



The INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation in Singapore: A Personal Retrospective



Thomas Herko

Liaison Officer
Federal Ministry of the Interior
Austrian Embassy Budapest
thomas.herko@bmi.gv.at



Abstract

Aim: The article introduces the INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation (IGCI) in Singapore. It provides a survey of the facility's genesis and development portraying the ambitious original vision for the IGCI to become firstly, a second headquarter for the INTERPOL General Secretariat (IGS), secondly, a cutting-edge research and development facility for police worldwide, and thirdly, an Asian hub for international police cooperation.

Methodology: The author has used open sources supplemented by personal memories and insights of both former and current executive staff of the IGS.

Findings: As the original vision for the IGCI has not been accomplished to date, three key factors are identified as crucial for its realisation: agreement, funding, as well as commitment.

Value: The article assesses the added value of the IGCI for international police cooperation as well as its future potential.

Keywords: INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation Singapore, Cyber-crime, digital security and operational support, Capacity building and training, Police innovation

My First Visit to Singapore

In early 1990, when I was a student at Vienna University, I visited Southeast Asia and Singapore for the first time. I remember how overwhelmed I was by

The Hungarian version of the publication was published in *Belügyi Szemle* 2023/11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38146/BSZ.2023.11.4>. The publication was submitted to the Editorship in English.

the tropical climate with both high temperatures and humidity, the paradisiac flora in the Singapore Botanic Gardens, the buzzing Orchard Road full of huge modern shopping malls with everything one can buy, the coastline seafood restaurants promoting the national dish ‘chili crab’, the highly developed infrastructure, as well as the super clean cars on the roads. Overall, apart from the sometimes-unbearable heat – which made me appreciate air conditioning – quite positive impressions. How should I have known that I would get the chance to live and work around the corner of the splendid Singapore Botanic Gardens 24 years later?

INTERPOL Looking for More Space

The International Criminal Police Organization, in short INTERPOL, with 195 member countries is the largest international police organisation. Basically, it is a global platform for the membership’s law enforcement agencies to share and access data on crimes and criminals, as well as to provide a range of technical and operational support following its mission statement ‘*Connecting police for a safer world*’. Under the supervision of the Executive Committee, whose members are elected by the General Assembly – INTERPOL’s governing body in which each member country has one vote – the IGS coordinates the organisation’s day-to-day activities to fight a range of crimes, among other things by managing 19 databases. Today the IGS comprises a headquarter in France (from 1946 in Paris, since 1989 in Lyon), a facility in Singapore and several satellite offices¹ in different regions.

The facility in Singapore – the centre of INTERPOL’s activities in cyber-crime, research and development, and capacity building also providing an Asian base for several crime areas ([URL1](#)) – exists since 2015. It complements the headquarter in Lyon and enhances the Organisation’s presence in Asia. However, there is a story behind INTERPOL’s expansion to Southeast Asia and the genesis of the IGCI, in fact the path to Singapore started in France in the first decade of the new millennium.

After its foundation in Vienna in 1923 and its reestablishment in 1946 INTERPOL’s membership had steadily grown and the IGS continuously delivered and modernised its tools and services for the member countries without

¹ These are in Argentina (Buenos Aires), Austria (Vienna), Barbados (Bridgetown), Belgium (Brussels), Cameroon (Yaoundé), Côte d’Ivoire (Abidjan), El Salvador (San Salvador), Ethiopia (Addis Ababa), Kenya (Nairobi), The Netherlands (The Hague), USA (New York), as well as Zimbabwe (Harare).

much attention by the public. This changed with the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. They mark a turning point for the organisation making it operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, as well as developing '*a more reactive, relevant and operational function, to better assist police in its member countries in times of crisis*' (URL2).

The increasing demands for IGS services resulted in the need for more staff and space. From 2003, additional premises next to the headquarter in Lyon had to be rented at high cost. The need grew year by year and more additional space had to be rented. As the fundraising for the extension of the headquarter in Lyon was not successful – as a matter of fact, due to police budget constraints an increase of the mandatory statutory contributions of member countries was out of question – the IGS opened consultations with several member countries to find an alternative solution. Finally, Singapore offered to fully fund the creation of a new INTERPOL hub with a state-of-the-art building in a prime location in the island state.

Singapore's offer to establish a second headquarter in Asia was gladly welcome by the IGS and seemed to bring about a win-win situation for both sides. On the one side, INTERPOL would both strategically and operationally strengthen its global infrastructure with a new facility in the Asia and Pacific region as well as answer the growing demand for space in Lyon. Establishing a permanent presence in the region would consider that the global centre of gravity – from a demographic, economic and decisional point of view – was shifting more and more rapidly towards Asia and Pacific, while at the same time the region still had significant potential for development in international police cooperation. The new facility, however, would also expand the scope of cooperation to other increasingly complex (technology-based) crime challenges such as cybercrime.

On the other side, Singapore had a high interest in strategic terms to bring INTERPOL in and establish an innovation hub for law enforcement worldwide. This because it was already a global hub for both the security industry as well as research institutions with an outstandingly developed high-tech infrastructure in place. The additional hub would further enhance Singapore's perception as a dynamic country with a strong culture of innovation. The win-win situation for both sides became a vision by the end of the 2000s.

In 2010, the Executive Committee discussed and finally unanimously endorsed the proposal for the creation of the IGCI in Singapore. It highlighted that the new facility would '*complement and support*' the IGS in Lyon which would '*remain the organisation's world headquarters*'. The key elements would include innovative research and development to enhance forensics and database capabilities, particularly in the identification of crimes and criminals, technology

and innovation-based police training and capacity building, as well as enhanced capacity to provide 24/7 operational support to police across time zones and distances with greater mobility (URL3).

To conclude, the vision for the IGCI was to become a second headquarter for the IGS, a cutting-edge research and development facility for police worldwide, as well as an Asian hub for international police cooperation.

A New INTERPOL Facility in Singapore

In November 2010, the General Assembly in Doha, Qatar, adopted resolution AG-2010-RES-08 calling for the establishment of the IGCI in Singapore (URL4). The resolution highlights the *'need for all of our member countries to benefit from cutting edge research and development on the identification of crimes and criminals, innovation-based capacity building and provision of 24/7 operational police support to strengthen policing worldwide to better deal with future challenges'* but also the importance *'for the Organisation to be able to continue to evolve without increasing mandatory statutory contributions of member countries'*. The General Assembly made a clear point on the commitment that the funding for the establishment of the new facility would not result in any increase of the member countries' mandatory statutory contributions. Finally, the resolution authorised the signing of the Agreement between INTERPOL and the Government of the Republic of Singapore regarding the establishment of the IGCI in Singapore – the Headquarters Agreement on which both sides agreed within a short period of time.

The IGCI Working Group

In accordance with resolution AG-2010-RES-08 a working group (IGCI WG) was established in which member country representatives were invited to participate in the process of the IGCI creation and provide necessary input. The IGCI WG held several meetings during the period 2011–2014. It presented progress reports with recommendations to the Executive Committee in work areas of the IGCI in 2012 and 2013 as well as a full report with recommendations which was endorsed by the General Assembly in Monaco in 2014. Furthermore, cybercrime was added to INTERPOL's strategic framework.

Within the IGCI WG the Operational Expert Group on Cybercrime supported the further development of the INTERPOL Digital Crime Centre, one of the key features of the new facility. As a result, the General Assembly in Monaco

adopted resolution AG-2014-RES-04 on the creation of the INTERPOL Global Cybercrime Expert Group ([URL5](#)).

The Establishment of the IGCI

In September 2012, the IGS set up the Transition Support Office (TSO) in Singapore to push forward the establishment of the IGCI. The mandate of the TSO focused on the implementation of the Headquarters Agreement between INTERPOL and Singapore, as well as on the coordination of the IGCI building construction.

As for the implementation of the Headquarters Agreement, it turned out soon that there were different conceptions on both sides regarding the legal implications of the Agreement's provisions. However, to meet INTERPOL standards the implementation of certain articles of the agreement would have even required amendments to Singapore's legal framework which was difficult to achieve. In fact, INTERPOL was the first inter-governmental organisation to have a headquarters agreement with Singapore. Hence, this was a challenging process for both sides with a few issues remaining unsolved.

The construction of the IGCI building in a prime location opposite the US Embassy around the corner of the Singapore Botanic Gardens started in January 2013. From the beginning, the TSO coordinated the alignment of INTERPOL demands in terms of technical infrastructure, security features and interior design with Singapore's construction project. To fulfil the IGS requirements, initial funds allocated to the project from Singapore were not sufficient. In the end, the budget was topped up by INTERPOL, certain expectations of the IGS were downgraded and certain features in the building such as the IT infrastructure were co-funded by public-private partnerships.

The lessons learned of the experience both with the Headquarters Agreement as well as the building construction can be summed up that time, communication, and consequently agreement between INTERPOL and Singapore on all details – including the funding – were crucial from the very beginning of the project and even in the project conception phase. At any rate, things had to continue to run their course.

The IGCI Opening and its Main Features

In September 2014, Singapore officially handed the IGCI building over to the IGS. Finally, the TSO – which had grown from 3 to 30 staff between 2012 and

2014 – was able to move into the new premises. Remarkably, the building had received the Green Mark Platinum Award thanks to conforming to the highest environmental standards ([URL6](#)).

In April 2015, the IGCI was officially inaugurated in the presence of several ministers of member countries from different regions. Described as a cutting-edge research and development facility for the identification of crimes and criminals, innovative training, operational support, and partnerships, the IGCI – as one of four Executive Directorates within the IGS – set out to deliver:

- Support in cybercrime investigations as well as digital forensics;
- Strategic trend analyses in innovation, research, and digital security;
- Police capacity building and training;
- Operational support with global outreach around the clock; as well as
- Partnerships with the private sector and academia to the benefit of law enforcement.

The IGCI's state-of-the-art facilities such as the Cyber Fusion Centre, the Cyber Research and Innovation Centre, and the Digital Forensics Laboratory were designed to support the member countries with cybercrime investigations and to enhance cybersecurity capabilities. The Cyber Fusion Centre coordinates and supports international operations against cybercriminals. It assists member countries in tracking down cybercriminals and cybercrime networks operating across borders through real-time monitoring and threat analysis. The Cyber Research and Innovation Centre conducts research and development activities to identify technological advancements and evolving cyber threats. The Digital Forensics Laboratory provides specific forensic support and assists with building national digital forensics capacity.

As for police capacity building and training, the IGCI offers training programmes and capacity-building initiatives to law enforcement personnel from around the world. These programmes aim to enhance their knowledge and skills in dealing with cybercrime and cyber threats. The IGCI premises have numerous training spaces and meeting rooms. From the beginning, trainings were delivered related to new urgent crime challenges such as cryptocurrencies, darknet, and malware.

As for operational support, a third Command and Coordination Centre (CCC) in addition to the first one in Lyon (from 2003) and the second one in Buenos Aires (from 2011) was set up in Singapore's IGCI in 2015. This to provide real-time support in multiple languages for any member country requiring urgent assistance ([URL7](#)). The CCC in Singapore completed the project called '*Follow the sun*' in service delivery, as with the 3 CCCs operating only day shifts

must be provided. The CCC is also supporting member countries with its teams deployed for INTERPOL Major Events such as the FIFA World Cup 2022 (Qatar), the G7 2023 (Japan) or the Singapore Formula 1 Grand Prix as well as with Incident Response Teams in case of sudden major terrorist attacks or natural/transportation disasters with multination's casualties.

FIFA and the IGCI

In June 2015, INTERPOL announced the suspension of its agreement with FIFA following investigations into corruption ([URL8](#)). This concluded an agreement of 2011 by which INTERPOL had received a donation from FIFA worth 20 million Euros to create an Integrity in Sport programme – with a specific focus on the fight against match-fixing – for a period of 10 years. Subsequently, INTERPOL returned 2.9 million Euros which remained unspent from the donation. The decision had a direct impact on the IGCI as basically a whole floor of its building was dedicated to the Integrity in Sport programme within the Capacity Building and Training Directorate. Consequently, due to lack of financial resources the contracts of several staff had to be terminated. This was a setback for the IGCI just two months after its inauguration.

The Further Development of the IGCI

The experience with FIFA was also a setback for INTERPOL's general policy related to partnerships with public and private entities and has contributed to a more prudent approach. This resulted in the development of a transparent due diligence framework defining the criteria for becoming an INTERPOL partner, particularly strict when external funding was involved ([URL9](#)).

The original vision for the IGCI was to become a global platform for networking and information exchange between actors confronted with security challenges and actors developing innovative solutions for such challenges. For this purpose, there was even the concept of a permanent showcase in the IGCI ground floor which could not be realised due to several obstacles.

Beyond the IGCI premises, however, there was a concept which could materialise: INTERPOL World, an event owned by INTERPOL but organised by an external agency in Singapore. It combined a congress with an expo aiming at creating a platform for the security industry, law enforcement and government agencies to develop closer partnerships and innovative security initiatives.

The first edition took place in April 2015 – in the margins of the IGCI inauguration – and brought together more than 8,000 participants, 200 companies from 30 countries and law enforcement from across the globe. The Congress focused on 4 emerging security challenges: border management, cybercrime, safe cities, and supply chain management ([URL10](#)). A second and a third edition of INTERPOL World were conducted in 2017 ([URL11](#)) and 2019 ([URL12](#)).

The IGCI as a Conference Venue

Since its opening in 2015, the IGCI has hosted several conferences and meetings. Just to name a few: the Europol-INTERPOL Cybercrime Conference (2016, 2018), a unique Regional Police Organizations gathering (2016), an Additional Session of the Executive Committee (2022), the INTERPOL Digital Security Challenge (2016), the INTERPOL Data Protection Officer Conference (2023), as well as various expert meetings related to topics such as disaster victim identification, child sexual abuse, leadership for women in law enforcement, or major event security. Furthermore, the IGCI organised the 18th Heads of NCB² Conference and the Police Science Congress at a huge conference centre in Singapore in June 2023.

My Secondment to Singapore

In early 2011, my story with INTERPOL began when I was appointed as new head of the INTERPOL Bureau in Austria's Criminal Intelligence Service (NCB Vienna). I assumed responsibility for the strategic, organisational, legal as well as administrative coordination of my country's membership in INTERPOL. For the following 3 ½ years, I represented Austria in various bodies and conferences related to international police cooperation, among others in the IGCI WG from 2011 to 2014.

As host and founding country of INTERPOL in 1923, Austria has always demonstrated its commitment to the cooperation in the organisation's framework. In this light, Austria was also willing to contribute resources to the historic establishment of the new facility in Singapore. It materialised in the secondment of a national expert. Subsequently, I was encouraged to apply for a senior

2 NCB stands for National Central Bureau, the single point of contact in each INTERPOL member country.

position, and after a successful application procedure, I was recruited as Assistant Director for Strategic Partnerships for the secondment period 2014–2017. In this function, I developed an external relations network of INTERPOL's new presence in Asia which included outreach to the diplomatic community, international organisations, the security industry, and the research community. This to identify potential areas of cooperation in the fight against high-tech enabled crime such as cybercrime as well as in the promotion of innovative solutions for police. Furthermore, I aligned the compatibility of the INTERPOL World editions in 2015 and 2017 with INTERPOL's public image in close cooperation with the event organising agency. Finally, I was also enabled to provide advice to the IGS on issues related to strategy, ethics and due diligence as well as to support the IGCI Executive Office with the admission procedures of senior personnel seconded by member countries.

In retrospect, my 3 years at the IGCI have allowed me to gain very good insights into both the inner workings and the management of the organisation.

Vision and Reality

At the very beginning, the vision for the IGCI was to become a second headquarter for the IGS, a cutting-edge research and development facility for police worldwide, as well as an Asian hub for international police cooperation. Has this vision turned into reality?

I would say, although considerable progress has been made, the full realisation of the original vision still lies in the future. Today, the IGCI comprises around 125 staff (out of more than 1,000 staff of the IGS in total) from 45 member countries. In 2019, the Executive Directorate IGCI was replaced by the new Executive Directorate for Technology and Innovation, the units in IGCI were fragmented between Lyon and Singapore. Hence, overall INTERPOL's centre of gravity is definitely still in Lyon. To realise the original vision, INTERPOL's member countries would have to encourage the implementation of 3 key factors: a profound agreement on the provisions of the Headquarters Agreement between INTERPOL and Singapore, sufficient financial resources to guarantee that the IGCI meets all demands of the membership, and a clear commitment of the organisation that Asia should become INTERPOL's second epicentre next to Europe.

As of 2023, a lot has been achieved with the IGCI in Singapore of which INTERPOL can be proud of. This applies especially to the delivery of cyber- and innovation-related services as well as to the boost for the international

police cooperation in the Asia and Pacific region. Nonetheless, the IGCI's full potential is yet to be seen.

My Last Visit to Singapore

After 1990, I visited Singapore again in 2012. Several breathtaking architectural changes had created a new Singapore skyline with skyscrapers such as the iconic Marina Bay Sands resort. Even after my secondment I used to visit Singapore once per year... After the travel restrictions due to the Covid pandemic had been lifted I was able to return over the Easter weekend 2023. Although I had only a layover of less than 48 hours, I managed to walk through my beloved magnificent Singapore Botanic Gardens as well as to pass by the IGCI building. I could see that facade renovation works were ongoing, 9 years after the construction completion, a fact owed to the climatic conditions in this part of the world. The surrounding area being as neat as before the most striking change was the brand new MRT station 'Napier' just a few steps from the IGCI's entrance gate. MRT stands for Mass Rapid Transit system and is Singapore's principal mode of railway transportation. The number of cars on the island is limited and most people use the MRT, buses or taxis to move around. It's overwhelming to see how fast Singapore has continuously been extending the MRT network to the convenience of the people. One of many examples for the island state performing well when it comes to eco-friendly development as well as smart solutions. Singapore is and remains a fascinating place, a peaceful multi-ethnic society with a high standard of living, a welcoming country for expats, a police-friendly environment, and finally a high-tech laboratory for the future – a future with the IGCI as a flagship for international police cooperation in the fight against 21st century crime waiting to realise its full potential.

Online links in the article

URL1: *General Secretariat*. <https://www.interpol.int/Who-we-are/General-Secretariat>

URL2: *Interpol 100 – Key Dates*. <https://www.interpol.int/Who-we-are/INTERPOL-100/Key-dates>

URL3: *INTERPOL Global Complex in Singapore to enhance and strengthen policing worldwide*. <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2010/INTERPOL-Global-Complex-in-Singapore-to-enhance-and-strengthen-policing-worldwide>

URL4: *Establishment of the INTERPOL Global Complex in Singapore*. <https://www.interpol.int/content/download/6047/file/AG-2010-79-RES-08%20-%20Establishment%20of%20the%20INTERPOL%20Global%20Complex%20in%20Singapore%20.pdf>

- URL5: *Creation of the INTERPOL Global Cybercrime Expert Group (GCEG)*. <https://www.interpol.int/content/download/5957/file/AG-2014-83-RES-04%20-%20Creation%20of%20the%20INTERPOL%20Global%20Cybercrime%20Expert%20Group%20%28GCEG%29.pdf>
- URL6: *INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation opens its doors*. <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2014/INTERPOL-Global-Complex-for-Innovation-opens-its-doors>
- URL7: *Command and Coordination Centre*. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Command-and-Coordination-Centre>
- URL8: *INTERPOL suspends agreement with FIFA*. <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2015/INTERPOL-suspends-agreement-with-FIFA>
- URL9: *How to become a partner*. <https://www.interpol.int/Our-partners/How-to-become-a-partner>
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Reference of the article according to APA regulation

Herko, T. (2023). The INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation in Singapore: A Personal Retrospective. *Belügyi Szemle*, 71(SI3), 45–55. <https://doi.org/10.38146/BSZ.SPEC.2023.3.4>