

## Conference on Maritime Piracy Financial Investigations

Welcome Address by [Ronald K. Noble](#) INTERPOL Secretary General  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is with the greatest pleasure that I have the honor to address such a distinguished and varied audience.

But before beginning my formal remarks, let me kindly ask all you to stand up and observe with me a moment of silence for all those and the families of those whose lives were lost, who have been severely injured or who remain missing following last week's tragic earthquake in Haiti, an INTERPOL member country since 1957.

Thank you.

I hope that this tragedy, like other recent natural disasters, will remind us all how precious our lives and those of our loved ones are and how important it is for us all to come together not only in times of tragedy, but at all times in order to preserve and protect life.

Let me now offer you my warmest welcome to INTERPOL's global headquarters here in the beautiful city of Lyon.

The theme that brings us together today remains as timely as ever. No more than 24 hours have passed since the release of one of the largest oil tankers ever seized – the Maran Centaurus - captured on 29 November 2009 with two million barrels of oil, the equivalent of the daily output of some of the world's top oil producers.

While we rejoice for the future return of all crew members back to their families, there is little to celebrate in the process that led to this outcome. According to media reports, on January 17th, a ransom of between \$5.5m and \$7m was dropped on the deck of the supertanker. This marked the success of the perpetrators' bid for extortion, and made this the single biggest reported ransom ever paid to maritime pirates.

As I stand here before you, I am not aware of any hot leads being pursued, nor am I aware of which organized crime piracy group perpetrated this crime!

No louder call could exist for us to be here today, as INTERPOL hosts the first-ever international **Conference on Maritime Piracy Financial Investigations**, a groundbreaking event which I am honored to open as INTERPOL's Secretary General.

The reason why such a geographically and professionally diverse audience has convened here today is simple, but far from trivial.

The past few years have seen an upsurge in a criminal phenomenon that – while dating back to the dawn of civilization – is still far from being eradicated. It remains a crime with enormous implications that go well beyond its perceived direct victims.

Maritime piracy simply cannot be regarded as a threat limited to shipping companies or to unfortunate crews involved in specific, individual attacks.

In a world that currently sees 80% of international trade conducted by sea, unchallenged piracy represents a serious threat to economic growth. It leads to estimated direct and indirect costs to the global economy ranging from US\$ 1 to 16 billion;

In a world that witnessed open international trade become the foundation of peace, piracy stands as a menace to political stability;

In a world where criminal groups – including terrorists – are quick to forge new alliances for mutual profit, piracy represents a major threat to international security.

The interests of countries and communities worldwide are at stake every time a vessel is attacked on the high sea. It is international crime at its worse.

Understandably, the focus of the international community has been increasingly on the situation off the Coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden.

Between 2008 and 2009, total pirate attacks in the region reported to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) have almost doubled, with a trend similar to that observed in the preceding 12 months.

Hijacks of commercial ships at sea in the area have shown little signs of decline between 2008 and 2009. Approximately the same number of crew members spent New Year's Eve in the hands of captors at the end of both years.

Not surprisingly, concerted actions taken so far by the international community have involved increased visible signs of security and deterrence in the form of military vessels.

We have seen anecdotal examples of success as a result. The deployment of joint naval coalitions to the region in 2008 has already been identified as a factor behind the decline in the rate of successful hijackings.

INTERPOL believes that the global community needs to integrate law enforcement into its approach to fighting maritime piracy because maritime piracy is really nothing more than transnational organized crime operating on the high seas and benefitting from their profits on land.

Since its launch in 2005, INTERPOL's project BADA has been making progress in laying down the foundation of law enforcement capacity able to bridge the gap between military interdiction and prosecution of pirates.

Information sharing through INTERPOL has allowed our member countries to identify several organized groups. In 2009 alone, more than 40 different member countries have been using INTERPOL to exchange information concerning maritime piracy.

And to further enhance INTERPOL's contribution to this fight, a dedicated Task Force will be created and will operate under the oversight of our Executive Director of Police Service, Mr. Jean-Michel LOUBOUTIN.

The Task Force's role will be to coordinate INTERPOL's response to the maritime piracy threat in all its facets, and to maximize the value added by the Organization's multiple components and by its new strategic partnerships across the world in this realm.

I have also reached agreement with Europol's new Director, Rob Wainwright, that INTERPOL will support one of Europol's analytical work files on maritime piracy, and Europol will support INTERPOL's becoming a central platform for exchange of maritime piracy-related information globally by police and other relevant law enforcement entities. Let me also say that we are happy to have Christoffer ENGBERG from Europol with us here this morning.

INTERPOL recognizes the clear need to step up our joint effort against this menace. Following the mounting pressure coming from the international community, pirate attacks off the Eastern African coast have been increasing in their geographical reach - taking place often 1,000 miles from Somali coasts into the Indian Ocean. Maritime pirates react to changed circumstances, and so must we.

While its implications are global, and the dimensions touched by its disruptive effects are multiple, the principal motive underlying maritime piracy remains the same.

Profit.

Whether using swords or rocket propelled grenades, a galleon or a fastboat, a sextant or GPS, pirates will always be looking for easy targets and easy profit. To strike at the heart of maritime piracy, we must investigate, understand and use to our advantage the financial motivation behind each of these attacks.

We must follow the money!

We should keep in mind that even if the public and media's attention leave the scene of an attack after a ransom is paid. It is after the ransom is paid that the leaders of these transnational organized crime groups seek to enjoy the proceeds of their crime. A game that demands us to be ready to step into the field on a moment's notice.

Millions of dollars are being divided, laundered and transferred to reach the masterminds of the attack, and possibly to insurgent and terrorist groups active in the region. The rationale behind the need to step up joint international initiatives against proceeds from piracy is straightforward, and based on two major elements.

First, that the unchecked flow of piracy proceeds is a formidable obstacle to deterrence, no matter how many frigates may be deployed on the high seas.

Every single dollar obtained by pirates and left untraced and unrecovered is a call for action for new generations of pirates. In Puntland alone, piracy receipts correspond to three times the region's income. Successful hijackings and ransoms collected with impunity show the world how well the pirates' business model works.

Secondly, following the money trail provides a formidable opportunity to understand the structure and functioning of maritime piracy networks.

As in any profit-driven criminal enterprise, proceeds must flow up the pirates' chain of command to reach those who designed the attack, often with the help of accurate intelligence on vessels' routes, ownership and cargo.

For these reasons, it is now time for the international community to integrate this fundamental financial component in its joint law enforcement strategy against maritime piracy, involving all relevant actors represented here today:

- investigators, analysts and prosecutors - dealing with increasingly sophisticated piracy networks;
- policymakers and experts - facing the distorted impact of attacks and flows of proceeds on their constituencies;
- private shipping companies - from which profit is extorted by means of violence;
- and
- the financial industry – concerned by its products being turned into channels to funnel and launder proceeds.

INTERPOL is proud to be the platform where these fundamental players will meet, discuss and devise new holistic plans against maritime piracy and its surge, in the next two days as in the months to come.

In closing, let me thank all of you for your participation in this conference. Let me give a special thanks to the co-drivers of this initiative, the United States State Department and the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, without whose support this conference would have never been possible.

We all have a clear vision in mind.

In the words of a Roman law carved in stone in Delphi and dating back to 100 B.C., it **is that of a world where** *"citizens and their (...) allies may conduct their business affairs, as is required, in the eastern cities and islands without danger and that they may be able to sail the seas in safety"*.

I truly hope that the next two days will represent a new, substantive step towards the attainment of our common goal – an end to maritime piracy as we know it today.

Thank you!