

77th INTERPOL General Assembly

St. Petersburg, Russia – 7 October 2008

Opening speech by Arturo Herrera Verdugo, INTERPOL senior Vice President

A united, co-ordinated police community is the best tool with which to confront the “globalization of crime”!

With this statement I warmly welcome you to this 77th INTERPOL General Assembly session.

The theme chosen for this occasion: “Jointly building sustainable police capacity”, is not only an acknowledgment of the work we have done, but also an invitation to concentrate on the great deal which remains to be done.



This General Assembly session therefore has special meaning for us all. This year, we have the privilege of conducting our work in the exceptional and unique setting that St Petersburg offers. In this city, world history has been written and science and the arts have found a place for innovation and the development of the human mind.

It is not by chance that this city welcomes us today since, as the former capital of Russia, it was founded in 1703 as a “window to the world”. It is the second largest city in the Russian Federation, and one of the most important cities in Europe, and stands proud today as a world heritage site by reason of its architectural and cultural beauty.

These are certainly ideal surroundings for promoting fruitful dialogue between police forces from different regions of the world.

I therefore wish to thank most sincerely the Russian authorities for their excellent welcome and their willingness to ensure our objectives are met. And I would also like to specially greet the heads and members of the Russian Police. On behalf of all the delegations, I wish to convey our gratitude: we are only too well aware of the long months of preparation you have devoted to this General Assembly.

I can think of no better venue for us to gather for the important challenges that await us over the next three days.

Although our Organization is celebrating 85 years of existence, we must approach our tasks with the future in mind. Our institution is fundamental for international security. Our four core functions demand that we assume our historic responsibility to meet the needs of all the world's police:

First, the ability to communicate securely and in real-time;

Second, the ability to retrieve information from police databases which is critical to crime investigations;

Third, the possibility of sharing knowledge and good practice between police forces from around the world; and

Finally, the possibility to call upon INTERPOL when our police forces require training and specialization.

Fulfilling these obligations most certainly requires a strong, solid coalition, and this is the main task of the General Secretariat and the Sub-Regional Bureaus.

In the 21st century, INTERPOL will face unavoidable challenges. Although, in recent years, we have made progress in efficiency and responsiveness, we must now consolidate our strategic processes, in support of the law enforcement officers who are active in the field each and every day.

They are our first line of defence against crime and terrorism and, consequently, deserve to be our priority concern.

These collective efforts have certainly enabled us to accomplish things that would not have been possible otherwise, such as:

- assist the Philippine Government with identifying the more than 800 victims who perished in the ferry disaster in Cebu City last June;
- launch a global appeal to the public to identify and arrest a serial child sex offender that resulted in his arrest within 48 hours;
- undertake a forensic examination of laptop computers seized from a FARC terrorist camp;
- issue more than 5,000 notices in a single year; and
- provide the UN war crime tribunals with operational support in locating and arresting suspects in the Rwandan genocide and the war in the former Yugoslavia.

All this was possible because we acted with the conviction that co-operation between the NCBs, Executive Committee and General Secretariat is a necessary condition for obtaining excellent results. Unity makes us stronger!

This union is reflected by a number of milestones. For example, the connection of our Organization's 186 member countries to the I-24/7 system; the challenge is now to expand its services beyond the NCBs.

Another milestone is the introduction of MIND/FIND technology, which enables police officers to quickly check in our databases various items of information, such as names, passports or vehicles. It is a unique tool, but its potential to disrupt criminal activity will only be fully realized when all of our member countries have this technology up and running.

DNA profiling offers entirely new possibilities to support criminal investigations, and can help to link seemingly isolated crimes in different places.

This technology has also shown its value in operations to identify numerous disaster victims. This technology – available to only a few countries at the moment – must become a common, frequently used tool.

To do this, we must continue enhancing operational assistance, transferring technology in a timely manner, developing joint operations and sharing knowledge and good practice in police management.

As the Executive Committee – and together with the General Secretariat – we are proud to offer examples of this. The OASIS-Africa project carried out with invaluable support from Germany has led to increased co-operation in terms of operations, infrastructure and training. This is thanks to a generous contribution of more than 20 million Euros over four years.

This initiative provides a significant amount of support to our colleagues from African police forces, thus improving their operational and analytical capacity, with the aim of protecting not only their own citizens, but also those in other countries. It is for this reason that we have given resolute backing to this project.

By combining training, infrastructure development, and operational assistance, the OASIS programme meets, I believe, the fundamental requirements for a police strategy designed to sustainably improve the efficiency and quality of its services.

Ever since I came to lead the Chilean Investigative Police, it has been my firm belief that a police force's ability to effectively respond to crime challenges depends on its willingness to improve. This is achieved by investing in training and human resources, and developing its infrastructure, but without ever losing sight of the fact that these two elements cannot be separate. Our challenge today is to do our utmost to find the finances to offer the same level of assistance to other regions as well.

Over the coming three days, many other initiatives will be submitted for your consideration, and allow me to comment on a few of them.

Cybercrime is a threat that requires our careful attention, and which underlines just how flexible and multi-purpose a tool the I-24/7 network is.

It is a crime whose impact is anything but virtual. It is clear that the specialized units use our network to exchange urgent information and seek assistance in collecting evidence.

The time is therefore right to create a forensic computer analysis unit that will both assist member countries and provide training in handling electronic evidence. I think there is great potential here to make the existing wealth of expertise available to all our NCBs.

Another challenge is to continue to improve our notices system. You have witnessed the successes of Operations VICO and IDent, whereby INTERPOL sought the assistance of the public in identifying and locating dangerous sex offenders.

Consequently, providing the NCBs with the possibility to request the General Secretariat to publish Red and Yellow Notices, where possible, on its public website will most certainly lead to more successes in apprehending dangerous fugitives and locating missing persons.

We must therefore continue increasing our collective efforts. So at this session, you will be asked to accept the Vatican City as the 187th Member of our Organization. It faces the same security challenges as all of us and by welcoming it into the INTERPOL community, you will be gaining a new partner in the fight against crime and terrorism. A delegation from the Vatican headed by Bishop Renato Boccardo is therefore here with us today.

Dear Colleagues:

INTERPOL's greatest strength lies in its ability to maintain its forward momentum, acknowledging and valuing innovation as an essential element of international police co-operation.

Following the resignation of Jackie Selebi in January of 2008, in my capacity of the Senior Vice-President, I have had the honour to take on the role of President of the Organization. I could not have fulfilled this role successfully without the support of you all and the backing of my colleagues on the Executive Committee, and particularly the Secretary General. We have worked together with the development of INTERPOL as our goal.

This is why – as a natural process of change - at the end of this General Assembly session we will have the responsibility of electing the next President. This is a key decision for INTERPOL's future. Strengthening its leadership and consolidating its strategic development are necessary steps which will mark the next stage. The decision will be yours.

At this point, those who have given valuable service also deserve a special mention. With great regret I bid farewell to those four of my colleagues whose terms come to an end at the end of this session: Francisco Aranda, from Spain; Zulmar Pimentel Dos Santos, from Brazil; Farid Bencheikh, from Algeria; and Fernand Koekelberg, from Belgium. I would like to express our gratitude to them for their work, which has brought honour to their countries.

Finally, I should like to thank Mr Khoo and Mr Stock who, as the chairmen of the Strategic Development and Finance Sub-Committees respectively, have greatly contributed to the Executive Committee's decision-making by thoroughly reviewing major initiatives examined by the Executive Committee.

DEAR AUTHORITIES, DELEGATES AND SPECIAL GUESTS

This 77th General Assembly session is the most important meeting of the modern international police community, the new "public square" where we meet to define common courses of action. We are responsible for making progress towards a more human, safer world, with the aim of meeting the challenges of the society of knowledge, globalization and human development.

I therefore invite you to continue working towards consolidating a system of international relations based on security, peace and development.

Bearing in mind the recent Olympic Games in China, I would like to end with this analogy: in the race for global security, the gold medal must always be our main objective.

Thank you