

Bio-Terrorism Conference opens with warning of major threat. Interpol member countries seek co-ordinated global response.



Interpol Secretary General Ronald K. Noble welcomes more than 500 delegates from 155 countries to the 1st Interpol Global Conference on Preventing Bio-terrorism.

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LYON, France - Interpol's first Global Conference on Preventing Bio-Terrorism, the largest-ever gathering of police, senior officials and experts from 155 countries, began on Tuesday with urgent calls for increased vigilance against bio-terror attacks.

"There is no criminal threat with greater potential danger to all countries, regions and people in the world than the threat of bioterrorism" said Interpol Secretary General Ronald K. Noble.

France's Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin has warned that bio-terrorism could be the next stage in the evolution of international terrorism.

The Minister revealed that al-Qaida pursued development of chemical and biological weapons after the US attacked in Afghanistan.

When the Taliban controlled Afghanistan, al-Qaida operatives learned how to develop and use biological materials, including ricin and botulism, de Villepin told the gathering.

"More recently, after the fall of the Taliban, these groups pursued their work in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge," de Villepin said, an area in the former Soviet republic reputed to be a safe haven for Chechen militants and international terrorists.

Preventing and fighting terrorism around the world is one of Interpol's highest priorities.

Interpol is the world's largest international police organization. Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, the organization has substantially expanded its efforts to fight terrorism and has offered the deployment of its Incident Response Teams following every major terrorist attack around the world in order to assist the member countries concerned.

Interpol has introduced a new, state-of-the art global police communications system; set up a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week Command and Co-ordination Centre at the General Secretariat in Lyon; created a Crisis Management Support Group to help national police forces deal with major crimes or disasters; built up its range of databases, including a crucial database of stolen travel documents which now contains almost six million entries; and developed its own list of terrorism suspects, now totaling some 8,000 names.

For more information on the Interpol and bio terror:

<http://www.interpol.int>

Sources: Interpol and Voice of America News.