Thematic debate on progress made in the implementation of the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons
22 March, CR2, 15:00-18:00

INTERPOL Statement

Chair,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thanks a lot for inviting INTERPOL to this thematic debate.

INTERPOL offers to assist Member States in preventing and combatting illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Perhaps the most crucial is the ability for any of our 192 member countries to communicate through the INTERPOL Secure Network (I-24/7), and instantly warn or inform about movement of illicit firearms.

INTERPOL’s system of notices is used to alert member countries of firearm-related threats. Let me mention the most relevant Notices in this context:

- The INTERPOL Red Notice can be used to seek the location and arrest of wanted persons in relation to small arms trafficking;
- The INTERPOL Orange Notice can be issued to warn police, public entities and other international organizations about potential threats posed by disguised firearms which they may not be detected under normal circumstances.
- The INTERPOL Purple Notice can be issued to share specific modus operandi for firearm trafficking. For instance, warn against new or very distinct methods of concealment.
- The INTERPOL–United Nations Security Council Special Notice, which may call for an Arms Embargo against entities or individuals.

INTERPOL also provides specific police databases designed to combat illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

The INTERPOL Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS) allows users to report and search lost, stolen and smuggled firearms rapidly and securely. Firearms records in this database include the brand, model, caliber, serial number, and either the country in which the firearms was manufactured, or the country where it was last legally imported.

iARMS also includes a set of web-based Trace Request functions to manage international firearm trace activities. iARMS database contains over 800,000 illicit firearms records. 164 countries are currently using the database with over 2,000 Law Enforcement Agencies worldwide having access.
Another highly effective INTERPOL tool is on ballistics is the INTERPOL Ballistic Information Network (IBIN) - a global platform for collecting and comparing ballistic data. IBIN is the first and only large-scale international ballistic data sharing network and is hosted at INTERPOL HQ in Lyon. Today IBIN has 27 operational countries. IBIN counts over 1M records to search against data from all its members.

Just as fingerprint data can link crimes and criminals across international borders, so can the international sharing of ballistic data.

INTERPOL also offers access to its Firearms Reference Table (IFRT) - an interactive online tool to identify and describe firearms, including the make, model, calibre, country of origin and serial number. The table contains more than 250,000 firearms references and over 57,000 firearm images.

INTERPOL is currently in the process of enhancing its IT systems and databases (such as iARMS and IBIN) to technically interconnect and interoperate with other existing national databases. This will reduce the duplication of efforts and time in searching and creating records in multiple databases at national and international level.

INTERPOL’s work current regarding including national marking practices into INTERPOL’s existing mechanisms:

This work has been organized in 4 phases and INTERPOL is currently working on Phase 1, keeping in mind that some of these phases are overlapping and work is done simultaneously:

Phase 1. Contact the relevant actors and locate and review of existing information on firearms marking practices:

- The INTERPOL Firearms Programme is currently in communication with the Bonn International Center for Conversion, which has developed the Interactive Guide on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Phase 2. Collection of national firearms marking practices from relevant actors:

- INTERPOL will request National Central Bureaus to provide information on national marking practices. This will allow us to communicate with firearms manufacturers in view to obtain information on their marking practices.

Phase 3. Modification of the INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table to contain national firearms marking practices:

- Working in consultation with the Canadian Police and relevant partners, the table will be modified to include new information on national firearms marking practices.

Phase 4. Circulation of the national firearms marking practices system:

- It will be available to all 192 INTERPOL member countries through the INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table.
**Global trends in weapons tracing worldwide:**

✓ INTERPOL’s information analysis regarding trace requests indicates that the majority of them were sent to the country of manufacture, and very few sent to the last legal country of import. This may be due to the fact that not all countries mark all firearms legally imported in their countries.

✓ However, even if the surface of the firearm contains markings, the officer seizing the firearm may not recognize it. Thus, law enforcement officers would greatly benefit from the development of a reference table including national firearms marking practices. (I have talked about INTERPOL’s efforts in this regard on including national marking practice into the INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table)

✓ Central and South America and the Caribbean is the region which is tracing most of their recovered firearms – from the top 20 list of contributing countries to the iARMS database, 10 are from this region.

✓ In the African region, Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland are good examples of successful use to iARMS to trace firearms, while in Europe, the United Kingdom, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia and France also benefit from this database.

✓ The top recipient countries of most of firearms traces are the United States, Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, Belgium, Argentina, Germany, Austria, Honduras, Czech Republic, Spain, Costa Rica, Turkey, Nicaragua, Italy and Russia.

**Biggest challenges regarding tracing of weapons**

1. **The lack of knowledge about firearms tracing systems**

   The existence of firearms tracing systems and what they can do to enhance illicit firearms investigations is largely unknown. This means readily available resources are under-utilized.

   **Possible Solution:**

   INTERPOL recommends continuous training and reinforcing of knowledge about firearms tracing at the basic level, as well as regular information update for Law Enforcement Officials about existing firearms tracing systems.

2. **Lack of access to national firearms registers**

   Successful firearms tracing should start with the availability of national firearms registers and databases which can be consulted to get information about illicit movements when required. Lack of access to national firearms registers and databases increases the time taken trace them.

   **Possible Solution**

   INTERPOL recommends the promotion of access of Law Enforcement Agencies to available national and international tracing registers and databases such as iARMS, which reduces the time taken to trace firearms.

3. **Lack of cooperation between different law enforcement agencies at national level**
Multiple Law Enforcement Agencies report that there is limited sharing of information when it comes to firearms investigations and tracing. This hinders progress of investigations and also creates loopholes for criminals to escape justice.

Possible Solution

A national firearms tracing single point of contact should be designated, and all law enforcement agencies should be made aware of the need for cooperation on investigations related to firearms and tracing at national level.

4. Lack of standard firearm recovery procedures

Law Enforcement Officials in most countries do not have clear guidelines and procedures to follow when they have recovered illicit firearms, in order to determine their source.

Possible Solution

The INTERPOL Firearms Programme has developed a guide for uncovering firearms trafficking. Traditionally, investigations ended with the seizure of the firearm. But this is just the beginning. Laboratory examinations and database queries using iARMS and IBIN are necessary in order to target the true source of the firearms that are recovered.

INTERPOL is fully committed to assisting its Member States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons.

Thank you.