to be with my counterparts on this historic occasion.

We are also honoured today by the presence of Simone Farina, whose courage – in turning down a bribe to fix a match and reporting the attempt to police – serves as a model of the proper values, attitude and behaviour that we hope to inculcate in all athletes. During this conference, we will hear about important tools in our efforts against match-fixing, such as early warning systems. Therefore, once again we say: perhaps the earliest warning system would be to develop more Simone Farinas who are willing to stand up for what is right. Thank you, Simone.

As we look in the coming days to better tackle the problems posed by match-fixing, I would like us to direct our attention to a country – which like many countries – has encountered a match-fixing problem in its football league. I am not talking about Italy or Spain, England or South Africa, South Korea or Hungary.

The country I want to highlight is Canada.

In Canada, where, as you know, they refer to football as soccer, the Canadian Soccer League is an obscure semi-professional league largely run by volunteers. In terms of sports, in Canada, ice hockey maintains a firm grip on the national consciousness that football enjoys in so many countries throughout the world. Yet a German court recently found that a Europe-based crime syndicate fixed a match in that Canadian league. Based on interviews with players and officials, a recent article reported that players in the league were regularly approached to fix games, and a Canadian journalist investigating this issue stated that he has received death threats following his reporting on match-fixing allegations in the league.

The Canadian match-fixing scandal demonstrates the long reach of match fixers into all types of leagues around the world, and the need for law enforcement to have an equally long reach. Even a relatively unknown league in a country where football is not a highly popular sport can attract the evils of match-fixing. Canada is but one of many countries to uncover match-fixing in its football leagues, including the South African Football Association in the run-up to the 2010 World Cup, Italy's Serie A league, Turkey's "Super Lig", and South Korea's K League. Other recent venues to experience revelations of match-fixing include Greece, Zimbabwe, Hungary, Finland, and Germany. The list goes on. No country is immune.

Let's look at the international reach of match-fixing from another angle, the well-publicized case of Wilson Raj Perumal. According to reports, while working for a Singapore-based syndicate, Perumal fixed hundreds of football matches around the world. His reach extended from Asia to Europe, Africa, and even South America. Using front companies, he entered into contracts with national football associations in places as diverse as South Africa and Bolivia to arrange friendly matches that he was able to manipulate by controlling referees and players.

This was the scope and range of only one match fixer, working for one trans-national organized crime syndicate.

Why does match-fixing spread so thoroughly throughout the world? In short, it's about money. This international business is also big business. Illegal betting, which drives match-fixing, encompasses a market that is said to be in the range of hundreds of billions of euros per year, with estimates that the large bookmakers have revenues on the same scale as the Coca Cola company. Criminal organizations benefit from match-fixing both in the profits it promises and in its ability to launder their ill-gotten gains from other criminal activities.

Match-fixing is clearly a many-headed dragon that we must slay with a coordinated national and international effort. On both levels, there is a great deal of infrastructure already in place to combat match-fixing and clean up the sport of football.

Take Italy as an example. In 2011, the Italian Ministry of the Interior and the Italian Chief of State Police, Antonio Manganelli, established two new units. The first is a Sports Betting Information Unit (UISS) to monitor and gather information relating to betting patterns and illegal betting. The second is an Investigation Sports Betting Team (GISS) which actively investigates criminal inroads into the world of sport, using in particular data acquired by the Sports Betting Information Unit. These units work together on an interdisciplinary level, and represent the coordination of police, telecommunications, the Italian betting agency, and sports associations.

They monitor games and betting trends on a day-by-day basis and exchange information to detect and root out criminal activity in sport. Additionally, the Monopoli di Stato also runs an early warning system that monitors betting within Italy and allows authorities to use betting patterns to identify matches that may be fixed.

Because match-fixing is a criminal phenomenon that transcends borders, it requires that we invest our efforts in intelligence, strategic and operational coordination on an international basis to combat it. To that end, INTERPOL established in 2011 a specialized match-fixing task force

comprising investigators from twenty-nine countries from Africa, Asia and Europe, as well as members from Europol. In addition to day-to-day intelligence gathering and sharing, the task force meets twice a year to exchange information. The first three meetings took place at the INTERPOL General Secretariat in Lyon, France, and the fourth meeting was held last month in Vantaa, Finland.

A recent example demonstrates the success of this initiative. INTERPOL provided support to Italian authorities, which made seventeen arrests in a match-fixing operation in December 2011, including the arrest of former World Cup player Cristiano Doni.

INTERPOL also facilitated the exchange of information between Singapore and Italy and helped set up an emergency operational meeting in Singapore to support an arrest operation in May 2012. That month, Italian authorities raided over thirty different premises associated with players, coaches, and club administrators in Italy's Serie A, Serie B, and "Liga" divisions in 23 cities throughout Italy.

INTERPOL issued Red Notices to help apprehend those key suspects who remained at large after the raids. This mounting pressure led to the recent surrender of one such suspect, Almir GEGIC, to the Italian police in November.

In addition to national and international efforts to combat match-fixing from a law enforcement perspective, we are also making inroads on another crucial front: education and prevention.

In 2011, we entered into a historic 10-year agreement with FIFA, the leading international football organization. For the purpose of furthering education and training to combat match-fixing and illegal betting, FIFA gave INTERPOL the largest private donation it had ever received.

Since that historic agreement, we have been working to deepen our understanding of the problem match-fixing presents. Our goal is to create educational curricula tailored to the most at-risk

populations in football so that we can prevent as many players, coaches, team officials and referees as possible from succumbing to the temptations of corruption.

We thank FIFA for this funding of INTERPOL's Integrity in Sports programme. We are especially grateful to Jerome Valcke, FIFA's Secretary General, who played an essential role in bringing about the INTERPOL/FIFA agreement which ensured that INTERPOL would have both the support and independence it needed to make this a success.

We acknowledge and appreciate the cooperation of UEFA and its Secretary General, Gianni Infantino, in our quest against match-fixing and corruption in sport.

On a personal note, I would like to offer my thanks to John Abbott, Chair of the INTERPOL Integrity in Sport Steering Group, and to my staff for their tireless dedication and continuing efforts in developing INTERPOL's Integrity in Sports programme.

In keeping with the global reach of match-fixing and of our efforts to combat it, let me reach around the globe to share with you the words of an ancient thinker. The Chinese sage Lao Tzu once observed that "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." If a lay person were to survey the vast international scope and resources of match-fixing, he or she could be forgiven for thinking that the task of opposing it is just too great, that our journey has no end. But the fact that the task is daunting and the journey is unending will not stop us, because there is so much that we can do. Far-reaching education and training can make many players and referees of the future stronger in the face of corruption by the fixers. Consistent international coordination between law enforcement and sports associations bears more than just the promise of success – it has begun to show results.

Let us use the days we have here in Rome to think creatively so we can act smarter as we take the next steps in this journey against corruption. You can count on INTERPOL's support on this journey as we continue to strike a blow against match-fixing – together.