

20th Americas Regional Conference

Opening remarks by Ronald K. Noble, INTERPOL Secretary General

Viña del Mar, Chile 1 April 2009

Chile's Vice-Minister of the Interior, Mr. Patricio Rosende Lynch, INTERPOL Vice-President, Director of the Investigative Police of Chile, Mr. Arturo Herrera Verdugo, Mr. Ivan de la Maza Maillet, Intendente de la Quinta Region de Valparaiso, Members of INTERPOL's Executive Committee, Members of the diplomatic corps, Chiefs of police, Heads of INTERPOL National Central Bureaus, Members of the Investigative Police of Chile, Members of INTERPOL General Secretariat staff, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It is a great pleasure to be here with you for INTERPOL's 20th Americas Regional Conference.

Chileans call their homeland "país de poetas" – the country of poets.

Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda, who had a house next to here in Valparaíso, has captivated readers throughout the world with his poems about the history, culture and people of this great country.

Mr. Neruda wrote in one of his most famous works: "Y una a una las noches entre nuestras ciudades separadas se agregan a la noche que nos une." – "And one by one the nights between our separated cities are joined to the night that unites us."

This poem is about love between two people. It echoes with all of us on a personal level. But it is also meaningful for all of us in the INTERPOL family, as we, the police, are bound by our deep mutual respect, admiration, commitment and concern for one another.

One by one we have traveled great distances to be united here today, from our northernmost National Central Bureau in the Americas, Ottawa, Canada, to our southernmost, Montevideo, Uruguay, from all points in between – and my staff and me from the INTERPOL General Secretariat in Lyon, France, our Regional Bureaus in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in San Salvador, El Salvador, and at the United Nations in



INTERPOL Secretary General Ronald K. Noble said it was vital to focus attention on the most serious gaps in the global security infrastructure, especially passport checks at borders.



Mr Noble encouraged countries in the region to increase their use of INTERPOL's Stolen and Lost Travel Documents database.



Mr Noble addresses the 20th Americas Regional Conference.

New York.

I hope whatever has moved generations of Chileans – maybe it's the omnipresent Andes Mountains, whose tallest peaks make us believe we might actually touch the stars, or whose deepest valleys hold the secrets of 10,000 years of civilisation – will inspire all of us during this conference.

We can also draw inspiration from the people in this room, our police colleagues, from our neighbors, from the members of the diplomatic corps present, and from those who could not be here but are with us in spirit.

... like our police brothers and sisters in Haiti, who work in the face of extremely difficult conditions, but still recognised that the escape of a single dangerous prisoner constituted a threat to all of us – as they did when they requested the issuance of an INTERPOL global alert with the photos and identity details of 13 escaped convicts.

... like the police officers in Panama who in less than 24 hours after the issuance of a wanted person's alert through INTERPOL located, arrested and deported a Colombian fugitive who was charged with defrauding thousands of investors.

... like the United States and the 11 Caribbean Cricket World Cup host countries – Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago – which put in place INTERPOL's MIND and FIND technology to check the passports of all international arrivals by air and sea against the only global database of stolen and lost travel documents – and the other countries in the region that are taking similar steps.

In doing so, the countries increased their monthly searches of INTERPOL's stolen and lost travel documents database from fewer than 100 times per month to over 5 million per month. Consequently, they are identifying thousands of international travelers carrying passports that had been reported as lost or stolen.

Over the next three days, we will find much to inspire us – and to motivate us.

Prior to coming to Chile, I met with senior government and law enforcement officials in the United States, Colombia and Bolivia – and I will go on to Nicaragua and El Salvador after this conference – to highlight the continued support of INTERPOL to national and regional policing initiatives and the many tools and services provided by INTERPOL to these and other countries in the region.

In my meetings in these countries – and in all of the 124 countries I have visited as Secretary General – I have focused attention on INTERPOL's concerns about the most serious gaps in our global security infrastructure that require urgent and immediate action by all heads of state and world leaders.

As long as too little consideration and too few resources are given to addressing these gaps, we are dangerously – and needlessly – exposed to the same forces that allowed an economic crisis that started with a single bank failure in one country to engulf the rest of the world.

In 2008, 16 percent of all international travelers – about 148 million people – entered a country in the Americas.



The conference will encourage expanding the use of INTERPOL tools and services at national and regional level.



Mr Noble (left) with Patricio Rosende Lynch, Chile's Acting Interior Minister (right), who also addressed the conference.

Most likely, they came to study, to enjoy your natural wonders or to close important business deals.

Only 50.6 million of those arrivals – about one out of every three – had their passports checked against INTERPOL's global database of stolen and lost travel documents.

In other words, close to 100 million of those arrivals did not have their identities verified when they entered our borders.

So we will never know how many of those travelers came to escape justice in another country; or to smuggle people – or were victims of smugglers themselves; or to plan acts of terror.

But conducting searches is only half of the solution. A database is only as effective as the information it contains. One search of 10 million records will reveal far more than 10 million searches of a single record.

While countries in the Americas region accounted for almost 70 percent of all searches of the SLTD database performed worldwide, countries in the region submitted only about 13 percent of the records.

Unless countries notify INTERPOL when their citizens' passports have been reported lost or stolen, the screening of our databases will not produce the best and most accurate results, which makes us all vulnerable.

And there is good reason for us to be concerned about who is traveling in this region carrying fraudulent passports.

In the last two years, Central American countries have become the main transit points for Iraqis being smuggled into the United States. INTERPOL has tracked 14 different smuggling cases involving Iraqi nationals traveling on fraudulent passports.

In these cases, 74 passports from 10 different European countries were used, but only 24 had been recorded in INTERPOL's database of stolen and lost travel documents.

Think about how simple it would be for Al Qaeda terrorists to slip into or through your countries in order to plan and carry out the same kinds of deadly terrorist attacks that occur far too frequently in Iraq.

In addition, there have been reports that maras, whose members routinely engage in drug trafficking, people smuggling, extortion, kidnapping and murder, may have had contacts with Al Qaeda.

Although these reports have not been confirmed, it is easy to imagine street gangs in the region and terrorist networks jointly exploiting each other's money, manpower and local knowledge, just as we have seen deeper links between organized crime and terrorists in other parts of the world.

As one immigration official said: "If [the maras] can smuggle people for a job, they can smuggle people interested in terror."

Recently, authorities have dismantled cocaine-trafficking rings that used their proceeds to finance the activities of the FARC and Hezbollah, while drugs destined for European markets are increasingly being channelled through West African countries.

The fourth phase of Operation Jupiter targeting organized counterfeiting networks in South America led to the seizures of not only counterfeit medicines, but also illegal drugs, potentially toxic children's toys and food products.

What these examples illustrate is that the nature of the threats we face here, and throughout the world,

has become both extremely localised and highly globalised. And market forces – or market opportunities – have motivated criminals that used to specialise to diversify into new areas of activity.

Speaking about the secret to winning football matches, Pelé, who scored more goals for Brazil than any other player in history, said: “When you control the ball, you control the score.”

And like football players passing and controlling the ball downfield, our continued effectiveness in the future will depend on the capacity of police in our member countries to consult one another’s data via INTERPOL and to coordinate their investigations.

And this is where INTERPOL is so vital – by providing the tools and services that enable you to perform your fundamental police work while keeping an eye towards continual innovation and enhancement.

The first component of our collective success – of “controlling the ball” – is information.

The reach of the maras extends to at least 10 different countries across two continents. An intelligence database of known members is being created at our Regional Bureau in San Salvador to give specialised police units in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua the secure means to store, share and retrieve intelligence on these criminal gangs.

A copy of the database will be stored at the INTERPOL General Secretariat, so that all of our member countries can access this valuable data.

As part of the fourth phase of Operation Jupiter, more than 900 coordination messages were exchanged, facilitating almost 300 targeted operations that led to the arrests of hundreds of individuals and seizure of counterfeit and illegal goods worth more than 130 million US dollars.

During my recent missions to Colombia and Bolivia, the prosecutorial and judicial authorities of Colombia agreed to place in INTERPOL databases the data seized from FARC computers and data storage devices, while Bolivian police will move to implement MIND/FIND throughout the country, meaning all countries will benefit from searches of INTERPOL’s databases conducted by the Bolivian police.

The second component is training and capacity-building.

Last October, a team from the INTERPOL General Secretariat trained police and immigration officers at Peru’s international airport to better fight criminal use of stolen and lost travel documents.

Our OASIS programme being supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs has provided operational and analytical training to thousands of police officers in Africa and could serve as a template for training and capacity-building initiatives in other regions, including the Americas.

We are hopeful that in the next few months a country in the Americas region will step up to provide the funding for an OASIS programme here in this region.

Criminal analysis software training that has proven so useful in other regions will be deployed here in Chile later this month.

The third component is partnership.

Operation Jupiter achieved outstanding results because it brought together police and customs in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, other stakeholders like the World Customs Organization, and the private sector.

With the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, INTERPOL is creating the world’s first institute of higher learning

dedicated to the study and prevention of corruption, where police officers and others from all over the world will be able to come together to gain new skills in this critical aspect of any effective anti-crime strategy.

And through our ambitious Global Security Initiative for the 21st Century, we will be able to better position ourselves to raise the profile of INTERPOL so that heads of state and government better appreciate the essential role that INTERPOL plays in keeping their citizens safe at home and abroad.

The Global Security Initiative will also help you, our member countries, to better respond to existing and emerging threats through collaborative efforts with one another and the private sector.

The GSI is already working on developing innovative programmes related to cyber-security, secure borders and secure travel documents, anti-counterfeiting and anti-corruption.

Finally, the last component is planning.

Over the years, as INTERPOL has become more and more relevant to your daily policing activities, we have seen a dramatic increase in requests from our member countries for operational assistance and training.

While we are committed to fulfilling any call for help from our member countries, this has convinced us that we must – together with you – engage in a broad, all-inclusive strategic planning effort that will enable us to become more efficient and more effective as an organization.

Through a more formalised approach to strategic planning, we are moving to refine a common vision for INTERPOL that will guide our activities in the years to come.

By putting in place clearer performance measures and targets, we will provide greater accountability on our part as we deliver ever-expanding levels of service to our member countries.

This must be a collective endeavour, so, throughout this effort, you will be called upon to actively participate, provide your valuable input and take ownership of this process.

Everything INTERPOL does we do in the real world – one that requires us to adjust to changing circumstances.

Given the current economic situation, we do not feel that we can ask our member countries to take on a greater financial burden, so it has been agreed that your budget contributions will not be raised for the year 2010, except for inflation.

The economic crisis also means we must reinforce and strengthen our existing regional structures. While I have always been a firm believer in this, current circumstances have made this a necessity, not an option.

For this reason, any discussion about creating an Ameripol for this region must include what, if any, added value such an entity would provide to member countries whose scarce resources need to be carefully allocated.

From INTERPOL's perspective, if Ameripol were to try to duplicate our databases or our I-24/7 secure global police communications system, it would lead to unnecessary duplication and a waste of already limited resources in the region.

Before closing, let me take a moment to recognise Mr. Arturo Herrera Verdugo, the Director of Chile's Investigative Police who, in his capacity as INTERPOL Vice-President, has ensured that INTERPOL has

enjoyed unrelenting support in Chile, at our Regional Bureau in Buenos Aires and at INTERPOL General Secretariat headquarters in Lyon.

Every time INTERPOL has asked for his support or the support of Chile's Investigative Police, Mr. Herrera Verdugo has delivered.

On a more personal note, he has helped me grow as a Secretary General through his insight, compassion and understanding.

Mr. Vice Minister, dear colleagues, I thus wanted to make clear to all in attendance in his home country and to all who might read these remarks around the world that INTERPOL has benefitted extraordinarily over the years from the dedication, wisdom and leadership of Mr. Herrera Verdugo. For this, I am deeply thankful and appreciative.

Finally, let me thank my staff from the INTERPOL General Secretariat, the organizers of this conference and, especially, the officers and staff from Chile's Investigative Police here in Viña del Mar, at the NCB and throughout the country, whose professionalism and sacrifice have ensured that this 20th Americas Regional Conference will be a true success.

Thank you. I wish you a productive three days.