

16th Asian Regional Conference,

Bangkok, 20-22 February 2001

Opening address by [Ronald K. Noble](#), Secretary General

Deputy Prime Minister Pitak
Commissioner General Pornsak Durongkavibulya
Mr Kim, INTERPOL Vice-President for Asia
Mr Hughes and Mr Liu, INTERPOL Delegates for Asia
Honoured Guests, Observers and Delegates
- Good morning!

On behalf of all INTERPOL delegates to the 16th Asian Regional Conference I want to most sincerely thank the Deputy Prime Minister, the Commissioner-General and the Royal Thai Police for their hospitality and generosity in hosting this important conference in Bangkok.

The Kingdom of Thailand has hosted many INTERPOL conferences over the years. Thailand's reputation, not only as a nation with an outstanding and professional police service but also as gracious hosts, is in no small measure the reason for the outstanding attendance at this 16th Asian Regional Conference. Today we have over 33 nations and 22 observers represented. Let me, on behalf of all delegations express our gratitude to Thailand for its continued dedicated service to the international law enforcement community and thanks to this year's conference organisers and facilitators, and especially to the cadets and police band for their great performance.

Bangkok is also the site of INTERPOL's Asian regional liaison office. Being the only one of its kind to serve INTERPOL's wide Asian network, stretching from the Middle East to the Pacific, it is only natural that its possible future development will be a subject of discussions at this conference. One thing is clear though: INTERPOL's liaison office in Bangkok could not operate at all without the support and facilities that have been made available by the Royal Thai Police. This is in part why, Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, your country plays such an important role in the Asian region.

To start my tenure as Secretary General by addressing this, my first INTERPOL regional conference here in Asia is appropriate, and, I would say, an exciting opportunity. Asia together with Oceania is INTERPOL's largest region, with a total population of nearly 4 billion people (3 712 393 000), or over 61 percent of the world's population. All but four of Asia's countries are INTERPOL members, and 19 Asian police officers serve at the General Secretariat.

This Asian Regional Conference is being held at a very important time for INTERPOL, for the whole of this immense region and for international law enforcement at large.

The range of serious new crime problems that are the unintended consequence of economic globalisation and new technologies, like the Internet, are of grave concern to police all around the world. Asia is not immune from these new crime phenomena. Through global business and information technology, modern communications and expansive tourism, Asia is today more connected than ever before to the rest of the world, and vice versa.

Reports of trafficking in human beings, drug smuggling, terrorism, money-laundering, fraud and corruption hit the headlines almost every day. Asia is at the forefront in dealing with these challenging problems. It is clear that we need to cooperate more often, more intimately and more ambitiously to be able to cope.

So, what are the modern-day **crime trends** where I think INTERPOL should place its limited resources in the coming years. Let me touch on four areas:

First is cyber crime. Technology can be used by both crooks and cops! But while organised crime gangs have wasted no time in adapting new technologies to their ends, the efforts of the international community have remained fragmented and weapons of law enforcement almost obsolete.

Clearly, cyber crime and electronic vandalism represent new crime methods, and create new and severe problems that are international in focus and very complex for law enforcement to tackle.

Let me give three examples:

1. *Reported hacking incidents targeting state and public organisations in South Korea has risen by over 400 percent in the last year.*
2. *The May 2000 'I love you' computer virus from the Philippines, spread via e-mail, caused an estimated global damage of around 10 billion US dollars.*
3. *Electronic vandalism cripple and deface private and public websites throughout the Asian region and globally.*

Here is an important role where INTERPOL can help police officers worldwide. INTERPOL has contributed to the fight against cyber crime by establishing four regional working parties. Their achievements so far include the development of an early warning system with a 24-hour international response, a computer crime manual (now available on CD and on INTERPOL's own website), and a number of specialised training courses.

In November last year, INTERPOL's Asian-South Pacific Working Party on Information Technology Crime launched a regional intelligence study, designed to measure the size of this crime problem in Asia. On Monday this week, the day before this conference, the working party had a progress meeting here in Bangkok aimed at expanding participation in the project from the region. Needless to say, this is a most important venture. It seems certain that the incidents and impact of information technology crime will increase enormously over the next years.

A second area INTERPOL must focus on is economic crime, credit card fraud and money-laundering. Every day, the profits from drugs, extortion or simple expropriation in developing countries slide by devious paths into seemingly respectable bank accounts. Bankers are not policemen, and they are understandably reluctant to pry into the affairs of customers who for the most are honest and respectable.

Still, much more can and must be done to make money-laundering, credit card swindle and other fraud schemes more difficult and risky for criminal organisations. Reform of the banking sector in many countries should be one of our priorities. Also, administrative procedures should be rendered more transparent and controlled through accountability procedures, in order to avoid common bribery practices. The international community, and with it INTERPOL, has an important role in this field.

Asia is characterised by several important features which influence money-laundering methods used in the region: the existence of major drug production centres; a well established and growing

drug abuse problem; an entrenched and international underground banking system; the high use of cash; and the existence of highly structured organised crime groups. Probably the most significant of these, in the sense of money-laundering, is the underground banking system. Governments must now pass laws that will help the police address this conduit for criminal profits.

The level of information on money-laundering sent to INTERPOL from within the Asian region is unfortunately very small. But we know from what you tell us, rather than report to us, that money-laundering is a major problem.

A highly motivated team of police specialists at INTERPOL's General Secretariat now focus on money-laundering, and five detailed intelligence projects are being launched in the region covering all aspects of money-laundering. Nevertheless, these projects can only succeed, and INTERPOL can only add real value to your investigation of these offences, when we have sufficient incident reporting and intelligence information.

Most crime is for profit, and while top level organised crime figures are smart to stay away from the criminal activity and hire underlings for this, they want to stay close to their profits. The police need help in following the money to these kingpins. Money flows borderless, and no one country can cope with these problems alone. INTERPOL should be there to help.

A third crime area deserving our attention is the traffic in human beings, especially women and children, for forced and exploitative labour, including sexual exploitation. Human trafficking within and from South East Asia is very prevalent and a principal crime issue.

Our hosts for this conference, Thailand, have estimated that trafficking in human beings is the third largest source of profits for organised crime, just behind drugs and guns.

Let me again give some examples:

1. *In November last year, a Nepalese national was arrested for having trafficked girls to India for prostitution - 300 women sold over a 10-year period, none of them rescued.*
2. *In January this year, eight men were sentenced in China for having kidnapped more than 300 women and children.*
3. *In the same month this year, Bangladesh numbered their missing and trafficked children over the last decade at over 5,000, with almost 1,000 of those forcibly kidnapped.*

With revealing numbers such as these, it is surprising that INTERPOL has not received any official reports of humans trafficking from Asia or Oceania. We need your help in providing us better information on this growing crime problem.

This is, dear colleagues, one of the most serious violations of human rights which the international community now confronts, a modern-day slave trade that nations, governments and law enforcement agencies must do their utmost to put a stop to. We simply cannot turn our head in the other direction or say that these crimes are too difficult to investigate or prosecute.

The fourth crime area is drugs trafficking. It is interesting to note that in the past America and Europe viewed Asia as a source country for drugs. The tables are now turned and Europe is now a source country for an Asian drug problem.

Today, illicit synthetic drugs are a major concern for the Asian region. Last year, more than 22 tonnes of metamphetamine in crystal form and more than 100 million ecstasy tablets were seized in this region. The primary source region is Europe. Yes, Europe, and the method of operation is creative.

INTERPOL has identified Asian criminal groups that are exporting heroin to Europe, which is then exchanged for ecstasy tablets that are taken back to Asia by the same couriers. INTERPOL's project 'Exit' closely monitors police activities against synthetic drugs. An Exit sub-project, focusing on synthetic drugs in Asia, will soon conduct its first operational briefing in this region. Meanwhile, INTERPOL maintains its strong commitment to supporting the region in its anti-narcotic programs on heroin, cocaine and cannabis.

Let me add to these priority areas two other related matters of great immediate concern:

1. **Euro counterfeiting.** The largest establishment of a new currency in the History of Money will take place in early January 2002, less than a year ahead. The introduction of euro notes and coins next year for 300 million people in a single monetary area will be an important event for the world. People all over the world will increasingly view a unified Europe through the prism of its single currency. But not only that! It will also present great opportunities for criminals, and a myriad of potential problems for the police, from the point of production of the new currency to its transport worldwide during a concentrated period of time.

While these problems are more than counterfeiting, let me speak to that for a moment. Twelve nations of the European Union will adopt the new currency. There will be no more marks, or francs, or lira, and unfamiliar bills will start changing hands. Europe and Europol will need the full attention and help from the rest of the world. As you all know, we now live in a globalised and highly connected world where money, unfortunately also counterfeited money travels fast while law enforcement action runs into dozens of jurisdictions with different regulatory and policing functions.

INTERPOL's [178 member states](#) need to be aware of the euro counterfeit challenge, have materials and equipment to identify good from bad currency, share information on counterfeiting activities and opportunities. Think for a moment of the opportunities for counterfeiters at the soccer world cup games in Korea and Japan next year, just months after the new world currency is introduced!

2. **Corruption.** It would be senseless not to indicate that corruption is a serious problem in governments around the world. Anyone with authority is potentially subject to bribes. In consequence, this is a problem for the police. An honest and trustworthy police service is essential to the advancement of human rights, democracy and economic freedom. The willingness to share sensitive information is based on trust, while corruption is the strongest impediment to developing such trust.

INTERPOL will take a leadership role in helping to develop standards and practices and share experiences to help the world's police forces weed out corruption. The way to do it is to develop the professionalism their citizens can expect from them. Remember that a corrupt police officer, in any of our countries, is a threat to the reputation of fine police officers worldwide!

Dear Colleagues, not only must we look at new crime areas, such as the examples I have just given, but we must be creative in **how** we do this.

To be creative we must be able to identify and understand new crime trends. If our information is deficient, then our strategic predictions and extrapolations for the future will also suffer from information deficiency. So, to be able to serve well our global membership, including our many Asian members, we need your reports on international crimes and criminals. INTERPOL simply cannot succeed without a strong and consistent intelligence contribution by its many Asian members.

Probably the most important issue to focus on during these three days will be the draft **INTERPOL business plan** outlining proposed improvement initiatives for the Asian region. I therefore invite you to seriously consider, discuss and then firmly establish the regional objectives and commitments that are now required to advance INTERPOL goals and activities in this vast world region.

I am looking forward to discussing with you, for example:

The establishment of an INTERPOL sub-regional bureau here in Bangkok, through voluntary attachment of staff from the region and in order to better serve the needs of Asia.

We must also discuss the creation of other regional service arrangements to better adapt INTERPOL cooperation to the different needs in this diverse region.

I cannot overstate the importance of your endorsement of the INTERPOL business plan for Asia. A plan approved by this conference will guide the General Secretariat and each member state over the next few years. It will give us the blueprint for going forward in Asia. More than anything, I want INTERPOL, your organisation, to be essential to policing throughout Asia.

There are still too many gaps in the international police net to curb organised criminal gangs. INTERPOL must do a better job in increasing cooperation and coordination among the world's national police forces. In the critical fight against transnational organised crime we are still busy constructing our strategy - a joint, coherent and global strategy where we need to think globally, plan regionally and act locally.

I am very much looking forward to work together with you on this most important 'world road map against crime'.

Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, Commissioner General, my fellow delegates and friends, I wish this 16th Asian Regional Conference here in Bangkok all success.

Thank you.