

INTERPOL Regional Bioterrorism Prevention Workshop

19-21 March 2007

Muscat, Oman

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

Inspector General of Police and Customs, Lieutenant General Malik Sulaiman Al-Ma'amari,
Secretary General, Ministry of Finance, Darwish Aismail Albalushi,
Chairman, Muscat Municipality, Abdullah Abbas Ahmed,
Honourable Undersecretaries and Honourable Ambassadors,
Director General of Criminal Investigation Department and Head of NCB Muscat, Brigadier Suhail Amor Bait Fadhil,
John Abbott, Chairman of INTERPOL's Steering Committee on Bioterrorism Prevention,
Distinguished guests, police colleagues from NCBs and member country police services,
My dear colleagues from INTERPOL's General Secretariat
Experts in law enforcement, health sciences, bio-safety, bio-security and legal communities,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Assalamu Aleikum – Peace be with you

For most people who are not involved in law enforcement, the threat of a [bioterrorism](#) attack is not something they can easily imagine. Even within the law enforcement community, allocating scarce resources at the national level to preventing, preparing for or responding to a bioterrorist attack is viewed as a luxury that few can afford. Indeed, prior to 2004, even INTERPOL, with its network of over 180 countries at the time, devoted little thought, no training and none of its resources to this form of terrorist threat.

By 2004, many of us were already beginning to forget about the anthrax attacks that struck in the United States of America in 2001. We were forgetting even though those attacks revealed how woefully unprepared we were to defend ourselves, our staff and our citizens against such attacks. At INTERPOL, concerns about someone targeting INTERPOL's headquarters made us put in place safeguards that greatly disrupted the way we worked and the way we communicated then – and even today.

Although those attacks and the evidence later gathered from Al Qaeda's own training materials and from Al Qaeda operatives should have been enough for the world's law enforcement community to turn its attention to the threat of bioterrorism, we did not do so until 2004. We were lucky that no bioterrorist attack occurred in the intervening period, and we are lucky that no bioterrorist attack has occurred since then.

On the question of whether Al Qaeda is planning biological attacks against us, I still share the view of the Chairman of the United Nations Security Council Committee established pursuant to Resolution 1267 concerning Al Qaeda and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities. Back in December 2003, in a letter to the President of the Security Council, he said:

“Undoubtedly Al-Qaida is still considering the use of chemical or biological weapons to perpetrate its terrorist actions. When might this happen? Nobody really knows. It is just a matter of time before the terrorists believe they are ready. They have already taken the decision to use such chemical and biological

weapons in their forthcoming attacks. The only restraint they are facing is the technical complexity of operating them properly and effectively.”

Just a matter of time before we confront a bioterrorist attack.

In fact, in your neighboring country, Iraq, there have recently been no fewer than three chlorine bomb attacks targeting the public – innocent civilians. It is not difficult to imagine these attacks being extended from chemical to biological.

Fortunately for INTERPOL and its [186 member countries](#), INTERPOL has been using its time and your time wisely since deciding in 2004 to focus our efforts on bringing diverse communities of people together to help prevent bioterrorist attacks, to help investigate potential bioterrorist attacks and to help prepare to respond to such attacks.

The INTERPOL member country story on bioterrorism prevention has been nothing short of historic in so many ways.

Since this week will be the final week of our worldwide regional [workshop programme on bioterrorism prevention](#), and since it is the two-year anniversary from the time we hosted our first bioterrorism prevention event, I thought I would spend the next few minutes sharing with you some of the milestones that our member countries, our experts and our Bioterrorism Prevention Unit have been able to achieve by working together since March 2005.

I will also signal other challenges that still remain for us to confront, again, together.

In March 2005, our [global conference on bioterrorism prevention](#), in which 155 INTERPOL member countries participated, became INTERPOL’s largest conference in history.

The momentum that began in 2005 has continued. I would go so far as to say that it has increased.

Since March 2005, we have held [regional workshops](#) in each of INTERPOL’s regions – workshops in which the vast majority of INTERPOL member countries’ National Central Bureaus and member countries have participated.

In November 2005, we had our first regional workshop in [South Africa](#), where 41 countries and 91 law enforcement, scientific, health and legal experts participated.

In March 2006, we held our Asian regional workshop in [Singapore](#), with 75 participants from 27 Asian countries.

In July 2006, our Americas regional workshop was hosted by [Chile](#), where we brought together 78 participants from 26 countries.

Last November, we returned to Europe, but this time we moved from Lyon to [Ukraine](#) and attracted 78 participants from 21 of the 25 countries invited.

This week, we, as I said, hold our last regional workshop here in the great Sultanate of Oman, with 15 of the 17 countries invited present and 64 participants registered.

This means 130 countries and over 300 participants in less than two years.

Last evening when several of us were speaking with Dr. Paula Olsiewski from the [Sloan Foundation](#), which had the courage to sponsor this initiative from the start, we discussed the fact that even we could not believe the interest that INTERPOL member countries have had in learning more about the bioterrorist threat and in learning how to prevent it, or at least reduce the risk that it might occur.

Some of the highly qualified professionals from whom you will hear this week have been with us at every regional workshop:

John Abbott, the chair of our Steering Committee; Adrian Baciu, the head of our Bioterrorism Prevention Unit; Dr. Michael Alswede, an expert on strategic medical issues; and Professor Barry Kellman, one of the world's foremost legal experts on bioterrorism prevention and the person who first inspired me to get INTERPOL involved in this area.

In terms of law enforcement agencies, the FBI and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have provided experts at each workshop.

Switzerland and the US State Department co-hosted a Black Ice table-top exercise that brought together institutions that had never before sat around the same table at the same time to exchange views about how their institutions would respond – both to the threat of a bioterrorist attack and to the materialization of that threat. Andrea Lauritzen played a key role in putting that together, and the Sloan Foundation once again helped to make sure that it could be financed.

But one of the great things about these workshops is that new experts are encountered at each stage of the journey. This week we will also hear from a number of experts from the Sultanate of Oman, from India, from NAIF University, and from the World Health Organization.

The relationships that are made at these workshops bear fruit in ways that will benefit you and your countries when this workshop ends. Let me give you just two examples.

First, our experts and our Bioterrorism Prevention Unit working together have created the [INTERPOL Bioterrorism Incident Pre-planning and Response Guide](#) to be used by police around the world. It is available on our website, where we created a [Bioterrorism Prevention Resource Center](#) that is now at the disposal of the entire law enforcement community. This site helps police find training materials, online tests, scientific documents, planning guidelines, response and crisis management materials, and other useful resources.

Second, we are already preparing for our next phase, where we will be conducting 'train-the-trainer' programmes. The experts that you will hear from this week and other experts from around the world have been working together to design the courses for these train-the-trainer programmes.

So, I trust you can see that we are very active and innovative in our commitment to help law enforcement do all in its power to confront the threat of bioterrorism. You will also learn that preventing bioterrorism is not about law enforcement alone.

The relevant constituencies include law enforcement (police, customs, immigration), first responders, health sciences, bio-safety, bio-security, legal, emergency management, intelligence, environmental management, agricultural authorities, and other relevant private and public resources (local, national, regional and international).

Forging partnerships among these diverse professional communities means overcoming many formidable obstacles, but it is essential to do so. And that is why it is so important that we have representatives from many of these communities at workshops such as this.

Let me close by thanking you, Inspector General Al-Ma'amari, your police colleagues, NCB Muscat, and the citizens of the Sultanate of Oman for hosting this important training conference on bioterrorism prevention.

We have begun a long journey together. By looking back at what we have achieved together so far and looking forward to what we plan to do in the future, we should be hopeful that we can make great strides

toward achieving what remains to be done – and there is much important work that remains to be done in order to prepare ourselves to prevent and, if need be, to respond to a bioterrorist attack.

Wa Shoukran – Thank you.