

IRT Cebu Activity Hand Over Ceremony

(Cebu City, Philippines – 5 February 2009)

Remarks by [Ronald K. Noble](#), Secretary General ICPO-INTERPOL

Honorable Secretary of Defense for the Philippines,

Mr. Gilbert Teodoro,

Acting Cebu City Mayor Michael Rama,

Members of the Cebu City Council,

National and Local Elected Officials,

Ms. Kathryn Bomberger, Director General of ICMP,

Distinguished colleagues from all relevant local, regional and national Philippine governmental agencies,

Our dear law enforcement colleagues from the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation; the Philippine National Police, from INTERPOL's [National Central Bureau](#), from INTERPOL Headquarters and from around the world,

My dedicated staff and other members of INTERPOL's [Incident Response Team](#), including our international partners from the [ICMP](#),

Other distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good Morning

Prior to June 21, 2008, few of us knew one another, yet on that date a tragedy of epic proportions drew us together in a way that has forever marked the lives of members of INTERPOL's Incident Response Team (IRT) serving here in Cebu City. My colleagues and I have been privileged to do what we have been trained to do in order to try to bring peace and finality to the hundreds of families and thousands of people who have lost family members and loved ones. Although we might come from different countries or regions of the world and although we might speak different languages or practice different religions, INTERPOL's [Disaster Victim](#) IRT members know and understand the importance of helping to reunite family members and loved ones with those whom they have lost in a tragedy. INTERPOL and our dear, dear colleagues from the International Commission for Missing Persons deployed staff members from 24 different nationalities over the last seven months to come here and help Dr. Bautista and the Philippines Disaster Victim Identification team perform the difficult and meticulous task of identifying the victims of the Typhoon Frank Ferry disaster.

INTERPOL's perspective is global in nature; our INTERPOL family includes the citizens of each and every one of our [187 member countries](#). When a tragedy hits one of our member countries, it hits us hard and personally and unfortunately, we have seen far too many disasters and tragedies in recent years, both natural and manmade. But, there has been no other tragedy that has brought us as close together to the families and communities of those who perished than our work here in Cebu City.

Our experience here has been like no other. I have led a number of INTERPOL Incident Response Teams. I remember for example flying on [31 December 2004](#) to Phuket, Thailand to help set-up INTERPOL's General Secretariat Headquarters first major DVI deployment in our history following the Tsunami. I remember flying over Banda Aceh, Indonesia in a police helicopter and seeing the virtual total destruction of the northern tip of Sumatra. The loss of lives and destruction of property caused by the Tsunami of December 26, 2004 is without comparison.

Yet, I also will never forget [July 1, 2008](#). On that date, I came here with my colleague and Filipino national, Simon Fernan, to assess what INTERPOL's involvement should be in response to the Typhoon Frank MV Princess of Stars tragedy. Our advance IRT members, Tjorkel (DVI expert from Norway), Olaf (INTERPOL Headquarters IRT leader) and Andreas from the ICMP were already here engaged in their technical needs assessment. As part of my briefing, General Ronald Roderos of the PNP took me to the Cebu City Action Center which had been set up by the Cebu City government for the relatives of the ferry disaster.

I do not know what I expected, but what I saw changed my life. I saw over a thousand Filipino family members and loved ones of the victims. These Filipino citizens were gathered simply to hear word as to whether their loved ones had miraculously survived or more than likely had perished. I remember speaking to the family members and looking at the photographs and tributes for those listed as 'missing' helping to give life to the names, dates of birth, fingerprints or dental records that we would ordinarily receive. I remember telling them that we were here to help in any way that we could. I remember speaking about our intent to use the ICMP and their state of the art DNA analysis. I remember how they burst into spontaneous, loud and nervous applause when General Roderos translated that INTERPOL would do all of this for free.

I remember asking Acting Cebu City Mayor Michael Rama a little later how long these family members had been there. His answer: "About 10 days already – since June 21 – the day that the ferry capsized." I remember asking him, "But where do they sleep?" His response: "Right here."

At that moment, I looked at Dr. Bautista, and I said for the first time: "INTERPOL will not leave here until we have helped you to identify every person who can be identified." That promise was made on July 1, 2008 – more than seven months ago – and every day since then INTERPOL's Incident Response Team and the International Commission for Missing Persons led by my trusted colleague and honorary citizen of Cebu City Nimal Mahagama have been working side-by-side with Dr. Bautista and his colleagues from a wide variety of Philippine law enforcement and civil defense agencies.

Together for the first time in our history we employed a [DNA-led Disaster Victim Identification strategy](#). You will hear Director General Kathyryne Bomberger go into detail about the careful and state-of-the-art process employed by the ICMP. Our results have been extraordinary – we received more than 2,000 blood samples from surviving family members and for this we, all of us, are so, so thankful! Because of their trust, we have been able to identify over 300 victims who never would have been identified without their blood samples and the use of sophisticated DNA analysis.

This morning marks INTERPOL's hand-over of the leadership of this operation to the Director of the National Bureau of Investigation, Nestor Mantaring, and his national DVI team leader, Dr. Bautista. INTERPOL's Incident Response Team will continue to provide a supporting role. We believe that in the next four weeks we will have finished identifying virtually all of those victims for whom sufficient DNA profiles have been collected. The expertise and experience gained here will aid the Philippines and the region in the future. To that end, INTERPOL will donate the Forensic DVI Mobile Laboratory to the Philippine government to enable the national authorities to assist with future body recoveries or DNA tests of disaster victims in the region.

I understand that missing bodies may still be trapped in the hull of the MV Princess of the Stars, therefore, if during the final salvage operation of the said ferry more bodies/body parts are recovered, INTERPOL will be here to assist.

Let me restate INTERPOL's commitment to you and to all of the family members and loved ones of the Typhoon Frank ferry disaster: We will remain by your side until the last victim who can be identified is finally identified.

Mr Secretary, in closing, please allow me to recognize one of the most essential components of our endeavor – the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), headed by its Director-General, Ms Kathyryne Bomberger, whose expert knowledge, dedication, passion for helping INTERPOL to identify

missing persons and to collaborate on mass DVI operations through DNA were all invaluable in our operations here in Cebu. The ICMP currently operates the world's largest DNA human identification facility.

I would like to offer my gratitude to the Philippine national, regional and local authorities, especially the City Government of Cebu, led by Acting Mayor Mike Rama, for its full co-operation and support during our entire stay here.

I would also like to thank the Regional Disaster Coordinating Council (RDCC) of Region 7 for allowing INTERPOL's Incident Response Team to occupy almost the whole office of the Civil Defense Unit at the Regional Police Headquarters since July 2008. The office is the nerve center of the victim identification efforts here in Cebu, and the understanding and thoughtfulness of the RDCC staff made our work easier.

I would especially like to thank my staff and IRT members who are here with me today and those who are not with us today but served here as well.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank the surviving family members and loved ones of the victims for your support, your patience, understanding and willingness to provide us with the vital blood samples and information that have made it possible to identify so many of your missing loved ones. For those of you who are still waiting for word of identification to come, I promise that we will work as hard as possible and do all in our power to identify your loved ones.

Thank you and may God bless you all.