

## Americas Regional Workshop on Preventing Bioterrorism

Opening speech by INTERPOL Secretary General [Ronald K. Noble](#)  
Chile, 10 July 2006

### I. WELCOMING WORDS

Director General of Police and INTERPOL EC Member, Arturo Herrera Verdugo

Under Secretary of Investigations, Ricardo Navarrete Betanzo

Executive Committee members Zulmar Pimentel Dos Santos and Georges Boustani

Chairman of INTERPOL's Steering Committee on Bioterrorism Prevention, John Abbott

Distinguished police colleagues from NCBs and police services from INTERPOL's America's Region

My dear colleagues from INTERPOL's General Secretariat

Experts in the health sciences, bio safety, bio security, and legal communities

Ladies and Gentlemen

### II. WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT THAT WE ARE ALL HERE

Let me begin by saying why it is so important that we are all here.

We know from recent events that terrorists remain committed to perpetrating large scale violence.

We also know that, as biotechnology industries continue to expand throughout the world, new pathogens and pathogen-making technologies are rapidly proliferating, increasing the risk that terrorists could get their hands on deadly pathogens or their means of production.

It is also becoming ever more possible for terrorists to themselves produce the weapons, as the volume and sophistication of the necessary information becomes increasingly accessible through publications, the Internet, and other sources.

Just last month, in the UK, for example, the Guardian newspaper ran a front page story in which it reported that it had arranged for a mail order supply house to synthesize a small part of the smallpox pathogen gene code and deliver it to his home.

Experts were quick to point out that what the reporter purchased was but one part of a long gene sequence, and that it was far from being the actual pathogen itself.

Nevertheless, the fact that the seller engaged in no background check of the person buying the code section illustrates the lack of regulation in this area and makes one wonder what other pathogen-making materials can be so easily purchased by those who have no legitimate basis for doing so.

It also illustrates how little progress has been made in this area. In 2002, if you recall, university researchers created a synthetic version of the Polio virus by using a recipe downloaded from the internet and materials purchased from a mail order supply house.

The world's most noteworthy bioterrorism attack was the 2001 Anthrax attack in the U.S. Although the attack was limited in its direct harm to people because Anthrax is not contagious, and because it was delivered by mail sent to only a handful of individuals, it still caused five deaths and massive disruptions and losses throughout the world.

And there is much evidence that terrorists have a strong interest in the use of biological weapons, and are planning to use them. We must always remind ourselves of this evidence because this helps us maintain our resolve to prevent such potential harm from actually occurring.

The eleventh volume of al Qaeda's Encyclopedia of Jihad is devoted to chemical and biological weapons.

Captured terrorist suspects have admitted that their organizations are plotting potential biological attacks.

Police raids in a number of countries have resulted in the seizure of equipment and instruction manuals relating to the manufacture and use of bio-weapons.

Yet, in the face of all of this, some people still question whether the threat is real. They question whether it is truly necessary to devote resources to try to prevent it or even to prepare for it.

I have no doubt that the threat is real. Moreover, given the magnitude of the harm that would be caused by a bioterrorism attack -- hundreds, thousands, and even millions of deaths are possible -- it is clear to me that this alone mandates that we take this threat seriously.

But even if hundreds or thousands do not die, the panic and the subsequent social and economic upheavals that could follow such an attack represent another set of reasons why we should take this threat seriously.

Nevertheless, I want to point out, that even if there is never again a disease unleashed by terrorists, there certainly will be diseases unleashed by nature. Of this we can be certain. Natural pandemics have always been a part of life here on earth. In the 20 th Century alone, more people died of smallpox (over 300 million) than in both World Wars combined.

What we are doing at this workshop will help us prepare for an outbreak, whether unleashed by nature or by terrorists. And this is another reason why it is so important that you are all here.

### **III. WHAT INTERPOL IS DOING**

To address the threat of bioterrorism, last year we created a special unit to focus exclusively in this area. In March 2005, we kicked off the unit's activities by hosting a global conference on bioterrorism. That event was attended by over 500 people and police from 155 countries.

Since then we have conducted regional workshops in Africa and in South East Asia attended by a total of 65 countries. Now we are conducting this regional workshop with 27 countries represented. We will be conducting the next regional workshops in Central Asia and the Middle East.

In addition, today we announce the official release of the 'Bioterrorism Incident Pre-planning and Response Guide.' This guide will be presented to you during this workshop. It is also now available in English and Spanish on the INTERPOL public and restricted website.

We have also created a 'Bioterrorism Prevention Resource Center' on our website that is now at the disposal of the entire law enforcement community. This site can help you find training materials, online tests, scientific documents, planning guidelines, response and crisis management materials, and other useful resources.

We are developing another part of our website that will be dedicated to training materials that have been provided to us by NCBs and governments, to show what is being done at national levels in terms of bioterrorism preparedness and response.

We also have designed 'Table-Top' exercises that were conducted with great effect at our prior workshops and will be conducted here as well.

We will be conducting various 'Train-the-Trainer' programmes and two international interagency exercises as well.

We are launching a new project that will focus on bio-criminalization. The project's goal is to assess the criminal and administrative laws relating to biological weapons, and to assist countries in drafting, enacting, and enforcing such laws.

We are also developing a project aimed at the assessment and improvement of the bio-security measures in place at BL-3 and BL-4 labs.

In the future, we hope to find financing for a police officer rotation programme in which police can rotate through our Bioterrorism Unit, bringing their added expertise to the unit, and then returning home with still greater expertise to share with their national colleagues in building their own 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.

#### **IV. IMPORTANCE OF FORGING PARTNERSHIPS**

But law enforcement cannot effectively confront this threat alone – it must do so in partnership with professionals from other relevant disciplines.

All of the relevant professions must establish and implement protocols and procedures to share information and cooperate in prevention and detection efforts, to mobilize response resources in the event of an attack or natural outbreak, and to coordinate all of these efforts.

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).

These diverse professional communities must forge partnerships in order to ensure an integrated approach. This is required to maximize the synergies of their complementary skills, methodologies, perspectives and resources, and to minimize their conflicts.

This 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.

Although it is not practical to thank all of those representatives in my opening remarks now, I would like to make special mention of the participation of the World Health Organization. Its participation is of fundamental importance and it is greatly appreciated.

#### **V. NEED FOR LEGISLATIVE CHANGES**

Finally, let me speak to the need for countries to modify their legal and regulatory frameworks as they relate to the threat of bioterrorism.

This includes the frameworks for controlling the possession, storage, transportation, use, trafficking, and deployment of pathogens, and their means of production and weaponization, the frameworks governing intelligence, investigation, interdiction, and disruption, and the frameworks governing the activities required for attack response - isolation, quarantine, forced medical exams, forced vaccinations, etc.

As I mentioned earlier, we are launching a new project that will focus specifically on this critical area of bio-criminalization.

#### **VI. THANK OUR SPONSORS**

Before I open up the workshop and turn it over to John Abbott, the Chairman of INTERPOL's Steering Committee on Bio-terrorism Prevention, I would like to thank the Sloan Foundation for its financial support.

The Sloan Foundation has provided generous grants to INTERPOL to operate its bioterrorism unit so that events like this could be possible. In total, the Sloan Foundation has committed over 2 million US dollars to INTERPOL's Bio-terrorism Prevention Program. So we owe the Sloan Foundation our appreciation and gratitude.

In addition, INTERPOL also received a sizable grant from the Canadian government (300,000 US dollars from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade), for which we are also grateful.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the US Department of State's Bureau of Arms Control Office of Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions for its recent grant of 554,000 dollars to support the new bio-criminalization project.

I would like to thank my staff from IPSP's Bioterrorism Prevention Unit and the General Secretariat and our Sub -regional Bureaus . I would also like to thank Executive Committee Members Zulmar Pimentel Dos Santos and Georges Boustani.

#### **VIII. CLOSING**

Let me close by thanking Director General of Police and INTERPOL EC Member Arturo Herrera Verdugo, your police colleagues, NCB Santiago, and the citizens of Chile for hosting this important training conference on bioterrorism prevention.

I wish you all a most successful workshop.

Thank you