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Second National Fusion Center Conference Held to Foster Greater Collaboration

SAN FRANCISCO – More than 900 federal, state, and local law enforcement and homeland security officials attended this week the National Fusion Center Conference here to further the U.S. government’s plans to create a seamless network of these centers.

The second annual conference was jointly sponsored by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Office of the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment, and the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative. Participants discussed how to best incorporate fusion centers at the state level and in major urban areas into national plans to improve the sharing of information related to terrorism – a key goal of a strategy that President Bush released last October.

After the 9/11 attacks, states and various U.S. localities established information fusion centers to coordinate the gathering, analysis, and sharing of homeland security, terrorism, and law enforcement intelligence. Today there are more than 50 operational centers in 46 states.

“Working together – leveraging federal as well as state and local networks; moving relevant information and intelligence quickly; enabling rapid analytic and operational judgments – that is what this network of centers is all about,” said Charles E. Allen, Homeland Security Undersecretary for Intelligence and Analysis, in his opening remarks at the conference, which was held March 18-20 at the Hilton San Francisco.

Added Russell M. Porter, Director of the Iowa State Fusion Center: “Establishing a national, integrated network of fusion centers isn’t solely a federal effort.

“State, local, and tribal officials have been and will continue to be actively engaged in every step of the process,” said Porter, who also serves as Chair of the Criminal Intelligence Coordinating Committee.

Arthur M. Cummings II, Executive Assistant Director of the FBI’s National Security Branch, emphasized the importance of maintaining a unified front. Fusion centers, he said, “are an effective and efficient mechanism for exchanging information by merging data from a variety of sources to produce actionable intelligence for consumers, such as the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Forces and local police departments.”

Moreover, stakeholders must stay vigilant, said Bart R. Johnson, ODNI’s Director for Homeland Security and Law Enforcement Support and Outreach.

“Terrorism remains a credible and ongoing threat to our country,” he said. “The ODNI and all of the relevant federal, state, local, and tribal agencies must maintain the focus on and commitment to collaboration to mitigate this threat.”

To that end, bureaucratic turf wars would be extremely counterproductive. “Law enforcement and justice agencies at all levels need to find ways to overcome obstacles to sharing information – and the U.S. Justice Department is committed to providing the resources and assistance necessary to make sharing as easy as possible,” said Domingo S. Herraiz, Director of the Office of Justice Programs’ Bureau of Justice Assistance at DOJ.

On the whole, fusion centers play a decisive role, said Ambassador Thomas McNamara, Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment. “They are a critical part of President Bush’s National Strategy for Information Sharing,” the ambassador said. “They strengthen the nation’s ability to protect communities from future attacks.”

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