

# 118 ARRESTED IN GLOBAL ACTION AGAINST ONLINE FRAUDSTERS IN THE AIRLINE SECTOR

28 Nov 2014

[Press Release](#)

On 26 and 27 November, law enforcement agencies from all over the world, in cooperation with the airline, travel and credit card industries, joined forces in a major concerted action to combat online fraud. The operation – the third of its kind - was organised globally through three coordination centres at Europol in The Hague, Interpol in Singapore and Ameripol in Bogota. Over 60 airlines and 45 countries<sup>1</sup> were involved in the activity, which took place at over 80 airports across the world.

The coordinated Global Airport Action targeted criminals suspected of fraudulently purchasing plane tickets online using stolen or fake credit card data. In many cases it was revealed how credit card fraud is linked to other forms of serious crime such as drug trafficking and human trafficking. The banking, airline and travel sectors have suffered huge financial losses as a direct result of such Internet-facilitated crime, with the airline industry alone facing losses of USD 1 billion<sup>2</sup> caused by fraudulent online ticket booking. In addition, millions of innocent citizens are affected through the misuse of their credit card data.

Representatives from the airlines and major credit card companies American Express, MasterCard, Visa Inc and Visa Europe were present at the coordination centre run by Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3). They worked together to identify suspicious airline ticket transactions. Using their own financial data systems, credit card company officials confirmed suspicions when alerted by the airlines. This partnership between law enforcement authorities and the industries affected, as well as this level of global response, is essential to effectively target the extremely mobile cybercriminals who are able to commit these crimes from any place in the world.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) took part in the action, providing important fraud intelligence from its database. Notifications were sent to transport hubs across the world as waiting enforcement officers intercepted and detained suspects attempting to travel using fraudulently-obtained flight tickets. Backing them up, a team of dedicated Europol analysts provided live access to centralised criminal intelligence databases. Interpol assisted with the rapid identification of wanted persons and stolen travel documents. Officers from Europol's EC3 were present in Singapore and Bogota, and at some of the European airports, and a Eurojust official assisted at the coordination centre in The Hague.

Europol Director Rob Wainwright says: "This operation is another example of law enforcement and the private sector working seamlessly together, to prevent and fight cybercrime - this time identity

theft and credit card fraud. We are reaching new levels with our cooperation and aim to become an 'unbeatable alliance' with aspirations to make cyberspace as crime free as possible for global citizens. Europol's EC3 will continue to invest heavily in conducting similar operations and other activities that will make life harder for cybercriminals". This international operation was the result of months of detailed planning between law enforcement, prosecuting and border control agencies, airlines and credit card companies, coordinated by Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3).

"I welcome the launch of the Global Airport Action this week, which enables greater daily international cooperation for the security of airports all over the world and tackles serious forms of cybercrime," says Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship. "This major step, taken on a European and global scale, links all key stakeholders to solve problems within one of the most affected areas of cybercrime. Our aim is to act in concert to protect our societies and citizens. Cybercrime is becoming a 'service' that organised crime groups buy and use, so we have to be ready and boost the capacity of our law enforcement agencies to act effectively."

The aim of action was twofold – to target the criminal online services offering credit card credentials and fake plane tickets, and also to protect consumers from being duped by these criminal enterprises. During the operation more than 281 suspicious transactions were reported and 118 individuals were arrested. Some of the suspects were repeat offenders and had been arrested in previous police actions at airports. Besides the successful operational outcome, another positive result is the creation of our global alliance of airlines and law enforcement agencies, who will be working together on an ongoing basis to combat online fraud and crime.

Meta Backman from the European Airlines Fraud Prevention Group commented on the operation: "Airlines are fighting credit card fraud on their ticket sales on daily basis. It is clear to the airlines that they are up against organised crime in this fight. Airlines are depending on card issuing banks to obtain confirmation of fraudulent use of credit cards. Without confirmation, airlines cannot report the crime to law enforcement. The action day operations have been a good example of the importance of the cooperation of these three types of organisations: airlines, banks and law enforcement. Our airlines are grateful to Europol for making this cooperation possible and for the support Europol has showed our industry."

Aleks Popovich, Sr. Vice President, Financial and Distribution Services, International Air Transport Association points out: "Fraudsters are costing the airline industry significant amounts of money, but above all the IATA airline members do not want to transport criminals and thus facilitate their illicit activities. IATA is proud that the airline industry can support in any possible way the efforts of the police fighting organised crime by collaborating in this combined action of Ameripol, Interpol, Europol, the European law enforcement agencies, the card brands and airports around the globe."

Commissioner Juan José Andrade Morales, Director of the Costa Rican Police and President of Ameripol says: "This kind of joint action with Europol, Interpol and Ameripol confirms our commitment to fighting cybercrime and organised crime, and consolidates the strategic alliances

between our law enforcement agencies."

Download infographics:

1 Countries involved: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, Iceland, Switzerland

Australia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Qatar, Thailand, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United States of America

Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Costa Rica, Peru, Mexico, Panama.

2 Source: International Air Transport Association (IATA).

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