

**Stolen passports in Interpol database but no one checked**  
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The International Criminal Police Organisation, better known as Interpol, has confirmed that two passports recorded as lost or stolen in its database were used by passengers on board the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370.

Complaining on the lack of proactive security measures by a majority of countries, the agency said no checks of its Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) database had been made pertaining to the stolen Austrian and Italian passports between the time that they were stolen in Thailand and the departure of flight MH370.

"While it is too soon to speculate about any connection between these stolen passports and the missing plane, it is clearly of great concern that any passenger was able to board an international flight using a stolen passport listed in Interpol's databases," Interpol secretary-general Ronald Noble said in a statement released on Sunday.

He added that the agency was also "examining additional suspect passports" on the flight's manifest as a precaution.

Stressing that the primary concern now is finding out the cause of flight MH370's disappearance, Noble said that the Lyon-based international police agency is making all resources available to help the relevant authorities.

"In the meantime, our thoughts and prayers are with the families, loved ones and friends of the 239 passengers and crew on board," he added.

Noble, however, had some harsh words for the majority of countries for their lackadaisical attitude towards security at national borders and airports.

"This is a situation we had hoped never to see. For years Interpol has asked why should countries wait for a tragedy to put prudent security measures in place at borders and boarding gates," he said.

"Now, we have a real case where the world is speculating whether the stolen passport holders were terrorists, while Interpol is asking why only a handful of countries worldwide are taking care to make sure that persons possessing stolen passports are not boarding international flights," Noble added.

According to Interpol, last year, passengers were able to board planes more than a billion times without having their passports screened against Interpol's databases.

Interpol created its SLTD database following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack in New York, to help countries secure their borders and protect their citizens from terrorists and other dangerous criminals known to use fraudulent travel documents.

The database has since grown from a few thousand passports and searches, to more than 40 million entries and more than 800 million searches per year, averaging 60,000 hits.

The United States is the most active user of the database, making more than 250 million searches annually, while the United Kingdom comes in second, checking the database more than 120 million times. The United Arab Emirates too has made a search of the database more than 50 million times in the past year, according to Interpol.

Noble lamented that only a few member countries are systematically checking against Interpol's databases to determine whether a passenger is using a stolen or lost travel document to board a plane.

"If Malaysia Airlines had checked the passport details of prospective passengers against Interpol's database, then we would not have to speculate whether stolen passports were used by terrorists to board MH370. We would know that stolen passports were not used by any of the passengers to board that flight.

"For the sake of innocent passengers who go through invasive security measures prior to boarding flights in order to get to their destination safely, I sincerely hope that governments and airlines worldwide will learn from the tragedy of missing flight MH370 and start to screen all passengers' passports prior to allowing them to board flights.

"Doing so will indeed take us a step closer to ensuring safer travel," said the head of Interpol. – March 9, 2014.

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