

President Murr

The President of the Interpol Foundation, Deputy Prime Minister and former Minister of Interior and Defense, Elias Murr, affirmed: "I am entirely prepared to provide all direct and indirect assistance that Lebanon needs to enhance its security and stability, as soon as a new government of specialized and efficient ministers is formed." He added: "We will not leave the Lebanese people alone in these dire days, and it is an honor for me to help my country and my people. I have never hesitated to fulfill my duties as a Lebanese citizen, and I am proud of my country, despite all the crises and woes it suffers.

On the occasion of his re-election as President of the Interpol Foundation for a second term in November 2018, President Elias Murr speaks for the first time about the achievements and field operations at the international level.

President Murr said to "Aljournhouria": "During the past four years, the support of the Interpol Foundation allowed coordinating 51 international operations that resulted in more than 10,400 arrests, and carrying out more than 590 activities in which nearly 11,000 people participated. These operations also led to the seizure of 64,425 tons of cocaine, 5.07 tons of heroin, 11 million weapons, 50 thousand tons of counterfeit products, 33,500 tons of regular and counterfeit alcoholic drinks, and 520 tons of illegal pharmaceutical products (such as fake cancer drugs, illegitimate medicines and medical devices, etc).

Since the inception of these programs, with support from the INTERPOL Foundation, all of INTERPOL's 194 member states have participated in the activities of this project, including of course, Lebanon. The work and progress achieved in these projects have significantly contributed in the implementation of INTERPOL's global strategies to combat terrorism, organized and emerging crime and cybercrime.

Here we must note the pioneering role played by the Interpol's Secretary General, Mr. Jürgen Stock, in achieving these programs and achievements.

Counter-terrorism strategy

In response to a question about what has been achieved in the program of the Global Counter-Terrorism Initiative, President Murr explains that INTERPOL has developed a five-year strategy to strengthen the fight against terrorism to make the most of INTERPOL's police capabilities. This initiative aims to create the necessary infrastructure to help INTERPOL member countries, including of course Lebanon, to effectively deal with terrorist activities.

As for the main achievements, we mention some of them, for example:

- Operation Neptune 2, targeting the movement of foreign terrorist fighters using the sea route through the Mediterranean.
- Operations Maharlica II and III, focusing on the link between counterterrorism and human trafficking in the Sulu Sea area.

- Operations Simba 1 and 2, which are carried out through border control activities, to identify and combat terrorist and other transnational threats, across East Africa.
- Western Balkan Hotspot Operation, with a focus on biometrics (ie facial images and fingerprints), with the aim of supporting local law enforcement agencies, in order to control, manage and collect vital data.
- Meetings of high-level working groups, which dealt with the challenges of border control, the next stage in the issue of foreign terrorist fighters, international police cooperation, and its implications on international peace and security.

Combating drug trafficking

Regarding the most prominent achievements of Interpol in the program to combat illicit drug trafficking, President Murr says that INTERPOL has established the AMEAP (Africa, Middle East, Asia and the Pacific) program to help national authorities identify security threats and confront organized crime groups involved in illicit drug trafficking in those areas by adopting a cross-border operational approach, in which INTERPOL takes on the role of lead coordinator.

Global anti-drug operations have resulted in the confiscation of 64,425 tons of cocaine, 5.07 tons of heroin, 15 tons of cannabis and 430,000 Captagon pills and the arrest of more than 1,400 suspects.

Cyber crime

On the exchange of information concerning cybercrime and the real-time analysis platform, President Murr reveals that the strategy of Interpol aims at establishing a program for analyzing cyber data in preparation for expanding Interpol's capabilities to obtain cyber intelligence that requires action, analysis and dissemination, and to develop six technical tools to support member countries in exchanging information and data.

INTERPOL's Cybercrime Directorate has worked and will continue to work with member countries to implement operations on the ground aimed at reducing the global impact of cybercrime and enhancing community protection.

Combating human trafficking

On the program to combat migrant smuggling, human abuse and exploitation of children via the Internet, President Murr says that INTERPOL's international operations have led to the arrest of more than 818 people and the rescue of 486 victims. Moreover, this program succeeded in identifying and combating criminal networks. And as of 2021, other activities will be boosted in Central Asia and the Middle East, which are regions currently facing major challenges.

Protecting cultural heritage

On the subject of the cultural heritage protection program, President Murr reveals some activities that include:

- Final development of the ID-Art mobile app, the first INTERPOL application available for the public via cell phone.
- Organizing global, regional and national workshops to encourage INTERPOL member countries to create a specialized unit to combat crimes related to cultural property, as well as a database.
- Conducting the European Regional Operation "PANDORA III" organized by INTERPOL, Europol, Spain and Cyprus with the support of the World Customs Organization (WCO) and FRONTEX, which resulted in the seizure of more than 18 thousand weapons and the arrest of 59 people in 29 participating countries.
- Implementation of the global joint operation "ATHENA II" between INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization and the Police; and the European regional operation "PANDORA IV", in cooperation with Europol, the World Customs Organization, Cyprus, Italy and Spain. 101 suspects were arrested and 300 investigations opened as part of this coordinated restraint. More than 19,000 other artifacts and artworks have also been recovered as part of a global operation involving 103 countries.

Vehicle related crimes

As for combating vehicle-related crimes, some of the achievements are summarized as follows:

- INVEX is a platform based on collaboration between law enforcement and the private sector (i.e. car manufacturers) to investigate and recover stolen assets. In the second part of this collaboration, INVEX is ready to start the pilot phase. Despite the

epidemic crisis, more than 4000 notifications were issued to INVEX from October 2019 to September 2020.

- FADA-RI entered service and is currently being used in beta version by 6 countries within INVEX (Austria, Finland, France, Netherlands, Poland, and Spain). As a result, many stolen vehicles have been reported to have been tampered with during the operational activities of Member States or with the help of the Stolen Vehicle Unit (SMV).
- During the pre-implementation phase of IMPACTO IV, which took place in the Central American region, in coordination with RB San Salvador, 495 stolen vehicles were discovered.
- The FORMATRIN project delivered training courses across Europe, Africa, the Americas, Asia and Australia, providing in-depth vehicle identification and best surveying practices for more than 150 specialist dealers worldwide.

Counterfeit products

On the program to prevent trafficking in illegal goods and medical products, President Murr reveals that during several operations around the world, more than 11 million weapons were seized, 50,000 tons of counterfeit products, 33,500 tons of alcohol and counterfeit drinks, more than 3,620 tons of fake food and 9.7 million liters of food and beverages. 41,293 inspections were carried out, and 3,325 arrest warrants were issued, resulting in the arrest or detention of 749 people.

- Operation Opson IX took place during the pandemic and helped seize more than 12,000 tons of illegal and potentially dangerous weapons from stores and markets, and also during inspection operations of the transport. Authorities have also discovered thousands of counterfeit medical products, including disinfectants and nearly 17,000 counterfeit COVID-19 test kits.

- Operation PANGEA XI allowed the confiscation of 520 tons of illegal pharmaceutical products (such as counterfeit cancer drugs, illegal medical syringes, etc.). In the 116 participating countries, 859 people were arrested and 3,782 internet links closed. In the United Kingdom, 150 thousand strong sleeping pills were recovered, and in Argentina 4 million non-original Ibuprofen pills were confiscated.

- Operation Pangea XIII: During the outbreak of the Coronavirus, new directions in drug control have been identified. There was an increase in bouts of face masks, hand sanitizers, counterfeit and substandard medications (such as Chloroquine). Seizures amounted to 4.4 million units. 121 cases were arrested, and more than 2,500 websites were deleted.

Support to Lebanon

In response to a question whether President Murr has a plan or intention to support Lebanon, especially in these circumstances, he replied: "Lebanon has benefited and is benefiting from the majority of Interpol programs, and it is an honor for me to help my country and my family. I have never hesitated to do what my duty dictates to me as a Lebanese. I am proud of my country despite all the crises and woes it suffers, and I assure you that I am fully prepared to

provide all direct and indirect assistance that Lebanon needs to enhance its security and stability in the next stage, as soon as a new government of efficient specialized ministers is formed, and we will not leave the Lebanese people alone during these harsh days.

President Murr said that surely after the formation of the government, there will be strengthening of coordination with the Lebanese security services, especially the General Security and the Internal Security forces. President Murr revealed that there is a program under preparation devoted to developing cooperation with the Lebanese judiciary at the electronic level. And with this program, the Public Prosecution Discriminatory and through it the Financial Public Prosecution will have a key role in the committee that will determine how to communicate the international arrest warrants on the global level.