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Unknown author

Just last week, news channel CNN published a story titled Why Singapore Has The Smartest Kids In The World, in which one expert succinctly described the cause of Singapore's economic success, saying: "They did it largely with education and training."

In the wake of the Paris-like terrorist attacks in neighbouring Jakarta, Indonesia, last week, and the arrest last Friday of a terror suspect in Malaysia who was planning a suicide bomb attack in Kuala Lumpur, I would add that it is not just in the economic realm where Singapore's dedication to education yields results, but also in the realm of security.

I speak from my experience as secretary-general of Interpol from 2000 to 2014, where I witnessed first-hand how Singapore emphasised education in the realm of security, devoting substantial resources to educating and training its intelligence, police, immigration and other law-enforcement officers.

As a result, Singapore has the well-earned reputation of being one of the safest places in the world.

In 2006, I was invited by the country's Ministry of Home Affairs to address the Home Team at a gathering of almost 1,000 law-enforcement officers.

I used this occasion to describe how, in 2003, Milorad Ulemek used a stolen Croatian passport to cross borders to plan, prepare and perpetrate the assassination of then Serbian President Zoran Djindjic. The assassin Ulemek's stolen passport received law enforcement's official stamp of approval at 26 European border crossings - and once, at the border crossing, to enter Singapore.

**They redesigned Singapore's entire system for the issuance of identity documents, creating an entirely new ID document numbering system that would prevent Singaporeans from being falsely detained or arrested if their own passports were stolen, and that would allow Singapore to follow Switzerland's lead.**

I recall the surprise and shock expressed by the Singapore media, who asked how it was possible for Singapore to have left such a gaping hole in its security. My revelation even made front-page news in The Straits Times the next day.

Fortunately, for Singapore's law-enforcement agencies, they could say that, back in 2003, the international database of stolen or fake passports that would have exposed Ulemek's passport as stolen, did not exist.

However, I also announced that since then, Interpol had created the world's only database of stolen and lost passports, and Switzerland had already proven that it could be implemented efficiently by any country that is willing to do so.

Singapore analysed the issue, and discovered that doing so would be expensive, complicated and time consuming. Why?

Singaporean identification documents were conceived with efficiency in mind, not security, with the same unchanging national identification number of each person used for many different identity documents. As a result, a Singaporean who reported his passport stolen and got a replacement passport issued risked being detained or arrested when travelling abroad because the new passport number and the stolen passport number were the same.

Singapore could have responded to media inquiries by stating that my proposal was not practical for Singapore to implement, as it would put Singaporeans at risk of being falsely detained or arrested.

However, Singapore could boast of not just some of the

smartest, best educated law-enforcement officers, civil servants and technology experts in the world.

Together, they redesigned Singapore's entire system for the issuance of identity documents, creating an entirely new ID document numbering system that would prevent Singaporeans from being falsely detained or arrested if their own passports were stolen, and that would allow Singapore to follow Switzerland's lead.

Singapore educated and trained its police and immigration officers on how best to use Interpol's databases and technology to detect stolen passports and yet avoid long queues at entry checkpoints.

It then began to systematically screen the passports of all those crossing its borders, preventing those with stolen passports from entering.

As a result, Singapore now ranks No. 3 in the world, in terms of passport screening, after only the United States and Britain – countries with populations 12 to 60 times larger than Singapore's.

Unfortunately, today, fewer than 15 of the world's almost 200 countries systematically screen the passports of those crossing their borders against global databases like Singapore does, thereby placing far too many people at risk of falling victim to terrorists and other dangerous persons who use stolen passports to cross borders.

It is too soon to know today whether Jakarta's terrorist attacks were facilitated by the use of stolen or fake passports, as was the case with the recent attacks in Paris and Bangkok. We do know, though, that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria provides stolen and fake passports to its members.

Last month, Turkey arrested criminals possessing almost 150 authentic stolen European passports. Just last week, a passenger used a fake passport to board a British Airways

her unusually nervous behaviour. Tellingly, fake passports are openly advertised on the Internet, accessible via a simple Google search.

In November last year, after the Paris terror attacks, the European Union's Justice and Home Affairs ministers made a common decision that, by March this year, passport screening against Interpol's stolen passport database would be implemented at all of the EU's external borders.

Singapore made this same decision, not because of a terrorist attack on its soil, but because its law-enforcement officers studied the experiences of other countries, learnt the lessons, and applied them to the real-world threat.

I am, therefore, confident that as Singapore celebrates the success of its children in school, its law-enforcement officers will be studying what happened in Jakarta, and the other examples of terrorist attacks around the world, to see what lessons can be learnt.

Their commitment to keep educating themselves and keep learning, in order to better protect their citizens, economy and guests, is never-ending.

The more countries that follow Singapore's example, the safer we all will be from the threat of terrorists and dangerous criminals.

- The writer was Interpol Secretary General from 2000-2014 and is also the founder of RKN Global, a security solutions provider.