

14th SARPCCO Annual General Meeting Council of Police Chiefs

Remarks by Ronald K. Noble INTERPOL Secretary General
Johannesburg, South Africa - 2 September 2009

National Commissioner Bheki CELE of the South African Police Service;
Inspector General Sebastian Haitota NDEITUNGA of the Namibian Police Force and outgoing Chairman of SARPCCO;
Mr Eduardo Fernandes CERQUEIRA, INTERPOL Executive Committee Delegate for Africa;
Ms Julia Viedma Robles, INTERPOL's Director for Regional and National Police Services;
Mr Vilio HIFINDAKA, outgoing Head of Regional Bureau Harare;
Mrs Elizabeth Kuteesa – Assistant Director, NCB-AFRICA;
Mr Chilika SIMFUKWE, incoming Head of Regional Bureau Harare;
Mr Regimen James TAYLOR, Head of NCB Pretoria;
Esteemed Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
IPSG Staff from Harare and Lyon;
Distinguished Delegates from Japan;
INTERPOL Regional Partners;
Distinguished Chiefs of Police, Dear Colleagues and Honored Guests;

Good morning.

It is a true honor for me to speak in front of the Council of Chiefs of Southern Africa once again on this fine day, and to witness the determination of 13 countries – stretching over three and a half million square miles – to work as one in the fight against transnational crime shoulder to shoulder with INTERPOL.

Those of you who know me have no doubt about what I will say next. I will say what I always say: "It feels so good to be back on the continent that I and many who are of African descent call the motherland." I am especially pleased to be in South Africa, where one of the world's greatest leaders of all time, Nelson Mandela, demonstrates to this day the positive influence that one human being can have not only on his country, but on the entire world.

Not only is the site of this week's meeting special, but the day is special, because it commemorates the death of one of the symbols of its tenacity and pioneering spirit: Dr. Christiaan Neethling BARNARD, who performed the first-ever human heart transplant more than 40 years ago.

Both Nelson Mandela and Dr. Barnard's legacy can remind us of two principles that should always guide us as civil servants empowered to enforce the law:

First, that the foremost objective of our work is to defend and preserve human life and the ability of persons to live and work in a safe environment;
Second, that human ingenuity and determination – when applied to noble ends and in the right way – know no limits to their potential.

May these principles guide the new National Police Commissioner of South Africa, Mr. Bheki CELE, as he takes the baton from the outgoing SARPCCO Chairman, Inspector-General Sebastian Haitota NDEITUNGA (Namibia). Sebastian, let me take a moment to thank you not only for your leadership of SARPCCO here in the region, but also for the way in which you represented SARPCCO during the recently concluded Americas' Regional Conference in Chile. Your police experience, intellect, personality, leadership skills and command of languages combine to make you a formidable partner.

Commissioner Cele, congratulations on your recent appointment. In the short time that I have spent with you, I already have been impressed by your professionalism and by the seriousness with which you have undertaken your new responsibilities. I commit myself and the entire Organization of INTERPOL to work as closely with you as we did with your predecessor and INTERPOL's former President, Jackie Selebi. At INTERPOL, we never forget those who came before us.

Let me also single out Mr. Vilio HIFINDAKA, the outgoing Head of our Regional Bureau in Harare, for his great work over the last 4 years. Vilio, you have done an extraordinary job, and all of us are so proud of your appointment as Deputy Inspector General for Operations of the Namibian Police Force.

I am confident that the incoming Head - Mr Chilika SIMFUKWE from Malawi - will guide the Regional Bureau with the same level of commitment, enthusiasm, professionalism and dignity that you have demonstrated everyday.

Since its birth, SARPCCO has been the symbol of a simple, yet powerful message by its members to criminals in Africa. "We share a common good - security. We share the threats brought against it. And we will act together to respond to them".

INTERPOL is proud of its commitment to and support of SARPCCO on a daily basis. Our Regional Bureau in Harare has been acting as the organization's Secretariat since its creation in 1997, and as a vital partner in SARPCCO's many initiatives ever since.

Personally, I find truly amazing how INTERPOL's diverse components have been able to act as one to achieve the objectives we share with you, SARPCCO Chiefs of Police.

This would never have been possible without several key players present here today, like Mrs Julia VIEDMA ROBLES and Mrs. Elizabeth KUTEESA. Julia, your outstanding work in overseeing IPSP's support to NCBs, RBs and regional activities across the globe made this a reality. And Elizabeth, I am sure every single delegate in this room knows the determination with which you have guided the implementation of our initiatives across this continent, together with Mr. Hifindaka in Harare and NCBs throughout Southern Africa.

Although I will not be able to attend the Council of Ministers meeting on Friday for family reasons, I feel very proud in having these exceptional civil servants representing me.

We have recently seen significant changes in how SARPCCO is viewed by other governmental structures. It has been more than a year since the region's Heads of Government formally recognized SARPCCO as a Southern African Development Community (SADC) structure.

SARPCCO's role within SADC reminds us of the pivotal role of security in fostering true development, but also of how SARPCCO has been on the cutting edge of so many important developments and successes in crossborder police co-operation over the years.

The first success – and it is a continuing success – that comes to mind is the fight against counterfeit and illegal medical products, a crime phenomenon with devastating consequences in a region where over a million people die every year from malaria.

Operation MAMBA, conducted in the fall of 2008 in Tanzania with the strong support of its Commissioner of Police, Saidi MWEEMA, led to the inspection of 191 locations – 22 of which were eventually closed - and to the seizure of 100 different types of potentially harmful and illegal medical products, which are now off the shelves and out of the reach of potential victims.

If you ask Aline Plançon, INTERPOL's chief expert in fighting the counterfeiting of medical products, why Operation Mamba was a success, she would say that its success is owed to you, your leadership and the dedication of your colleagues in the police, the National Food and Drug Authority, the Presidency Office, the Fair Competition Commission and Customs Services.

INTERPOL is proud to have supported the authorities participating in the operation by providing - together with the World Health Organization - specific training to the forces deployed in the field.

The success of Operation MAMBA made it a model for other operations in the Southern African region.

Less than 3 months ago, Operation FIELA took place in Lesotho, targeting more than 50 locations and resulting in the seizure of numerous illegal or counterfeit medical products ranging from steroids to antibiotics. I hope that Lesotho's Commissioner, Elisabeth LETOONANE will tell you all how important INTERPOL's support has been to Lesotho in this and other ways.

Together with you, INTERPOL wants to replicate these successes on an even larger scale. New simultaneous operations will be conducted soon, involving an even greater number of countries in Southern Africa.

There is no doubt that over the last several years, INTERPOL has become more and more relevant to African police services, often in non-traditional ways. When we put I-24/7 in place, Africa received state-of-the-art satellite connections, not old or second-hand connections. When the Cricket World Cup needed expert support for security preparations and turned to INTERPOL, we didn't turn to the US, North America or Europe. We looked to Southern Africa, to Africa's Police Service and its Deputy Police Commissioner Andre Pruis.

Similarly, when SARPCCO and African Police Services ask for support in hosting major events, INTERPOL's General Secretariat responds. We now stand ready to support South Africa and Angola as the hosts of next year's largest global and continental sporting events: the FIFA World Cup and the CAF African Cup of Nations.

Yet the security of Southern African citizens does not depend only on what occurs within this beautiful region.

We are all well aware that today, criminals are not afraid of borders. They seek to exploit them. They thrive because of them.

Three recent cases – all connected to the nation that has welcomed us today – are a reminder of this reality.

First is the case of a sex offender wanted by South Africa since 2006. The man had managed to stay outside the reach of the law for almost three years, even boasting through the media that no police in the world would catch him. This same man was captured less than three months ago in Belarus, Eastern Europe, in connection with an attempted armed robbery.

Let me stress this.

A fugitive –

Wanted for sex crimes against children in South Africa –

Who engaged in other criminal activity almost 6,000 miles from the country he fled three years before –
Was caught thanks to your co-operation through INTERPOL.

Second is the similarly enlightening case of a Chinese individual wanted by China on drug trafficking charges, who was recently apprehended here in South Africa while living under a different identity.

Once again, a wanted criminal was enjoying freedom thousands of miles away from his home country, trying to escape his country's and INTERPOL's reach without success.

In the third case, a day after the brave performance of the Bafana-Bafana against Brazil in the Confederations Cup last June, a well-dressed individual claiming to be a businessman landed in Johannesburg holding a Pakistani passport.

Upon screening the passport using INTERPOL's I-24/7, that same passport was revealed to be part of a batch of 2,000 blank passports stolen in Pakistan in December 2001.

Almost 8 years after the original theft, 5,000 miles away from the location where the document was stolen, an individual was attempting to enter a country where a global event was taking place.

Where was he from?

Why did he need to obtain a fraudulent passport?

What were his intentions?

Investigators will answer these questions. But each of these questions carries the risk that criminal activity was about to be perpetrated in South Africa, or in one of the other 12 SARPCCO countries that today you proudly represent here.

Multiply that risk by 2,000 – the number of blank passports stolen in 2001 from one single office – and you will understand the magnitude of the threat posed not only to South Africa, or its neighbors, but to the entire world.

The three cases I just described have two fundamental elements in common:

First, they all underline the threat posed by criminals who seek to exploit national and regional borders to hide from justice.

A global threat that requires a global response.

Second, they all involve the use of the right INTERPOL tools – at the right time – to identify and apprehend the perpetrators.

In the first two cases, both criminals were the subjects of INTERPOL Red Notices. The countries involved were readily made aware of this via INTERPOL's I-24/7 global communications system linking all of our 187 member countries together.

Thanks to national authorities' requesting the issuance of such notices and the timely use of INTERPOL tools by the officers facing the perpetrators, these individuals have been brought to justice to face their charges.

In the third case, the fraudulent entry into South Africa was prevented first by the sharing of information between Pakistan and South Africa, and second because the right people had access to the right information at the right time and at the right place.

This was made possible by expanding the access to INTERPOL's database of almost 19 million Stolen and Lost Travel Documents beyond the local NCB to border-control posts right here in South Africa.

It is our goal at INTERPOL, together with you – Chiefs of Police in the region – to make these success stories not exceptional occasions for pride, but the daily reality of law enforcement in Southern Africa.

To do so, we must empower the men and women who fight crime in the field everyday with the appropriate tools.

To do so, we must ensure that they have access to the most advanced investigative techniques and that they know how to use them to their full potential.

Infrastructure. Capacity-building. Two pillars of INTERPOL's support to Southern Africa, both through ad hoc initiatives and through multidimensional programs like OASIS – which you will hear more about tomorrow from my colleague, Mr. RADERMACHER, a smart and delightful member of Germany's BKA and the Deputy Head of OASIS.

Several countries represented here today will see their I-24/7 systems both upgraded and expanded beyond their NCBs.

The more units have access to this tool, whether within police ranks or in other agencies united in defending the rule of law, the smaller room criminals will have to maneuver.

This capacity will have a special added value for Africa, particularly in the fight against drug trafficking. Recent intelligence shows that smuggling routes between Southern Africa and South America are becoming increasingly connected to those linking West Africa and Western Europe.

For this reason, INTERPOL will soon be merging together Project COCAF – focusing on West Africa and Europe – and Project PROTEUS, which targets routes between South America and Southern Africa.

The result will be a new initiative – Project WHITEFLOW – which will aim to enhance data-sharing on cocaine trafficking across the continent.

With your assistance, the expansion of the I-24/7 infrastructure will allow for faster and greater exchange of operational information: within Southern Africa, across the entire continent, and between African law enforcement agencies, INTERPOL's General Secretariat and police throughout the world.

In addition to infrastructure enhancement, some of your finest officers have also had the chance to share their expertise with colleagues from all over the continent, by participating in INTERPOL training programs.

Like them, many others will have access to unique training opportunities in the most advanced investigative and analytical techniques, covering areas ranging from drug offenses to wildlife crime.

These tools and these skills will allow the men and women of police forces in Southern Africa to respond with even greater vigor to the challenges they face.

But law enforcement is not just about reacting to threats. Our work does not end with the suppression of ongoing illegal behavior.

As police chiefs you are also called to identify and anticipate trends in criminal activity, to guide your officers to mitigate risks before they become full-blown menaces to the public order.

This is particularly true in Africa, a continent that is looking ahead at new opportunities provided by advanced technology and new paths to foster integration with world markets.

Thanks to several initiatives currently in place, in the near future there will be 250 million Internet users on the African continent. What an incredible opportunity for new African generations!

Yet any open door can also lead to unknown risks. Criminals have shown incredible skill at employing state-of-the art technology to advance their objectives. Amazing innovations can become powerful weapons in the wrong hands. And that is why we must act now if we want to ensure that Africa will reap the full benefits of this digital revolution.

INTERPOL has been working on new plans to reduce cybercrime, and we want Southern Africa to be a part of them.

We want your officers to be trained in the most advanced computer forensic techniques.

We want you to receive alerts on the latest developments in cybercrime typologies and measures to face them.

We want the people of Southern Africa to enjoy the full rewards of the Internet revolution, while you and the men and women you lead will be keeping them safe, just as you do everyday in your communities.

In closing, let me say again how privileged I feel to be your Secretary General and to be here with you!

We have so much to do to protect and serve our citizens. We carry a weighty responsibility.

To discharge this responsibility, we need you, your leadership and your voice.

Only by sharing your deep knowledge of this complex and fascinating region, and your direct experience as law enforcement leaders, will you be able to guide us in supporting your men in their duty.

Today, and in the years to come.

Whatever the future will bring before us and no matter how hard these challenges will seem.

Because in the words of perhaps Southern Africa's greatest leader – and I quote: "It always looks impossible, until it's done." Dr. Nelson Mandela.

Thank you.