

International Fugitive Investigator's Conference

Johannesburg, South Africa, 18 November 2008

Comments by Mr John Clark, Director, US Marshals Service

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I am pleased to see so many people coming together from points all around the world to learn ways to apprehend dangerous fugitives. I am also honored to be able to return once again to address such a distinguished group of police officials and I am especially pleased to be here with our gracious host, the South African Police Service. I understand there are 70 countries represented here to study this important topic.

I also extend a warm welcome to Secretary General Ronald Noble for his support of this conference and the efforts of INTERPOL to apprehend fugitives worldwide. Mr Secretary General, thank you for your support. INTERPOL is truly a global partner in the area of fugitive apprehension.

One of the greatest threats to the safety and well-being of our homelands is that of wanted criminals, who are able to flee and avoid apprehension, while they continue their criminal activity. In many cases, these individuals have extensive criminal records and have the knowledge and means to avoid detection and apprehension. It is up to us therefore to use every tactic and good police work to find them. Today, for your consideration, I want to offer a few ideas that have worked well in the United States.

A good fugitive apprehension program first starts with targeting the most violent offenders. It is important to prioritize the cases. Rather than just working cases as they come along, through experience we have learned that when we pursue and apprehend the most violent fugitives, there is an immediate impact on public safety. There are several good ways to do this.

TARGETED ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS: This basic concept requires pooling resources into a particular high-crime area to make a visible and dynamic response to violent crime. This is particularly helpful where you have high concentrations of gang activity, drug trafficking, gun crimes, sex crimes, robbery or any other criminal activity confined to a certain area.

For example, in the United States, the city of Camden, New Jersey was plagued with a high homicide rate, frequent shootings, and violent street crime. In fact, the situation was so bad, that crime analysts deemed Camden "America's Most Dangerous City." The United States Marshals Service joined with the Camden Police Department and concentrated on arresting the most violent fugitives in the city over a several month period. The results were astounding! Several hundred fugitives were arrested and the crime rate quickly decreased. In fact, by removing the most wanted criminals from the street, the crime rate dropped 33% overall, including a 58% drop in homicides and is at its lowest rate in over a decade. You see, once the real thugs were apprehended, the public saw an instant improvement in their safety and security.



International co-operation has already led to the arrest of hundreds of foreign and international fugitives, said keynote speaker John Clark director of the United States Marshals Service.

Think about your homeland for a moment. Are there areas that would benefit from a target enforcement approach? Do you have places where organized crime and fugitives tend to hide out and prey on innocent victims? If so, you may wish to consider targeting them with a strong police effort.

DEVELOP A "MOST WANTED LIST": Let me ask you, who are the most dangerous fugitives in your country? My bet is, you can probably look at some of your cases and easily identify those fugitives you would want to catch if you catch no others. Perhaps their crime is so horrible or their criminal enterprise so strong, that you would be thrilled to be the one to bring them to justice and arrest them.

Have you considered a "most wanted" program? The concept is quite simple, but the results are impressive. Identify your top 10 or 20 fugitives that you want captured, use the news media to help spread the word that you are looking for them, and place their picture and description of their criminal activity on a wanted poster that can be easily shared with police everywhere. By publicizing the fugitive's picture and asking for public help to find them you are making it difficult for them to hide.

The United States Marshals Service has a "15 Most Wanted" fugitive program that targets what we call "the worst of the worst." This year, through good police work, we captured 10 of them and, thanks to many of you, six of those 10 were captured outside the United States. INTERPOL can play a major role in helping you do this especially through the use of the "Red Notice" program. By distributing wanted notices to member countries and using their global outreach, this can be a powerful tool. However, you can do this on a smaller scale in your own country or police jurisdiction. This process is particularly helpful when the case is old and no new investigative leads are available.

CONSIDER A TASK FORCE APPROACH: A task force, by simple definition, is a group of people working towards a single goal. For fugitive hunters, this means putting a group of police officers together to locate and arrest only fugitives and violent criminals – nothing else. There are several advantages to this approach.

1. They become your experts in finding people.
2. They are driven to make an arrest.
3. They develop a strong camaraderie with their peers.
4. A team approach is used rather than just one police officer.
5. Police from various jurisdictions can pool their resources.
6. Intelligence and information is shared by the police.
7. Criminals quickly realize you mean business!

The United States Marshals Service uses a task force approach very effectively. This last summer, we conducted a national operation in the United States (code named "Operation FALCON") that encompassed several hundred state/local and federal officers working together to apprehend violent criminals during the month of June. In the end, over 19,000 dangerous fugitives were apprehended for crimes such as murder, drug offenses and sexual assault. The operation took months to plan and involved every tool we could use from aircraft surveillance to police dogs, but it worked well. I think you would agree that public safety and homeland security is greatly improved through this task force approach.

Do you have several police agencies working in your country all trying to apprehend fugitives? If so, you may consider using this approach. It works! Someone needs to be in charge and to organize it, but it is a great crime fighting tool when everyone works together.

One type of criminal that we particularly target with our task force approach is the sex offender. One of the most heinous crimes that can be committed is that involving children. I urge you to make this a priority as well. With the use of the internet and the growth of human trafficking crimes, sex offenders have an international marketplace to conduct criminal activity, as I said, often with young children who are innocent victims. The International Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that this worldwide crime has thousands of victims and it is up to us to help stop it.

I also want to address a central problem that confronts us today – the globalization of crime. Transnational criminal organizations and international fugitives take advantage of our global economy to travel, communicate and even to hide from police detection. It is more critical now than ever before that we unite to be an international police force, capable of apprehending and arresting criminals through cooperation with each other. Last year, the United States Marshals Service set a record in conducting 845 international extraditions from places all around the globe. In addition, hundreds of foreign and international fugitives were arrested because police officers like you cooperated and investigated the leads that were sent. As a result, many dangerous fugitives were brought to justice.

In an effort to counter the globalization of crime, it is my desire to conduct the first ever international fugitive apprehension initiative to bring INTERPOL member countries together to focus on fugitive apprehension. I will be working with INTERPOL and the International Crime Stoppers on the details of the program and hope to unveil it at the 11th Annual International Fugitive Investigators Conference in Toronto, Ontario Canada in May 2009. With the initiative we can really unite to find fugitives around the globe through a concentrated effort. I hope to see you in Toronto next spring.

In closing, let me again thank the Secretary General, Mr Ronald Noble and the South African Police Service for making this conference a reality. It has been a great honor and privilege for me to speak to all of you today.

I realize you are on the front line of defense to protect your citizens from criminal activity and, through this conference, you can see that you have many friends from around the world to help you.

Please stay safe. You have my deep respect and admiration for what you do to fight crime. I give my best regards to all of you. Thank you.