

# Interpol explained

Interpol is perhaps the most famous of the world's police organisations, but often the role of this international policing body is misunderstood by the general public. Sergeant Kevin Inwood backgrounds the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol).

**T**HE role of the International Criminal Police Organisation, commonly known as Interpol, is to ensure and promote the widest possible mutual assistance between all criminal police authorities.

This is carried out within the limits of the laws of the member countries and in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Interpol establishes and develops a relationship between all institutions likely to contribute effectively to the prevention and detection of ordinary criminal offences.

Interpol's history began when, in 1914, legal and police representatives of 14 countries met in Monaco to discuss the formation of an international records office and to improve extradition procedures. The creation of this body never eventuated.

The outbreak of World War I put the concept on hold until 1923 when another conference was held in Vienna. This resulted in the formation of the International Criminal Police Commission which remained in existence until the beginning of World War II.

The Commission was re-established in 1946 with its headquarters in Paris. In 1956 the organisation changed its name to International Criminal Police Organisation, a name which has been contracted to Interpol. After moving to Lyon in 1989, Interpol had members from 169 countries with an international staff of police officers from several countries including Australia.

The organisation operates the largest computer of any police force and makes its data on crimi-

nal activities available to its member countries' police forces. Interpol is strictly forbidden to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character.

The basic principles followed by Interpol include:

- respect for international sovereignty;
- co-operation unhampered by linguistic or geographic barriers;
- equality of services and rights between member countries;
- co-operation with government agencies concerned with fighting ordinary criminal offences; and
- flexibility in operating to keep formalities to a minimum.

Interpol is divided into two bodies – the General Assembly and Executive Committee and its permanent departments; the General Secretariat and the National Crime Bureaus. The General Assembly, as the supreme governing body, is composed of delegates appointed by their own governments. It meets once a year and takes on all major policy decisions regarding working methods, finance, means of co-operation and the program of activities. General Assembly decisions are implemented by an executive committee which meets three times a year.

The General Secretariat is the permanent administrative and technical element of Interpol. Headed by the Secretary General, the secretariat has three divisions and one department. Division I (General Administration) deals with finances, personnel and logistics. Division II (Police) centralises and processes information on criminal cases under investigation, writes reports and issues international notices. Its sub-divi-



sions deal with general offences, international terrorism, financial crime and illicit drug trafficking. Division III provides a legal and technical reference service, conducts surveys, analyses documents and shares in the work of other agencies in legal and criminological matters.

In each member country, the National Central Bureau (NCB) is the focal point of co-operation and can initiate large-scale operations at the request of other NCBs calling in other local police and governmental authorities. In Australia the NCB is located at Federal Police Headquarters, Canberra.

In 1974, the federal Attorney-General decided that as Interpol was an international organisation, the correct representative would be the Australian Government which would assume all costs. Previously costs had been divided between state police services. Operation of the NCB was transferred to the Commonwealth Police and on the formation of the Australian Federal Police, responsibility was passed on to the AFP.

The Commissioner of the AFP is Australia's representative to Interpol and is directly responsible to the Minister for Justice. Australia's NCB is staffed by 14 personnel – a superintendent, six sergeants, six constables and a staff member. The bureau operates on a seven-day basis from 7am to 11pm.

The purpose of the NCB is to perform the role of a central agency to facilitate overseas inquiries and vice-versa.

As the bureau serves all police organisations and several other government agencies, both federal and state, it has a strict code of confidentiality. This means that when information is obtained on behalf of a particular police service or agency, that information cannot be released to a third party without permission.

The NCB can only take action on requests which are of a criminal or humanitarian nature. As each bureau can only operate within the laws of its own country, it must establish the purpose for a request for information is in fact a criminal offence in the country that originates the request.

The bureau also assists in notifying people overseas of the death a relative in Australia where police have been unable to locate a relative in this country.

Another function of the NCB is to collect information from various sources, nationally and internationally, on topics being researched by police.

The bureau works in close co-operation with the federal Attorney General's Department in the matter of requests for extradition to and from Australia.

On request from police agencies, the NCB issues international notices colour coded in the following manner: red – wanted for extradition; blue – to locate the whereabouts of a suspect or offender; green – to advise that a known criminal is travelling overseas; yellow – missing person; and black – to identify a deceased person. Interpol also distributes notices of stolen art works, new modus operandi, weekly drug intelligence messages and other matters of police interest. These are forwarded to all state police services in Australia.

When a Australian police officer is required to carry out investigations in another country, the NCB can assist in obtaining the required permission and arrange for the help of police in the host country.

The NCB exists to assist all law enforcement officers with their overseas inquiries. If any doubt arises as to the correct procedure to follow or the type of information that can be obtained, it is recommended the officer contact the duty sergeant at the bureau on (06) 275-7641.

## Liaison Officer witnesses Bali resort blaze

**Superintendent Steve Polden, AFP Liaison Officer in Indonesia witnessed and photographed the destruction of the Bali Beach Hotel in January. He filed this report:**

On the 20 January 1993, the Bali Beach Hotel, located on the beach at Sanur just outside Denpasar, Bali caught fire and was completely gutted.

The nine storey, 30-year-old building caught fire at approximately 12:30pm and by 5pm was a complete ruin. It is believed that the fire started in the Qantas office in the reception area of the hotel. The office was closed due to an Indonesian public holiday.

The Bali Beach Hotel was built from Japanese war reparation funds and is owned by the Indonesian Government.

The hotel had about 300 guests at the time of the fire including about 170 Australian tourists. It was fortunate that the fire occurred when most guests were out of the hotel. There was no loss of life, but it may have

been a different story had the fire occurred during the night. As it was, the fire caused a tremendous consular problem as most guests lost everything in the fire, including passports.

Pumps were brought in from the airport in an effort to use water from the swimming pool, but the spray was only able to reach the fourth floor.

Thousands of spectators came from near and far and at times the crowd had to retreat from the base of the hotel as glass exploded and rained down.

Australian hotel guests that I spoke to later said that no one had come to their doors to warn them of the danger. A man on the second floor had a traumatic time reaching safety from his second floor room. A wooden ladder raised to his balcony caught fire and collapsed, while knotted sheets lowered by the man also caught fire.

He finally escaped by jumping into a blanket held taught by other hotel guests.



*In January 1993, the Bali Beach Hotel was consumed by fire. Water pumped from the hotel pool could only reach the fourth floor.*