

## INTERPOL's International Terrorism Conference 'Preventing the Emergence of the Next Generation of Terrorists'

3-5 April 2007 Lyon, France

Speech by INTERPOL Secretary General [Ronald K. Noble](#)

Mr. Chairman,  
Members of the Dais,  
Distinguished Delegates  
Members of INTERPOL's General Secretariat  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to welcome you to INTERPOL's International [Terrorism](#) Conference.

Your presence here is very important for the collective safety and security of your citizens.

The fact that over 200 individuals (embracing experts from the law enforcement and academic communities) from 79 countries have gathered here to discuss terrorism in four languages (Arabic, English, French and Spanish) reflects the global nature of the problem that we all confront.

This week's conference theme is "Preventing the Emergence of the Next Generation of Terrorists."

Over the last several years, INTERPOL has waged its anti-terrorist fight by looking forward. This is how we have tried to help reduce the threat that terrorists pose to us all.

But, we do not just look forward on our own – we necessarily call upon our membership, which embraces all of your countries ([186 member countries](#) in all) to share with one another and with us your past and present experiences; to discuss and analyze the weaknesses and strengths of systems or approaches that you have identified nationally, regionally and globally; to detail the kinds of investigative tools and support you would like to have; and to identify any emerging trends you might see.

Armed with this knowledge and with the benefit of your shared experience, INTERPOL concentrates its efforts on enhancing your efforts to prevent the next terrorist attack.

Let me pause for just a moment to remind you of something you have probably forgotten or may never have known. It is a point that I try to make as frequently as possible.

INTERPOL is not an organization that is physically located in any one country. INTERPOL is not something that one can physically touch.

INTERPOL is the ideal that runs through each sworn law enforcement officer anywhere in the world – that if help is needed by one officer and another officer knows it, then that help will be provided.

When the call "officer in need of assistance" is made, the instinctive reaction for police the world over is to respond. Police are not born with this instinctive reaction – they learn it through the shared commitment and experience of becoming and serving as law enforcement officers.

INTERPOL was born way back in 1923, based on the belief that unless a network of police cooperation were established internationally, then there would be a great likelihood that the call of “officer in need of assistance” would not be heard by those who could help.

Back in 1923, and back in the first half of INTERPOL’s existence, countries did not join the organization, police organizations joined. Therefore, Heads of Police had to consciously decide whether or not to join and to remain a part of INTERPOL. This meant that they had to take time to learn about INTERPOL and what it offered to them and their agencies.

Over time, as INTERPOL established itself more and more and without any express decision being taken to do so, countries eventually replaced the individual police organizations as its members. We became the world’s largest police organization of member countries.

Becoming a police organization of member countries made INTERPOL stronger institutionally; it made communicating between countries more efficient; and it gave the organization a certain legal status internationally. But, at the same time, it made INTERPOL weaker in terms of its relationship with the individual police organizations and more importantly the individual police officers in our member countries.

Indeed, most police officers could pass through an entire law enforcement career at the local, state and federal level without ever knowing that they were a part of INTERPOL and without ever knowing the full range of tools and services available to them.

In short, the change that I have described is in large part responsible for why so many of you and your colleagues do not know that INTERPOL is your organization; do not know that it belongs to you.

Over the last several years, with the help of [INTERPOL’s President](#) and [Executive Committee](#), we at INTERPOL’s General Secretariat, which is spread over four continents and at INTERPOL’s National Central Bureaus in 186 member countries, have been working feverishly to return INTERPOL to its roots. We have been working to bring INTERPOL closer to you – the brave men and women of law enforcement who risk your lives each and every day; closer to you who are tasked with handling some of the most sensitive and important terrorist investigations in your countries; closer to you who individually and collectively strive so hard and sacrifice so much to keep your citizens safe; and closer to you who help provide an environment in which individuals, families, and communities can pursue and fulfil their dreams without fear of terrorist attack.

But, we know that there are those inside and those outside our countries and communities who do not wish to allow us to live our lives and to pursue our dreams in a safe and secure environment.

“Those inside and outside our communities” seems like such an uncontroversial and generally accepted statement to make when one speaks about the terrorist threat today. But, if we are honest with ourselves, then we must admit that for the so-called western world, it took first the Madrid and then the London subway bombings for governments and for law enforcement to recognize that the anti-terrorist struggle could not be won by targeting, profiling or discriminating against visibly identifiable individuals, groups, nations and a religion.

Since INTERPOL embraces 186 member countries, with citizens of all nationalities, religions, appearances and backgrounds, INTERPOL knew from the very beginning that a narrow minded or discriminatory approach would not be a productive or effective one for fighting terrorism. INTERPOL recognized that many of our member countries’ police services were battling terrorists who looked like them, spoke like them, had the same nationality, lived in the same community and who could not be meaningfully distinguished from law abiding citizens based on appearance, language and backgrounds. I won’t name the countries because the list would be too long. But, just think about the number of countries that have had to confront terrorists whose entire interest, inspiration, and motivation was nationally or internally driven and whose terrorists themselves came from inside the very country targeted for attack. These countries have been dealing with the phenomenon of ‘home grown’ terrorists long before the term was understood and used by the so-called west.

INTERPOL's challenge has been to try to identify ways how we – collectively, its network of member countries' police services – could design systems, develop tools, and provide services that would help member countries prevent terrorists (whether they be inside or outside the country) (whether they are home grown or foreign) from meeting, planning, preparing, communicating, travelling freely, and executing their attacks. And from escaping, evading capture, and possibly striking yet again.

Looking forward.

By meeting with you, by listening to you, by talking with you, by engaging you in forums where you could exchange ideas freely, INTERPOL – your INTERPOL – has proven that what was previously thought as impossible, is in fact, possible.

Back in 2002, when INTERPOL said we needed to design an Internet based [secure police communications network](#) for all of our member countries, many people said the Internet could not be used for such a purpose, and that we would never be able to connect all of our member countries. At the time, we had only 182 member countries. As I stand here today, we have since designed and implemented the world's first secure Internet based global police communications system; INTERPOL's system (your system) now connects 185 of our 186 member countries. Only Somalia remains to be connected when the situation there becomes a little more stable.

Back in 2002, INTERPOL's [Public Safety and Terrorism Unit](#) proposed that we develop a Suspected Terrorist Watch List, whose names would be shared with all countries. That is, a list of suspected terrorists that each country wished for every other country in the world to know about – even if the governments of certain countries had no bi-lateral relations, and even if the governments did not trust or were suspicious of one another. We of course knew that countries would not share all of the names of suspected terrorists with all other countries, but we wanted to build the database of those suspected terrorists whose names countries were willing to share.

At the first [Fusion Task Force](#) meeting, held for this purpose, only about 30 countries showed up – all for the same reason – to get the names of the other countries' suspected terrorists. All came to collect information, not to share information. Now about 5 years later, our database of suspected terrorists has grown from fewer than 3,000 to more than 11,000. And, the number of countries participating in the Fusion Task Force has grown from just 30 or so, to over 110.

Back in 2002, at our [General Assembly in Cameroon](#), INTERPOL's membership was told by one of the world's foremost bioterrorism experts that INTERPOL needed to lead the world's efforts at training police in bioterrorism prevention. Since then, INTERPOL has created a [Bioterrorism Prevention Unit](#), and we have brought together for training on a region by region basis over 350 police officers from 130 countries; we have developed a bioterrorism investigation resource guide; and we have put in place a web based resource centre that concentrates invaluable information for you as to how to prevent, investigate, and respond to bioterrorist threats.

Back in 2002, we all knew that the lifeblood of many terrorists was falsified stolen or lost travel documents . But, unfortunately, there was no global database of stolen or lost travel documents. At the time, INTERPOL's databases only had a few thousand stolen passports from a handful of countries. We knew that police investigators and those performing border control functions needed to be able to check passport numbers quickly, securely, and efficiently.

But, we knew that these functions were not always performed by police and were not always within the province of ministries of Interior or Justice. We knew that it would be difficult to do what was needed, but thanks to the support of our NCBs, our Executive Committee, the world's police leaders, ministers, the G-8, ICAO, the European Union, the UN Secretary General, the UN Security Council, and thanks to the dedication of our staff, INTERPOL's Stolen and Lost Travel Document database has grown from just a few thousands to nearly 14 million, and the number of countries contributing the data has grown more than ten-fold – from 12 to over 120.

Most importantly, back in 2002, we did not have a [Command and Co-ordination Centre](#) to serve you 24 hours a day/ seven days a week. We did not have staff able to travel on a moment's notice to the site of a terrorist attack or major crime to assist you – at your request and under your mandate. But, the terrorist attacks at Jakarta, Tashkent, Madrid, Casablanca, Riyadh, and Amman (and especially the tsunami) saw what INTERPOL staff was now capable and willing to do when you responded “yes” to our offers of help.

I have taken the time to explain a little about INTERPOL, its history, its ideal, and the importance of bringing you and us together to demonstrate that what you might have thought impossible before walking through those doors this afternoon, is in fact possible.

But, to get where we need to be, we are going to have to remember that we all have the same goal – to keep our respective citizens safer than they otherwise would be, and to remain true at the international level to what has become instinctive for police at the national level. That is – to respond quickly and effectively to an officer's call for assistance anywhere in the world.

As the Secretary General of INTERPOL – your INTERPOL – I have to remind you of something that might be obvious to you, but is nonetheless worth emphasizing. This conference's theme is “Preventing the Emergence of the Next Generation of Terrorists.” And, although each of you might have a terrorist group in your country that is as important to you as Al Qaeda at the national level, there is no terrorist group, no terrorist network, no terrorist unifier, or no terrorist recruiter (either physically or inspirationally) more threatening globally than Al Qaeda. For purposes of what will follow, I make no distinction among Al Qaeda itself, Al Qaeda-linked, and Al Qaeda-inspired terrorism.

Terrorists who are connected in any way to Al Qaeda often claim to be carrying out their deplorable acts in the name of religion – Islam in particular. True believers in Islam and those who understand Islam know that such claims are false.

The fact that Al Qaeda inspires a twisted interpretation of Islam is a critical dimension of contemporary terrorism. That is just a simple reality. And we must not shy away from this reality.

While we must be aware of these sensitivities, and while we must be respectful and tolerant, yet we must also be clear and accurate in discussing the problem. We must recognize that how we frame the problem is of vital importance.

Sometimes people use terms that refer to the religion itself – such as “Violent Islamist” or “Violent Muslim Fundamentalist.” Some people argue that using these terms constitutes an attack on Islam itself. At other times, some use terms that make no reference to the religion itself – such as “Radical” or “Extremist” or “Violent Radical or Violent Extremist.” Some people accuse these terms, which do not refer to Islam, as lacking intellectual honesty, as merely constituting a “code” for the real problem, as skirting the real issue. Other people believe them to be the more appropriate terms. There is no definitive agreement around the world on the best terminology to use in this respect, and there will never be definitive agreement on this point. So, I suggest let's just accept this reality and move on.

Based on my experience, as the Secretary General of INTERPOL – your INTERPOL – and based on my experience of having gone on official missions to 107 of our member countries, I can tell you that certain aspects of the discussion of terrorism internationally can run the risk of making some people feel uncomfortable, or even offended.

From INTERPOL's perspective, though, the key is to encourage open and frank dialogue on the topic. During this conference and beyond, let us in law enforcement have the courage to confront the topic of terrorism in the fullest spirit of communication, cooperation, and problem solving. We all share the same goal in this area – to protect citizens from wrongful violence.

Keeping this goal in mind will keep us focused, and will bring us a step closer to understanding the nature of this rapidly evolving threat posed by the next generation of terrorists.

We always knew that terrorists could menace us from abroad, yet now all of us need to confront the threat that the bile of home grown terrorism could be brewing in our own communities. The internet is feeding this emerging phenomenon of 'home grown' terrorism. Terrorists are exploiting the internet's unregulated and anonymous nature, and its vast reach, to spread their deadly propaganda and obtain recruits.

We know that terrorist cells made up of our own nationals either are, or could be in any one of our countries plotting their next terrorist attack.

On top of all of this, it is probably only a matter of time before new waves of terrorists come spilling out of places like Iraq and Afghanistan – where they are learning and refining their deadly crimes and becoming battle hardened.

And now we are also seeing that extremist ideologies are reaching and influencing people of all walks of life – of every age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status – so we cannot tell where the next suicide bomber will come from, or where or why he or she will strike.

These would be daunting threats for any one country, or any one police organization to face alone. Some might say impossible even. But you are not alone. We are united in this fight.

I have given you examples of how we all, working together, have been able to achieve what many might have thought impossible. So, as you participate in this week's conference, please understand that you and we are – collectively – very much up to this challenge before us.

Thank you, and it is now my pleasure to declare that INTERPOL's Terrorism Conference on Preventing the Emergence of the Next Generation of Terrorists is now officially open.

I wish you all a successful conference.