

17th INTERPOL African Regional Conference

Lusaka, Zambia, 23 July 2003

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

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you today for what is a great biennial event for the international police community in Africa - INTERPOL's 17th African Regional Conference.

I should also like to thank the Zambian police, and in particular Inspector General Zunga Siakalima, for all they have done and for giving time and so much of themselves to ensure the success of this conference.

Lastly, I should like to thank all the delegates and observers who have accepted our invitation to meet here this week and discuss ways to combat international organized crime, and enhance police co-operation in Africa in the current highly specific international context.

The [17th African Regional Conference](#), unlike the previous conferences, marks a new era in the history of INTERPOL - an era which has seen the renewal of our global organization which is now fully operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; which now has [181 member countries](#), all of whom are committed to the implementation of joint agreed actions to combat transnational crime; which now has both the General Secretariat and Sub-Regional Bureaus (SRBs) working on operational projects; and which now has a global communications system, I-24/7, that will revolutionize international policing in the 21st century.

We are in a new era - we are a new INTERPOL.

There can be no doubt about the importance of Africa's role and its place in this new era. Africa represents the crossroads of international co-operation and exchanges of all kinds of goods and services. These crossroads present an opportunity for those interested in legitimate trade and, unfortunately, those interested in illegal trade.

Africa must combine its human resources, especially within the police, to protect its citizens, its natural resources, its citizens and their property. INTERPOL's General Secretariat and its dedicated staff stand shoulder to shoulder with the countries of Africa in this regard.

As you know, the aim of INTERPOL's biennial conference is to assess police co-operation on the African continent, to identify the specific problems that have arisen on this continent, as well as to focus on new forms of transnational crime and to develop concrete programs of action that respond to these challenges. But we cannot stop after developing concrete programs of action. We must evaluate and re-evaluate whether these programs are achieving their desired ends.

When speaking of the African dimension of contemporary crime, we must consider first of all particular types of crime currently confronting Africa. In this regard, if we were to go back to the regional conference in Gaborone, Botswana, two years ago, we would find essentially the same crime threats confronting Africa today that were confronting Africa then.

Let me go through the list: trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking, currency counterfeiting, fraud, corruption, trafficking in weapons, vehicle thefts, livestock rustling, traffic in illegal travel documents, highway robbery.

Terrorism, which was especially known to Tanzania, Kenya and Algeria more than two years ago, has emerged into a critical problem area for all of Africa to address. We all agree now that terrorism is now a clear, serious threat which can only be fought by a joint approach based on an agreed upon strategy.

The attacks perpetrated in Kenya, Tanzania, Algeria and Tunisia over the last several years, and just recently in Morocco, clearly demonstrate the increasing extent to which Africa is threatened by terrorism.

This means that a terrorist risk assessment for Africa must now be included among the strategic tasks to be carried out by INTERPOL and the law enforcement services in the countries of the region. This is essential if we are to thwart the terrorists' plans and to avoid tragic consequences for our communities. Against this background, SARPCCO (the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation), together with INTERPOL, recently agreed to set up an early warning system on terrorism - a special pilot project for southern Africa. The aims of this project, I submit, will not only be adopted by all of Africa, but by the entire world.

Yes, it is important to focus on terrorism, but we cannot forget other serious crimes such as drug trafficking. Indeed, yesterday (July 23) we concluded an important meeting of heads of African police drugs units. It was observed during this two day meeting that the most notable feature of drug trafficking today is the emergence of cocaine and heroin routes which have recently appeared in Africa, most of them leading to European destinations.

Traffic in firearms, fuelled by the various armed conflicts on the continent, is another major concern for citizens, political leaders and law enforcement services. Weapons trafficking is undoubtedly the reason for tens of thousands of deaths that occur every year. As the conflicts in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi continue, the pressure on law enforcement and security services increases. When these conflicts are resolved what will happen with all of the arms currently in possession of the combatants?

Perhaps more so than with drugs, the fight against the traffic in weapons requires increased multilateral co-operation because it is often difficult to identify and combat the weapons traffickers' networks.

Africa also faces violent crimes that pose risks to the safety of its motorists. Modern-day highwaymen no longer operate solely in the urban centres. Rural areas, formerly unaffected, have now become subject to this and all other forms of crime.

Directly linked to the traffic in weapons and explosives, vehicle hijacking is committed in urban suburbs, inter-city areas and on the roads leading to the weekly markets. The highwaymen use extensive resources in disassembling and re-assembling automobiles so that they can be moved from country to country with little risk of apprehension. They use extreme violence in resisting law enforcement and in terrorizing local populations.

If the crime problems that I outlined this morning are virtually the same as those identified two years ago in Gaborone, Botswana, have the recommendations from Gaborone been implemented? What effect have these recommendations had? Has there been the necessary follow-up?

In Gaborone we adopted recommendations that will be reported on during this conference. Let me summarize a few of them:

Recommendation 1: The Atlas communications project was adopted.

Result: in two years both technology and the needs of INTERPOL changed. So we replaced Atlas with a

state-of-the-art global communications system based on Internet technology - the system is known as I-24/7.

The I-24/7 global communication system has made progress in being rolled out in many areas of the world. Over a third of our member countries, 68 to be exact, have switched from X.400 to this new, state-of-the-art, Internet style system. It will revolutionize the way police communicate, co-operate and collaborate in fighting international terrorism and crime.

An important aspect of this conference is to set the foundations essential for implementing the new system throughout the African region.

I have brought senior members of our I-24/7 project team to Lusaka to work with you in achieving our goal of connecting African police, in order to make our citizens more secure. We have set up an actual, operational NCB (National Central Bureau) just outside this hall to show you all the new tools available over the I-24/7 network.

Later you will hear how the system works and our strong commitment to converting all countries in this region to the new system. We will also describe the results of the questionnaire recently sent out to many of your NCBs.

In addition, I have asked that we conduct two workshops simultaneously tomorrow so that together we can discuss directly with you and your key staff the I-24/7 system. No one should leave this conference without all his or her questions being answered.

INTERPOL, as an organization, has no higher priority for this region and the world than placing all of its member countries on the new INTERPOL I-24/7 international police communications network. Again, in our view, I-24/7 is the single most important communication system in the history of INTERPOL. It will open the world to you. So please take advantage of it.

Recommendation 2: Increase exchange of police information from Africa by 30%.

Result: we are pleased to report that we have achieved a 43% increase in the use of the INTERPOL network to exchange police information. INTERPOL's General Secretariat made sure that the increased message traffic was promptly handled by implementing an operational command centre at the General Secretariat. Despite this increase in traffic, we have reduced our backlog of messages handled from over 2000 to approximately 90.

Recommendation 3: Encourage African countries to record all stolen motor vehicles in INTERPOL's stolen motor vehicle database.

Result: the number of countries using INTERPOL's stolen motor vehicle database has not increased, but we have achieved a 59% increase in inserting names and a 45% in consulting the databases by African member countries.

Recommendation 4: Create a more equitable distribution of dues obligations among member countries.

Result: in this regard, INTERPOL's African member countries as a whole have received a substantial reduction of approximately 60% in their dues obligations. The impact of the reduction in the percentage of the budget to be paid will result in 52 of INTERPOL's 53 African member countries receiving a reduction in their 2004 budget obligation even though the budget as a whole may increase by 12%.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen the role of the regional police co-operation structures.

Result: INTERPOL can only remain effective globally if it has a strong General Secretariat, strong Sub-Regional Bureaus, strong National Central Bureaus and strong member country support. Unfortunately, the NCBs and the SRBs fail as a general rule to have the necessary support from their national governments. We must work hard on this problem.

Recommendation 6: Adapt a regional organized crime intelligence system to meet the needs of Africa.

Result: here, INTERPOL has achieved great success. Since our last meeting, 40 of Africa's 53 countries have had the system installed. Twenty-seven countries have received special grants for training and 17 other grants have been offered.

I should lastly like to stress the importance of the planned agreements between INTERPOL and the various African police committees in providing a new framework for the fight against transnational crime in Africa.

I therefore wish to state here and now that INTERPOL will do everything in its power to contribute to the success of these operations. The General Secretariat also has programs and projects housed in the General Secretariat, but fully supported by you. These include the Fusion Task Force on terrorism; our program in fighting the trafficking of human beings; our organized crime and drug program; our financial and high tech crime program and our fugitive investigative services program.

In closing, I am convinced that the decisions to be taken by this 17th African Regional Conference will provide effective and lasting responses to the threat posed by international crime and the challenge it poses to the African region.

I wish the conference every success in its work and invite you all to ensure that the decisions you take are put into practice.

Thank you for your attention