



STATEMENT

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Secretary General

**United Nations Security Council
Ministerial Briefing
on
Foreign Terrorist Fighters**

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UN Headquarters
New York, NY USA

Mr Secretary General

Mr President,

Distinguished members of the Security Council,

Honorable Ministers,

It is a privilege to address the Security Council once again. Let me thank the Lithuanian Presidency for having INTERPOL present, as Ministers of Interior gather before this body for the first time in history.

In my statement today, I will illustrate how INTERPOL is supporting the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014), against the threat of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) - a menace global in its impact, yet ultimately drawing strength from the individuals crossing borders to fill its ranks.

The phenomenon is not new in itself. Yet the ease, the speed, and the reach of the flows converging onto Syria and Iraq showed INTERPOL from the onset that the threat was unprecedented. This led to the creation of our Foreign Terrorist Fighters programme, as early as April 2013.

At its core, a single goal: breaking the cycle – from radicalization to return. A cycle which we saw tragically completed in the streets of Brussels. A single individual, carrying lethal skills refined through a year spent in Syria; able to leave the conflict and travel freely throughout South East Asia; and to finally re-enter Europe to strike against innocents.

At the time, no identifiers existed in INTERPOL databases about the suspect. Indeed, the incident illustrated how opportunities to disrupt terrorist mobility must be systematically forged and promptly seized.

Such was the case last year, when a suspect was apprehended on his way to Syria, thanks to Belgium's decision to issue an international alert through INTERPOL, and thanks to the actions taken by Lebanese officials on the ground, based on that intelligence.

In another instance, a routine fingerprint check against INTERPOL databases allowed to identify an undocumented immigrant off the coast of Greece as a subject wanted for terrorist activity in Chechnya.

These are just two examples out of the many interdictions achieved by our member states. No matter where they occurred, they all embodied the same two elements of success:

- First, the secure sharing of information on foreign fighters across national and regional borders, through INTERPOL;
- Second, prompt access to that information at the frontlines, by the right officer, at the right moment.

These two dimensions also define INTERPOL's support to its member states in the implementation of Resolution 2178 (2014).

Terrorism-related operational information has unique features. Understandably, restriction of its circulation is the default position of any sovereign national authority.

Therefore, we have actively engaged member states, to forge the trust needed for data to flow internationally. I have had the honor to personally open a dialogue on this issue with Ministers across our membership, such as in summits held in Riga, Latvia; Washington, DC; and St Polten, Austria.

In parallel, our counter-terrorism experts regularly hold restricted operational meetings. Here, national agencies can determine how to best combine the potential of INTERPOL's tools with their country's legal, tactical and human rights requirements.

Today, I am glad to confirm that remarkable progress has been achieved.

At the time of the adoption of Resolution 2178 (2014), less than 900 foreign terrorist fighters had been identified through INTERPOL channels. Today, identifiers of more than 4,000 are available in our databases.

No doubt, the call issued by the Security Council represented a watershed. Countries are increasingly realizing that not sharing ultimately represents a risk, while doing so through INTERPOL offers them an invaluable opportunity.

Whenever information enters INTERPOL's systems, the source country retains full control over it. Every single member country can take a free and sovereign decision as to how long the data shall remain in our databases, and how its visibility should be managed. Member states can therefore use INTERPOL channels even to communicate bilaterally.

The same freedom applies to the type of information countries choose to exchange. This can include basic identifiers such as names, aliases, dates of birth and photos; fingerprints and DNA profiles retrieved from crime scenes; and information on valid or revoked travel documents potentially at the disposal of suspects.

INTERPOL diffusions, which let states hand-pick foreign counterparts accessing their information, remain the primary channel to share information on FTFs. Their great flexibility has been proven in the field.

In one case, two countries had issued diffusions to flag the same foreign terrorist fighter, each of them choosing different geographical restrictions for access to their records.

The information was thus linked to the same individual within the database, yet INTERPOL applied a tailored approach to the visibility of every single piece of data, depending on the source and its instructions.

This model explains why countries increasingly trust INTERPOL with their data.

In addition, we are working to turn this information into added value for member states. Our analysts are working side by side with seconded national experts, thanks to the generous support of Belgium, France, Kuwait, Spain, Switzerland and the United States.

All data received is cross-checked to establish links, which are communicated to relevant agencies as allowed by data owners. Routes and transit hubs, as well as tactics, techniques and procedures used by terrorists, are the object of dedicated analytical products.

As a result, we are monitoring the threat as it evolves.

We assess that the pressure to restrict FTF mobility is already producing changes in tactics. In the medium term, we project "broken travel" to become a more frequent feature, and facilitation networks to become more prominent relative to self-organization. This underlines the importance of implementation of targeted UN sanctions on individuals and entities involved in such activities, including through the issuance of INTERPOL Special Notices.

Other patterns include a growing share of recruits with criminal records, especially from Europe, and the active role played domestically by some suspects who had been prevented from travelling abroad.

Furthermore, a growing number of groups - spanning from Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa to South East Asia - are shifting their allegiance to ISIL. Greater risks exist for cross-pollination among conflict zones beyond Syria and Iraq, and for access to resources for more sophisticated attacks abroad.

Mr President,

This landscape leads to a single conclusion – and my first recommendation today. We must share even more information, and share it even better. Intelligence is crossing borders, but at a much slower pace than foreign terrorist fighters are.

Groups active in Syria and Iraq can rely on recruits from 100 countries. This is well above the number of states currently populating INTERPOL's foreign terrorist fighters' database - which explains why a gap still exists between the number of FTFs we have identified, and those estimated to have reached this conflict zone.

Let me also highlight two other imperatives: first, ensuring that information flows domestically, between national intelligence agencies and law enforcement; second, sharing data across regional borders.

Several encouraging initiatives are fostering information collection regionally. I believe the next, natural step is for INTERPOL to bring them together as a single, global platform. This will avoid duplication of efforts, and new missed opportunities. Withholding information within any region simply puts the rest of the world at risk.

The same applies to any intelligence made available by member states, but unable to reach the frontlines.

As highlighted by The Hague –Marrakech Memorandum, making INTERPOL tools directly accessible at international borders is a valuable step in screening travelers and turn knowledge into action in the field. We are therefore pursuing the extension of INTERPOL's I-24/7 network to border posts as an utmost priority in our support to member states.

Compared to the same period in 2014, in 2015 80 million additional searches were performed globally against our screening tools – such as INTERPOL's nominal database; the travel documents associated with INTERPOL notices system; and the Stolen and Lost Travel Documents database. Over the past year, more than 20 countries have shown encouraging increases in the use of these systems.

However, to date, systematic checks at borders are a reality only in select member states. Underlying this is first and foremost national capacity. In many cases, domestic authorities show willingness to establish protocols and inter-agency cooperation to extend access. Yet infrastructural gaps still provide challenges, particularly in high-priority locations.

Mr President,

Here lies INTERPOL's second recommendation to this distinguished forum. The call for capacity building in Resolution 2178 (2014) finds a natural target in strengthening international borders. Today, we have the opportunity to set a clear-cut, ambitious objective to fill this urgent gap.

Leaving the most exposed member states alone in their response would mean undermining both their immediate security and our chances of success in the long term.

With your leadership and support, and by mobilizing member states resources, INTERPOL asserts that within a reasonable timeframe, all major border posts surrounding this conflict zone will be able to achieve systematic screening capacity. INTERPOL stands ready to act to turn this vision into reality, together with our partners.

Among them, of course, are the United Nations counter-terrorism entities. We remain committed to work closely with the United Nations and member states to fully implement the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

We will continue our close cooperation with the Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force, particularly as the Chair of the Working Group on the Protection of Critical Infrastructure and co-Chair of the Working Group on Border Management and Law Enforcement relating to Counter Terrorism.

The same applies to our support to the Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), including the provision of INTERPOL experts to assessment missions, and to our ongoing efforts with the 1267 Monitoring Team to strengthen the implementation of sanctions against individuals and entities associated to Al-Qaida.

Finally, we are working to expand our support by becoming a global, neutral platform to exchange experience, challenges and solutions across countries and sectors - acting as a bridge to the private industry in countering terrorist use of the internet; as a hub for law enforcement discussion on issues such as radicalization and de-radicalization; and as a forum linking police and the military – including peacekeepers – in understanding shared threats like the spreading of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Mr President,

In closing, let me express how privileged I feel for the trust the Security Council has bestowed on INTERPOL. I would like to commit once again the full array of our expertise, tools and services at the complete disposal of the international community.

As member states find themselves once again united in protecting peace, they will find INTERPOL at their side, helping them turn their borders into vehicles for justice, and barriers to terror.

Thank you for your attention.