

Enhancing Information Sharing through Integrated Justice and Interoperability Solutions

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Good afternoon and welcome. It is my pleasure to be here today. Over the next few minutes, I will provide you with the Canadian perspective on how interoperability solutions will act as a strong counter-terrorism tool, increasing public safety and security.

Canada and the United States share a common interest and a common goal: improving public safety and security within our borders. And today I'd like to focus on how "integrating justice information" will help to achieve this goal, and on how the building blocks we are putting in place today will serve as the foundation for a broader public safety initiative of full Interoperability. Our starting point is the premise that information is the lifeblood of increased public safety and security.

Let me begin by asking you to imagine a day, in the not-too-distant future, when law enforcement officials are linked electronically to all the information available across the many agencies responsible for public safety. Just think of what it will mean for them to be able to go on-line and access complete information on a criminal or terrorist.

Or when the many business transactions between agencies, and jurisdictions are done electronically without duplicate data entry and reams of paper.

Imagine a network that could put this kind of information power in the hands of law enforcement officials. Well, the Canadian government is committed to making such a vision a reality and has undertaken to create such a network. It is called the Canada Public Safety Information Network – CPSIN for short.

And creating this Network is my job. That is why I am here today as a representative of the Department of the Solicitor General of Canada, which is the lead agency for the Canada's push towards integration and better information sharing.

Simply put, information sharing is a key factor in Canada's efforts to combat crime of every kind, including terrorism.

By providing those working to create safer communities and secure borders with the right information, at the right time, we are in a better position to manage the risk and counter the threat.

This shared information must include criminal history, aliases, known associates, intelligence, biometrics and so on.

The fact that this does not already fully take place speaks volumes about the complexity of the issues, be they organizational, geographic, technological, cultural, legislative, and so on. To my knowledge, nowhere in the world does a fully integrated system exist, although some successes are starting to be realized.

In the current reality, we know that the consequences of not having complete information have become too great a risk.

And yet, in democratic societies such as ours, the pressures under which public safety officials work have only increased. As an example, a Customs Inspector at Pearson International Airport in Toronto has some 30 seconds to make a key decision. This does not leave much margin for information disconnects.

My focus for today is to outline Canada's action and commitment to deliver a central piece of the solution—an integrated criminal justice information network, as a foundation for security and public safety.

And just to make sure we are all on the same page, let me pose the question, what is integrated justice information?

While a textbook definition for integration suggests “a unified whole”, the common notion of integrated justice information refers to the capability to share critical information at key decision points from law enforcement to courts to corrections, involving some 200 discrete business processes and hundreds of partner agencies, within Canada alone.

Integrated Justice Information is clearly about modernizing systems and getting partners to share. It is also an opportunity to revolutionize the way they work together—the way criminals are tracked, captured, processed, charged, prosecuted, incarcerated, paroled, and pardoned.

It's about giving the right tools, the right information at the right time to front-line law enforcement officials. It's about laying the foundation for the eventual interoperability of all public safety workers.

And in developing this network to protect Canadians, we very much see it as an opportunity to increase the speed of information transfer beyond boundaries and allowing our two countries to work together, keeping citizens safe.

Since last year's conference in British Columbia, many steps have been taken to increase our cross-border cooperation, including the recent establishment of an Interoperability Sub-Group of the Canada-U.S. Cross Border Crime Forum. This Sub-Group allows for both countries to explore together ways of achieving greater interoperability of criminal justice information systems, facilitating effective and timely exchanges among law enforcement and justice communities. And it will help ensure that our two countries are moving in the same direction.

Every province in Canada, and I believe nearly every State in America, is planning or pursuing Integration initiatives.

The Canadian approach to integration is focused on bridging information gaps through partnerships between the several Departments and Agencies, first at the federal level and then with the Provinces and Municipalities. It is a pragmatic approach that is dictated by the legal and political landscape in which we work, and the realities of limited funding.

We find our environment very complex. I can't imagine how much more challenging these same issues must be in the U.S., given, for example, that you have some 18,500 police departments compared to our 300.

Even so, while experiences, approaches and solutions may vary; the issues are common, the goal is common.

Canada is working hard at closing the information gaps, and moving towards true interoperability. And integrating Justice Information is a first step towards the future of information sharing. Towards CPSIN—the Canada Public Safety Information Network. It is not simply a “nice to have” but an imperative.

So, what does this mean in practical terms for the Canadian government, which wishes to share information among officials in the interests of public safety?

The federal government has first committed to getting its own house in order recognizing that federal involvement in a given criminal case is very much dependent on the details of the situation at hand.

When you consider that an individual accused of murder in, say, the rural areas of the province of British Columbia would be arrested by a national police force working under provincial contract, and charged with a federal offence.

And yet, the individual would be tried in a provincial court, by a provincial Crown attorney, likely before a federally appointed judge.

And if found guilty and sentenced to incarceration, the sentence would be served at a federal correctional facility. This “marble cake” of jurisdictional roles is quite different from the set-up that is in the States. Nevertheless, the need for a common approach to information sharing is compelling.

Even the best technology, policy framework and business practices, will take us only so far without similar engagement by our provincial, territorial, state and municipal colleagues.

In Canada, we have already taken cooperative steps towards our common goal. One early success was the adoption last November of CPSIN Data standards by all the jurisdictions in Canada.

We know that the value of the information we collectively hold is not optimized in its use as a tool to fight crime and terror. This is at least partly because even the most trusted environment created by human beings to share information has not yet moved to a trusted electronic environment.

And creating this trusted electronic information sharing environment, whether in Canada alone, or between Canada and the United States will require a balancing of not only operational and security requirements but also between the rights of individuals and the collective right to safety and security.

Creating modernized information sharing systems, with robust query and trigger capabilities are just part of the information sharing challenge. Ensuring that this universe of information is only accessed by authorized users is another.

Crucial to all our efforts is finding the right mix of information technology and information management policy. Therefore, we are working on developing strong Identification and Authentication standards/protocols and working towards a National strategy for Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) that combines encryption and digital signature technology to protect sensitive information.

Also, we are working on a legislative roadmap and a Framework for the Management of Information, that defines a balance between the requirements of Canadian public agencies to collect, use and disclose personal information for public safety decisions and the privacy of individuals.

Striking this balance between information technology and information management policy is central to us fulfilling our mandate, which is, first, leading the modernization and enabling of federal partners towards information sharing.

And, second, to foster partnerships with our provinces and territories and ever-increasingly with you, our neighbours to the south, so that we all move in similar directions, recognizing that no single government can provide increased public safety and security on its own.

Fortunately, there is one great unifying factor—the commitment to public safety, to crime prevention, crime deterrence, and apprehension of criminals and terrorist.

Which brings us back to foundation for the future state of interoperability — the Canada Public Safety Information Network. What it really means is a national criminal justice information sharing capability.

The root of the technology problem is our legacy systems which were stand-alone systems, stove-piped such that information couldn't be easily shared.

Transactions between systems and agencies were typically paper-based, labour-intensive, and error-prone.

Worse yet, until recently, there were no standards governing how information should be managed or shared.

And finally, we have a business culture that tended to keep information inside.

Combined, this culminated in a less than exemplary overall system, as the occasional well-publicized court case tends to illustrate.

With these vulnerabilities in mind, the Government of Canada approved a Five-Year Action Plan to achieve the first generation of a Canada Public Safety Information

Network, slated for 2005. Currently, we are re-scoping this towards a broader public agenda.

Our vision of the Canada Public Safety Information Network is for a network of networks. Not a “big brother” database.

It will mean that Canada’s partners in will be connected and able to do business with each other electronically.

Our immediate partners make up a “criminal justice cluster” of nine federal departments and agencies. Our approach — for better or worse — is to work through partnerships, rather than re-organizing government.

Given the number of organizations with a stake in public safety, this list of partners is expanding over time.

The Canada Public Safety Information Network will mean common policies, common tools, and technology projects to link and share data electronically. This will mean getting the right information in real time. We are still a long way away from this today.

Central to us achieving our goal is the ability for partners to query each other’s systems in a manner that is fast, secure, and reliable.

This brings us to the centrepiece of the Canada Public Safety Information Network---the National Criminal Justice Index (NCJI). This Index is meant to provide users with the ability to identify sources of existing criminal justice or law enforcement records on an individual. This information will allow public safety officials to compile a more complete picture on a person of interest or an individual under investigation.

Canada is delivering modern case management tools for every federal player to enable them to function effectively in an interconnected environment. As one example, Corrections Canada is already piloting information sharing by allowing direct connections to their offender management system, by provincial institutions and local police forces. This is a whole new way of doing business.

The Correctional Service of Canada is working towards a situation where sentenced offenders can be processed directly from courts and between provincial jurisdictions without paper.

On another track, e are developing standards and common tools. I have already mentioned, for example, our data standards. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has also given its support for the adoption of these standards as the national standard.

People ask: Why are standards important? I asked Alistair Rondeau, the manager of our Data Standards Secretariat to look in his wallet and indicate how his name was represented on each of his cards. Understand that each card represents information in

a different computer system and that each could equally be a police incident reporting system.

An urgent request comes across the wire ... Have you had any contact with "Alistair Howard Rondeau?"

Through the magic of the Canada Public Safety Information Network, each system as it currently exists is searched using a sophisticated search engine. Without standards, the request might still be handled, but the likelihood of hits varies enormously. In this case, the citizenship system has the highest probability of answering correctly.

But from his "Petro-Points" application, application — which is like an air miles card for gasoline — it would answer using "A Rondeau" and would provide information on all "Rondeaus" who have a first name starting with "A." Not exactly what was intended. Imagine what the results would be if his surname were "Smith," or alternatively a much more complex name.

With partners agreeing to record complete information in the same format ... Surname, Given Name, Middle Name...the accuracy of data can be maintained. To date, this is but one of our success stories. And to ensure that the potential that establishing common data standards represents, we have undertaken to influence not only police organizations or Canadian governments to make the migration, but also for vendors to include the CPSIN standards in their new releases. And if it would prove to be helpful to our American colleagues, we are prepared to share our standards with you.

We are also developing a Common Offence Library to enable the migration away from independently established charge tables to a centrally maintained table allowing shared access by the entire justice community. This promotes uniformity and avoids needless duplication and erroneous charges in our 13 provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

As mentioned earlier, we are working to ensure that we have the right public policy in place to support information sharing while respecting privacy requirements. This is a non-trivial task.

And who gets in will be determined by role-based access.

The Canada Public Safety Information Network has many partners and stakeholders. Our partners are the representation of our common will.

We're starting a dialogue with U.S. officials to find the best way to make our respective systems interconnect. To build on the successes like the connection between your NCIC and CPIC, its Canadian counterpart/equivalent.

At present, we have a Charter signed by all participating Canadian federal agencies, and we are also pursuing the signing of the Joint Statement on a National Approach with our provinces and territories. We are laying the foundation for a truly national criminal justice information-sharing network, solidifying a common vision and senior commitment, and easing the path to success and to more partnerships.

Achieving Interoperability is a journey, not a destination, the first steps being integrating our justice information. The challenges are daunting. Let's look at just a few:

- Multiple user organizations
- Different legislative frameworks
- Various user perspectives
- Differing resource capacities
- Varying privacy rules
- Multiple legacy systems
- Different technological environments
- Complex IT systems

All of this without a central point of command-and-control. All the more reason to focus on consensus-building and partnership development.

But this is not something that will happen overnight. It will require a long-term commitment of all parties, including many of you in this room, if we're to succeed.

Linking our computers is a necessary but not a sufficient solution. We also have to look at ways to promote a sharing culture.

I'm reminded of something that Colonel Michael Robinson, once said when he was Director of the Michigan Department of State Police. "A top-down mandate wasn't enough to change the way tight-lipped cops have worked for decades. The best way to get them to loosen up is to lead by example."

Canadian visionary Marshall McLuhan once said "societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which they communicate than by the content of the communication."

That certainly rings true of the way that legacy systems seeped into the way we used to work with each other. Our challenge is to turn around.

We need to work together to build a sharing culture that is a reflection of this new rich data that we will be unlocking with the Canada Public Safety Information Network. Information sharing will not come easily. It will require what my colleagues in the SEARCH organization out of Sacramento, calls: "CFA squared":

- Commitment and Collaboration
- Focus and Funding
- Action and Accountability

Although, I might be inclined to add two Ts:

- Time and Tenacity.

And, although true Interoperability as a concept has been around for several years now, if I had to synthesize to one final thought, it would boil down to this:

Interoperability and Integrated Justice Information—now more than ever.

In closing, the Government of Canada is fully engaged in this great initiative.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to try to answer any of your questions.