

Police Study How to Share Criminal Information Across International Borders

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By Kerry Sheridan, Voice of America (New York)

Police from around the world are meeting in New York this week to plan ways to fight terrorism by sharing criminal information. New technologies will make it possible for a police officer to determine if the person he is arresting is wanted for a crime in another country.

New York will be the first city to access international criminal information held by the global police organization, Interpol. The Interpol database, called I-247, contains photographs, fingerprints, and records of criminals in 80 countries around the world. Ronald Noble, head of Interpol, says the state-of-the-art technology will give New York City officers an unprecedented edge in the fight against terrorist activity.

"Very soon, an NYPD police officer will be able to contact NYPD's intelligence division, who will be able to access directly Interpol's database to see whether someone being investigated by NYPD or someone who has been stopped by an NYPD officer in the street is known to or wanted by police internationally," he said.

Interpol officials say they hope to have all 181 member countries connected to the database by June. In the United States, New York City police officers will test the system first. Once any initial difficulties are ironed out, access to the system will extend to all 50 states.

New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly says the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 made police officials realize they desperately need to be able track people who have criminal records in other countries.

"We have never really been structured to conduct the kind of collection and analysis of information that is needed to help us deter criminal and terrorist activity. We needed a new perspective and a new method of responding to threats in these tumultuous times," he said.

Interpol has also announced a change in how it compiles its "most wanted list" of suspected terrorists around the world.

Now, a person can be flagged with what Interpol calls a "red notice," for belonging to a suspected terrorist group. Before, a "red notice" could only be given to a person who was charged with murder, assault, or conspiracy.

Interpol officials say the change came about because more countries are recognizing membership in a terrorist group as a crime. Interpol currently has 1,400 people in its database with suspected connections to terrorist activity.