

The INTERPOL–United Nations Ministerial Meeting

Opening address by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong
Singapore – 12 October 2009

Mr Khoo Boon Hui, President of INTERPOL

Mr Ronald K Noble, Secretary-General of INTERPOL

Mr Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary General of the UN

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I extend a warm welcome to all of you to Singapore for the inaugural INTERPOL-United Nations Ministerial Meeting and the 78th INTERPOL General Assembly.

I am heartened to see so many leaders and experts on security and law enforcement here today. Your presence is a clear indication of your commitment to global security and international police cooperation.

Today we all live in a globalised world. Our economies and societies are linked in many ways. Trade and travel have seen exponential growth. Goods move freely all over the world. Our peoples visit one another's countries with increasing frequency. Bits and bytes travel even more freely than physical goods and people. Our computers are linked by the worldwide web, and we can communicate by Skype, email, SMS, MSN, Twitter, etc. Billions of dollars in digital currency can be transferred between jurisdictions in the blink of an eye.

Globalisation has brought untold benefits to countries worldwide. But it has also created some difficult challenges. Crime too has become global. Criminals can move around more easily and run transnational operations. They often direct crime from offshore bases. Using modern communications tools, criminals can freely exchange information, coordinate their operations, even share "best crime practices". Jihadist terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and cybercrime are all global in scale and transnational in nature. The same modern day technologies and techniques that improve our lives are as easily applied to more sinister ends.

To deal with new crimes and more sophisticated criminals, it is necessary, but not sufficient, for Police authorities to also become smarter and better equipped. Police officers must learn the latest technologies, understand how they might be abused by felons, as well as how they could be deployed to enhance policing work. Police services must raise the capabilities of their officers, help them to master the new tools and to always stay one step ahead of criminals. But in addition to this, countries have to cooperate more closely with one another, by sharing intelligence, watching for international fugitives and conducting joint enforcement actions. Only by working together can we effectively tackle transnational crime and terrorism.

INTERPOL plays a vital role as the largest police organisation dedicated to international cooperation. INTERPOL brings together [187 member countries](#) and facilitates international police cooperation even where diplomatic relations do not exist between particular countries. It does this by respecting the limits



Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, told delegates that committing police peacekeepers to rebuild failed states contributed also to national security.

of existing laws in the different countries. Its constitution prohibits any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character. This encourages member countries to contribute information on fugitives, terrorists, stolen goods, and stolen and lost travel documents. These are then collated into databases which can be accessed securely. Such cooperation has enabled countries to extend the long arm of the law beyond traditional borders to take collective action against a common enemy. I am happy to note that the INTERPOL network is growing, and by the end of this Assembly, Samoa will join, and there will be 188 member countries.

INTERPOL has led or coordinated many successful operations to cripple international syndicates. It has also helped to build global capacity in police agencies, through training and establishing intelligence-sharing protocols for member states. These efforts have enabled police authorities all over the world to prevent, detect and suppress crime.

Singapore benefits greatly from international police cooperation. We are an open, cosmopolitan city, highly connected to the world. Working with other police services multiplies our effectiveness. Through INTERPOL, wanted criminals and terrorists have been returned to Singapore to face justice. We use the Mobile INTERPOL Network Database system to screen travel documents at checkpoints for stolen or lost passports. We have also participated in joint operations. For example, the Singapore Police Force was part of a regional task-force together with China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam in two INTERPOL-coordinated operations, codenamed SOGA 1 and 2, in 2007 and 2008. These two highly successful operations targeted illegal soccer gambling controlled by organised crime gangs. Operation SOGA 2 alone resulted in the arrest of over 1,300 persons across the various countries, and disrupted betting records of almost US\$1.5 billion.

I encourage INTERPOL delegates to maintain their professional approach. By continuing to eschew political, religious and racial considerations, we will maintain the common ground for fruitful cooperation. Singapore is also keen to do our part. Our police force is a small one, but our officers are happy to help wherever we can. It was a great honour for our Police Commissioner, Mr Khoo Boon Hui, to be elected as INTERPOL's president last year. We will be happy to discuss further ways in which we can assist in INTERPOL's work.

Besides fighting crime, police officers have taken on growing responsibilities in international peacekeeping. This has come about because international agencies increasingly recognise the valuable roles that civilian police forces can play. While military forces are indispensable for establishing initial security, civilian police forces are more suited for law and order tasks and for maintaining security. Police officers by instinct and training are more adept at keeping the peace. They do so by building strong institutions and proper governance systems and progressively establishing an orderly environment. Consequently, the number of police officers deployed in peace-keeping operations worldwide has increased from just over 100 in 1964 to more than 12,000 now, and demand for their services continues to grow.

Singapore has actively contributed to peacekeeping operations. Since 1989, nearly 450 civilian police officers have taken part in 10 peacekeeping operations. We have been involved in various missions, usually under UN auspices – police training, enhancing the operational readiness of local police, and supervising UN-sponsored elections. We have been in Cambodia and Nepal, and further afield, in Namibia and South Africa. Currently, the Singapore Police Force has a 21-member contingent serving in Timor-Leste.

Singapore takes its peacekeeping duties seriously. In our globalised world, disorder or worse breakdown of political authority in one country threatens regional and international security. Failed states can become breeding grounds for international terrorism or bases for transnational criminal organisations. Countries therefore need to help others to help themselves. When we commit police peacekeepers to rebuild failed states, promote good governance and foster sustainable peace, we are also contributing to our own security. Hence I support the partnership of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPKO) and INTERPOL to bring the role of police peacekeepers to the forefront of the international security agenda.

Singapore has also provided indirect support. From 1994 till 2005, we collaborated with the United Nations Institute of Training and Research (UNITAR), to host a number of international conferences. These conferences bring together peacekeepers, policy-makers, academics and research teams, in order to pool their expertise and improve the conduct of international peacekeeping. The first conference was held in Singapore, at the initiative of Ambassador Tommy Koh. I am delighted that Ambassador Koh is with us this morning, and will be chairing the session after this.

The contest between police and criminals is never-ending. There is a Chinese saying "when good gains a foot, evil adds a yard". As you upgrade your knowledge, skills and equipment, you can be sure that criminals are doing the same. See how jihadist terrorists have evolved their malevolent plans in response to security action. They used to drive car bombs into military installations. When these installations were hardened, they switched to soft targets like hotels. And when hotels increased their security and started screening guests, the terrorists smuggled the bomb-making material in and progressively assembled the bombs in their hotel rooms.

To win against such misguided but determined foes, the forces of law and order have to work together and keep raising our game. Conferences such as this offer a valuable platform for meaningful dialogue and knowledge sharing. I hope you will use this opportunity to chart the way forward and take international policing to new levels. I wish you all an enriching conference, and a pleasant stay in Singapore.