



SPEECH

Jürgen Stock
Secretary General

INTERPOL and Europol Operational Forum on Countering Migrant Smuggling Networks

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Mr Okechukwu Ibe, Executive Secretary of the African Union Commission;

Mr Alexander Prokopchuk, INTERPOL Executive Committee Member;

Mr Wil van Gemert, Deputy Director for Operations at Europol;

Distinguished Participants;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the INTERPOL and EUROPOL Operational Forum on Countering Migrant Smuggling Networks.

Today, we welcome over 120 participants from more than 50 countries to Lyon, including representatives from a number of international and regional organizations and the private sector.

This level of participation reflects the scale of the challenge, and the interest of countries and organizations in working together to address it.

I would like to thank Director Wainwright, Deputy Director van Gemert, and Europol, for their support of this Forum as partners with INTERPOL. And I thank you all for coming to Lyon. This is truly a joint effort.

As you know, Europe is currently facing the largest influx of migrants since World War Two. Millions are trying to enter the region to escape instability, conflict or poverty in their homelands.

It is a crisis of both humanitarian and security proportions. To have such an influx of undocumented individuals, who cannot access the services they desperately need or be identified by authorities, compromises the basic foundations of our society.

However, this is not an issue faced by Europe, Africa and the Middle East only.

We all know it's a global issue. In fact, globally, there are nearly 60 million people who are forcibly displaced, according to the UN.

Strong political awareness is needed, and law enforcement must be one part of the response.

Yet, no matter where it is taking place, a constant of this challenge is the smuggling networks behind it.

These networks lie at the heart of the problem. Without them we would not hear about the tragedy of an overturned boat leaving hundreds dead; watch migrants rush the borders to overwhelm authorities; or pack on to a train about to leave the station.

Their motivation is profit, not the well-being or safety. Profit which is often used to subsequently fuel corruption, money laundering, and other criminal activities.

They attract potential clients through kinship ties and social media platforms, where information is given on the various services they provide;

The gravity of this challenge was recently underlined by the adoption of UN Security Resolution 2240, which authorized the inspection and seizure of vessels confirmed as being used for migrant smuggling and human trafficking activities off the coast of Libya.

As the Resolution stresses, there are many countries and organizations involved in addressing the migrant smuggling challenge, and no one actor is able to stop these smuggling networks on their own.

Coordinated action among source, transit and destination countries is needed, and must include support from the 15 plus observer organizations, which are here today - and beyond.

Coordination is what this conference aims to achieve. As a result, this forum was convened by INTERPOL and EUROPOL to establish (and re-establish) contact among experts, build trust between them, and foster meaningful relationships that can be sustained over the long term.

With this as a basis, it will open up a dialogue aimed at identifying roles and responsibilities, and allow for the sharing of information and experience for the purpose of developing a coordinated and effective response.

Law enforcement is a critical component in the fight against smuggling groups, and INTERPOL believes it can play a facilitating role in the dialogue, strategy, and implementation of this response.

We want to give options to law enforcement and a toolkit which can bolster their efforts against these migrant smuggling groups no matter where they are on the globe.

With a membership of 190 countries, INTERPOL is ideally placed to coordinate our collective efforts to build such a response – in particular connecting the many regions of the world affected by this challenge.

As a neutral platform, INTERPOL also brings value by joining law enforcement in countries which are otherwise unable to connect with one another.

The speed at which smuggling networks communicate and move requires law enforcement to have information in real-time.

This is the priority for INTERPOL: to enhance the information flow between law enforcement to stop these networks, something that was stressed in Security Council Resolution 2240.

To do this, INTERPOL will create a Specialist Operational Network against Migrant Smuggling to build and maintain an information sharing hub on known smuggling groups.

This is what the next two days is all about, with a number of different events and breakout sessions intended to facilitate closed-door information sharing on suspected migrant smugglers, their linkages and operations.

It is about making this Specialist Operational Network as strong as it can be.

What participants get out of these events and sessions is information received through international cooperation that can then help

enhance their national security efforts or the work of their organization.

The Specialist Operational Network sets the basis for stronger operational cooperation, even as we all go back to our respective home country or organization after this forum is over.

Yet, INTERPOL provides a platform that will allow you to not only communicate while physically apart, but work together as well.

The secure and real-time exchange of case information, data and modus operandi across the globe is the priority activity of INTERPOL.

Over the next two days, you will hear about the infrastructure we have in place, and how you can potentially benefit from it.

Such infrastructure allows INTERPOL to also be operational.

The information that is shared through this Specialist Operational Network, can be used to help countries identify, locate and apprehend suspected and wanted smugglers and traffickers.

INTERPOL is there to help these countries coordinate multijurisdictional cases and to take action on a global scale.

In this regard, we plan to organize dedicated fugitive round-ups, using our INFRA-model operations, which will help to initiate investigations or progress existing ones.

Finally, any information that is shared through the Specialist Operational Network, or during the INFRA operations can be analyzed.

Through the creation of a dedicated analysis file, INTERPOL is in a position to provide a return on investment to member countries and those in the global community.

This file acts a repository for storing and making sense of information on these networks to produce a high-quality global picture of the threat by our experts at INTERPOL.

However, INTERPOL's efforts are only one part of the collective strategy.

Ultimately, the value and success of this forum and subsequent collaborations depend on each and every one of us, and what we gain from our interactions.

This is why INTERPOL and EUROPOL convened this forum – for you to get to know one another, share your ideas, experiences and thoughts, to generate constructive discussion - all to ultimately guide action.

I believe that by working hand-in-hand, we can dismantle organized smuggling networks and stop them before they cause further harm and suffering.

Certainly, this will be a challenge in the security landscape for the foreseeable future.

Even next month there will a summit on migration in La Valletta, Malta. INTERPOL will attend alongside EUROPOL.

I look forward to sharing the many good ideas and results that will be generated over the next two days with participants at the summit, and we will certainly report back on the progress that is made there, during our next meeting.

I wish you all a very pleasant and fruitful two days ahead.

Thank you.