



SCHOLAR EYE

CSS & PMS EXAM PREPARATION

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS SERIES

INTERPOL

The International Criminal Police Organization —
Complete Reference Guide

A comprehensive, exam-focused study guide covering INTERPOL's history, structure, membership, notice system, databases, operations, and role in Pakistan — built specifically for CSS & PMS aspirants.

HISTORY

STRUCTURE

RED NOTICES

PAKISTAN & NCB

EXAM MCQs

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each section closes with an **Exam Focus** box highlighting the facts most frequently tested in CSS and PMS current affairs, international relations, and general knowledge papers. Read actively — note dates, numbers, and terminology precisely.

01 Introduction & Overview

The **International Criminal Police Organization**, universally known by its telegraphic address **INTERPOL**, is the world's largest international police organization. It is an inter-governmental body that enables police forces of member countries to cooperate with one another even where normal diplomatic relations do not exist between their governments. INTERPOL itself does not conduct arrests or investigations; rather, it acts as a global platform for information-sharing, coordination, and operational support among national police forces.

1923

Year Founded

196

Member Countries

Lyon

Headquarters, France

With 196 member countries, INTERPOL ranks second only to the United Nations in terms of international membership, making it a truly global institution. Its full official name is the **International Criminal Police Organization**, and it operates as an inter-governmental organization rather than a supranational police force — meaning it has no agents with power of arrest and must work through each country's own law enforcement apparatus.

What INTERPOL Is — and Is Not

A common misconception, reinforced by films and television, portrays INTERPOL as a squad of international detectives chasing criminals across borders. In reality, INTERPOL is best understood as a **service organization**: it maintains secure communication channels, criminal databases, and coordination mechanisms that empower national police to do their jobs more effectively across borders.

- INTERPOL **does not** have its own investigators who make arrests abroad.

- INTERPOL **does not** issue international arrest warrants in the legal sense — a Red Notice is a request, not a warrant.
- INTERPOL **does** operate a secure global police communications system (I-24/7).
- INTERPOL **does** maintain criminal databases accessible to member states.
- INTERPOL **does** provide training, forensic support, and operational coordination.

"We do not take over the activities of national law enforcement but rather support and augment them." — paraphrased from INTERPOL leadership on the organization's role.

EXAM FOCUS

Q: Is INTERPOL a supranational police force? **A:** No — it is a coordinating and information-sharing body; it has no independent power of arrest.

Full name: International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL is the registered telegraphic/common name).

02

History & Founding

INTERPOL's origins trace back to a period of rising cross-border crime and rapidly expanding rail and postal transit networks across Europe in the early twentieth century, which made it easier for criminals to escape national jurisdictions. This prompted police officials from several countries to explore formal cooperation.

Timeline of Key Milestones

- 1914** The First International Criminal Police Congress is held in Monaco, laying early conceptual groundwork for police cooperation.
- 1923** The **International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC)** — INTERPOL's forerunner — is formally established in Vienna, Austria, with 20 founding member countries.
- 1946** The Commission is reconstituted after being disrupted and misused during the Second World War; headquarters move to Paris, France.
- 1956** A new modern constitution is adopted and the organization formally adopts the name **International Criminal Police Organization – INTERPOL**.
- 1972** A Headquarters Agreement with France gives INTERPOL formal status as an international organization.
- 1989** Headquarters relocate to **Lyon, France**, where the General Secretariat remains today.
- 2015** The INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation (IGCI) opens in **Singapore**, extending research and cybercrime capabilities into the Asia-Pacific region.
- 2023** **Palau** becomes the 196th member country, marking INTERPOL's centenary year (100 years since its 1923 founding).
- 2024** **Valdecy Urquiza** of Brazil is elected Secretary General, becoming the first person from outside Europe or North America to lead the organization.

Founding Members

The original member countries in 1923 included Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United States, and Yugoslavia,

among others — a predominantly European founding base that later expanded to nearly every country on Earth.

EXAM FOCUS

Founded: 1923, Vienna (as the International Criminal Police Commission).

Renamed: INTERPOL, 1956.

HQ moved to Lyon: 1989.

100th anniversary: 2023 — also the year membership reached 196 with Palau's accession.

03 Aims, Mandate & Core Functions

INTERPOL's constitution defines its purpose as promoting the widest possible mutual assistance between criminal police authorities, and establishing institutions likely to contribute to the prevention and suppression of international crime — all within the limits of the laws of each member country and in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 3 of its constitution explicitly forbids the organization from undertaking activities of a political, military, religious, or racial character.

Three Global Programmes

INTERPOL organizes its policing work under three overarching global programmes, each coordinating specialized units at the General Secretariat:

1. **Counter-Terrorism** — tracking foreign terrorist fighters, terrorism financing, and radicalization threats.
2. **Organized & Emerging Crime** — covering human trafficking, drug trafficking, environmental crime, firearms trafficking, and illicit goods.
3. **Cybercrime** — combating ransomware, online fraud, business email compromise, and other digitally enabled crimes.

Core Service Areas

- **Secure global police communication** via the I-24/7 network linking National Central Bureaus.
- **Operational data services** — criminal databases on individuals, stolen property, and documents.
- **Operational police support** — on-the-ground assistance during major crises, disasters, or events.

- **Training and capacity building** for member country law enforcement agencies.

ARTICLE 3 — POLITICAL NEUTRALITY

INTERPOL is constitutionally barred from intervening in matters of a political, military, religious, or racial character. This provision is central to understanding debates over the misuse of Red Notices for political purposes (see Section 09).

EXAM FOCUS

Three global programmes: Counter-Terrorism, Organized & Emerging Crime, Cybercrime.

Constitutional restriction: Article 3 — no political, military, religious, or racial activity.

04 Organizational Structure

INTERPOL's governance rests on four principal bodies, each with a distinct role in decision-making, oversight, and day-to-day operations.

1. The General Assembly

INTERPOL's **supreme governing body**, comprising delegates from all member countries. It meets once a year to set policy, approve the budget, elect the President and Executive Committee members, and decide on major resolutions. Each member country normally has one vote, regardless of size or population.

2. The Executive Committee

A supervisory body of **13 members** elected by the General Assembly, made up of the President, three Vice-Presidents, and nine delegates, each representing a different world region to ensure geographic balance. It oversees implementation of Assembly decisions and supervises the Secretary General's administration.

3. The General Secretariat

The organization's **operational headquarters**, based in Lyon, France, and run day-to-day by the **Secretary General**. It coordinates INTERPOL's activities around the clock, staffed by both police officers and civilian experts seconded or recruited from member countries. It also maintains a Global Complex for Innovation in Singapore and several regional and liaison offices worldwide.

4. National Central Bureaus (NCBs)

Every member country designates an **NCB** — typically housed within its main police or interior ministry — as the country's central point of contact with the General

Secretariat and with other member countries' bureaus. NCBs are staffed entirely by that country's own law enforcement personnel.

Position	Role
President	Chairs the General Assembly and Executive Committee meetings; largely a ceremonial/oversight role, elected for a four-year term.
Secretary General	Chief administrative officer; runs daily operations of the General Secretariat; appointed by the General Assembly for a five-year renewable term.
Executive Committee	13 members providing oversight between Assembly sessions.
NCB Head	Senior police official managing each country's liaison point with INTERPOL.

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Supreme body: General Assembly (meets annually, one vote per country).

Executive Committee: 13 members — President + 3 Vice-Presidents + 9 regional delegates.

Current Secretary General: Valdecy Urquiza (Brazil), since November 2024.

Secretary General term: Five years, renewable once.

05 Membership & Global Reach

INTERPOL's membership has grown continuously since its founding: from 20 founding members in 1923, to 50 by 1955 as the organization rebuilt after the Second World War, 100 by 1967, 150 by 1989, and its current total of **196 member countries**, reached in 2023 with the accession of Palau. This makes INTERPOL larger in membership than the United Nations lacks only a handful of the UN's 193 members while including additional territories and entities.

Regional Structure

To reflect the diversity of crime challenges across regions, INTERPOL organizes regional conferences and maintains regional bureaus across Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East/North Africa, alongside its Singapore-based Global Complex for Innovation serving the Asia-Pacific region.

20 → 196

Members, 1923 to Present

2nd

Largest Int'l Body After UN
(by membership)

5

Continents Represented

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Current membership: 196 countries.

196th member: Palau, joined November 2023.

Often confused with: UN membership (193) — INTERPOL has more members than the UN.

06

The INTERPOL Notice System

INTERPOL Notices are international requests for cooperation or alerts, allowing police in member countries to share critical crime-related information. They are colour-coded by purpose. A notice is issued at the request of a member country's NCB (or an authorized international tribunal) and reviewed by INTERPOL's Notices and Diffusions Task Force for compliance with the organization's constitution before publication.

Notice	Purpose
 Red Notice	Locate and provisionally arrest a wanted person pending extradition; the most well-known notice type. <i>Not a legal arrest warrant.</i>
 Yellow Notice	Help locate missing persons, often minors, or help identify persons unable to identify themselves.
 Blue Notice	Collect additional information about a person's identity, location, or activities in relation to a crime.
 Black Notice	Seek information on unidentified bodies.
 Green Notice	Provide warnings and intelligence about persons who have committed criminal offences and are likely to repeat these crimes in other countries.
 Orange Notice	Warn of an event, person, object, or process representing a serious imminent threat to public safety.
 Purple Notice	Seek or provide information on <i>modi operandi</i> , objects, devices, and concealment methods used by criminals.
 UN Special Notice	Issued jointly with the UN Security Council for groups and individuals subject to UN sanctions (e.g., relating to Al-Qaida and ISIL).

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

A Red Notice is **not an international arrest warrant**. It is a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition — actual arrest depends entirely on the domestic law of the country where the person is found.

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Total notice types: 8 (Red, Yellow, Blue, Black, Green, Orange, Purple, UN Special).

Most famous: Red Notice — request for provisional arrest, not a warrant.

Reviewing body: Notices and Diffusions Task Force at the General Secretariat.

07

Databases & Information Systems

INTERPOL's information-sharing capability rests on a network of secure databases, accessible in real time to NCBs and authorized officers through the **I-24/7** global police communications system. These databases collectively hold records spanning identity documents, biometric data, and criminal patterns.

Major Databases

- **Nominal Data** — records on known criminals and suspects.
- **Fingerprints & DNA Profiles** — biometric identification data shared by member states.
- **Facial Recognition (Face Database)** — images used to identify suspects and unidentified persons.
- **Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD)** — checked billions of times a year at borders worldwide.
- **Stolen Motor Vehicles** — a global database used to combat vehicle theft and trafficking.
- **I-Familia** — uses family DNA to help identify missing persons, launched in 2021.
- **ID-ART** — a mobile app and database logging stolen and looted works of art.
- **Firearms Reference Table & iARMS** — tracking illicit firearms trafficking.

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Communication backbone: I-24/7 secure global police network.

Newer databases (2021): I-Familia (missing persons via family DNA) and ID-ART (stolen art).

SLTD database: Stolen and Lost Travel Documents — critical for border security checks.

08

Global Programmes & Major Operations

Beyond notices and databases, INTERPOL coordinates large-scale, time-bound operations that bring together police forces from dozens of countries simultaneously to target specific categories of transnational crime.

Notable Named Operations

- **Operation Pangea** — targets the online sale of counterfeit and illicit medicines and medical products worldwide.
- **Operation INFRA-RED** — focused on combating human trafficking and child sexual exploitation.
- **Operation Sunbird** — centred on environmental crimes such as illegal logging and wildlife trafficking.

INTERPOL has also intensified cybercrime coordination in recent years, including large-scale takedowns of criminal server infrastructure used for online fraud and ransomware, often carried out jointly with major technology companies and national cyber units.

Forensic & Specialized Support

INTERPOL maintains specialized units for disaster victim identification (DVI), forensic science support, and crisis response, deploying Incident Response Teams to member countries facing major security events, natural disasters, or public health emergencies upon request.

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Operation Pangea: Counterfeit/illicit medicines.

Operation INFRA-RED: Human trafficking and child exploitation.

Operation Sunbird: Environmental crime, illegal logging & wildlife trafficking.

09

Criticism & Controversies

Despite its constitutional prohibition on political activity, INTERPOL has faced sustained criticism over the potential misuse of its notice system — particularly Red Notices and "diffusions" — by some member states seeking to pursue political dissidents, journalists, or activists abroad under the guise of ordinary criminal investigations. This phenomenon is frequently discussed under the term **"transnational repression."**

Reforms & Legal Responses

- INTERPOL created a specialized **Notices and Diffusions Task Force** to screen requests more rigorously before publication.
- A revised **Statute for the Commission for the Control of INTERPOL's Files (CCF)** allows individuals to challenge and seek deletion of Notices they believe are politically motivated.
- The **US National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2022** prohibits U.S. agencies from extraditing anyone based solely on an INTERPOL Red Notice or diffusion, and mandates periodic reporting to Congress on misuse.

Presidential Controversy

INTERPOL's leadership has itself drawn scrutiny — for instance, the election of a President in 2021 who later faced investigation abroad over allegations of torture and arbitrary detention sparked debate about vetting standards for the organization's top officials.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR EXAMS

Questions on INTERPOL frequently probe the tension between its stated political neutrality (Article 3) and real-world allegations of misuse — a recurring current affairs and international relations theme.

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Key term: "Transnational repression" — using Red Notices to target dissidents abroad.

Oversight body: Commission for the Control of INTERPOL's Files (CCF).

10

INTERPOL & Pakistan

Pakistan is a long-standing member of INTERPOL, and its National Central Bureau (NCB) functions within the country's law enforcement framework to coordinate international police cooperation, extradition-related requests, and cross-border crime investigations.

NCB Pakistan

Pakistan's National Central Bureau operates under the **Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)**, which serves as the country's central liaison point with INTERPOL's General Secretariat and with other member countries' bureaus. It handles matters such as processing Red Notice requests for fugitives, coordinating on human trafficking and cybercrime cases, and facilitating information exchange on stolen vehicles, documents, and wanted persons.

Relevance for CSS/PMS Aspirants

Questions relating to INTERPOL and Pakistan commonly arise in current affairs and international relations papers, especially around: high-profile Red Notice cases involving Pakistani nationals, Pakistan's cooperation with INTERPOL on counter-terrorism and anti-narcotics operations, and the FIA's institutional role as the country's NCB.

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Pakistan's NCB is housed within: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

Key cooperation areas: Extradition requests, human trafficking, cybercrime, counter-terrorism.

11

Key Facts, Figures & Exam Notes

Item	Detail
Full Name	International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)
Founded	1923, Vienna (as International Criminal Police Commission)
Renamed INTERPOL	1956
Headquarters	Lyon, France (General Secretariat)
Secondary Hub	INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation, Singapore
Membership	196 member countries (2nd largest after the UN by membership)
196th Member	Palau (November 2023)
Supreme Body	General Assembly (meets annually)
Executive Committee	13 members (President + 3 VPs + 9 regional delegates)
Current Secretary General	Valdecy Urquiza (Brazil), since Nov 2024
Secretary General Term	5 years, renewable once
Number of Notice Types	8 (Red, Yellow, Blue, Black, Green, Orange, Purple, UN Special)
Global Communication Network	I-24/7
Founding Constraint	Article 3 — bars political, military, religious, racial activity
Pakistan's NCB	Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)
Centenary Year	2023 (100 years since 1923 founding)

One-Line Answers Frequently Asked

- **Is a Red Notice an arrest warrant?** No — it is a request to locate and provisionally arrest.
- **Who chairs the General Assembly?** The INTERPOL President.
- **Who runs daily operations?** The Secretary General, via the General Secretariat.
- **What is an NCB?** National Central Bureau — each country's liaison office with INTERPOL.
- **What database tracks stolen travel documents?** SLTD (Stolen and Lost Travel Documents).

REVISION TIP

For CSS/PMS papers, focus on precise numbers (196 members, 1923 founding, 8 notice types), correct terminology (NCB, General Secretariat, CCF), and the current Secretary General's name — these are the details examiners test most directly.

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