



---

**29 June, 2006**

**United Nations Conference to Review 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**

**Position of the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol)**

**Report by: The Office of the Special Representative of Interpol  
to the United Nations**

## **Interpol's position regarding 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**

The International Criminal Police Organization, Interpol, welcomes the opportunity to provide the participants to this conference with an update of what Interpol is doing to assist countries with 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, and, to explain how member countries in turn can support Interpol's efforts.

However, to begin with, I would first of all like to provide you with an overview of Interpol's role, function and activities:

Interpol with its 184 member countries is the world's largest international police organization with a focal point in each country called the National Central Bureau, also referred to as the "NCB". The General Secretariat of the Organization is located in Lyon, France.

The primary task of Interpol is to support the police forces and services in our member countries in their efforts to prevent crime and to conduct criminal investigations as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In order to provide this support to member countries Interpol conducts all its activities within the following three core functions:

### **1) Secure global police communications services:**

The fundamental pre-condition for international police co-operation is for police services to be able to communicate with each other securely, in real time, and throughout the world.

In order to provide the international law enforcement community with the best means of communication, Interpol has designed and implemented a state of the art, global communications system, commonly known as the I-24/7. It allows the transmission of important information about individuals and crimes, including photographs, fingerprints and DNA profiles, to our member countries, in a secure manner within a matter of seconds. As of today, 183 of our 184 member countries are connected to this system. It is envisaged that the remaining country will be connected by the end of this year.

### **2) Operational data services and databases for police:**

Once police can communicate internationally, they need access to information to assist in their investigations or to take the necessary steps to prevent crime. Interpol has therefore developed, and maintains a range of global databases, covering key data such as names of criminals and suspected individuals, search requests for wanted persons, fingerprints, photographs, DNA profiles, lost and stolen travel documents, stolen vehicles, and illicit weapons related to criminal cases

### **3) Operational police support services:**

Interpol currently prioritizes crime-fighting programs on fugitives, public safety and terrorism, drugs and organized crime, trafficking in human beings, and financial and high tech crime. Other projects deal with child pornography on the Internet, stolen vehicles, stolen works of art and cultural property, bio-terrorism, and identifying and tracing of illicit weapons.

In addition, Interpol's General Secretariat provides expertise to its member countries in the above mentioned priority crime areas. Support is also provided by means of "best practice guidelines" e.g. the issuance of a manual for investigators of trafficking cases. Interpol also hosts or facilitates international and regional conferences dedicated to specific crimes, bringing together law enforcement experts to exchange their knowledge and experiences in fighting crime.

Interpol's support also extends to the collection, analyses and evaluation of information which is placed at our disposal by the member countries. Our goal is to keep member countries informed of new developments in the context of criminal activities, as well as facilitate further enquiries and investigations.

#### **International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace Illicit SALW**

Interpol has been specifically mandated in Paragraph 35 of the "*International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, In a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small arms and Light Weapons*" to assist States with the:

- *Facilitation of tracing operations conducted within the framework of this instrument, and,*
- *Investigations to identify and trace illicit small arms and light weapons.*

In order to meet this obligation Interpol designed the Interpol Weapon Electronic Tracing System known as 'IWeTS'. In essence, this tool, combined with our communication system, will give the law enforcement agencies of Member States the capability to trace illicit firearms that are being seized through law enforcement activities in their countries.

In theory, IWeTS will be a network linking, by means of I-24/7, the databases related to SALW of Member States to Interpol. In addition, IWeTS will also host a comprehensive library of most firearms in existence, facilitating the identification of such weapons used during an alleged crime. This combination will enable the law enforcement agencies to identify and trace such alleged illicit weapons.

In practice, the prototype of IWeTS is being developed using Interpol's I-24/7 system, linking it to the responsible agency in the US for law enforcement activities with regard to SALW, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). In fact, the link to the ATF National Tracing Center is an expansion of the I-24/7 system, and proves its versatility and flexibility. The significant value of using ATF's Tracing Center is that it is the only agency within the Federal government of the United States that has the capabilities to trace firearms by providing access to information from the manufacturer, the wholesaler and firearm dealers in order to provide an accurate and complete picture regarding firearms recovered by law enforcement during investigations.

By simply completing a template located on the I-24/7 dashboard, this project provides law enforcement officers with an easy method for requesting, and responding to a trace on firearms recovered during an investigation.

The value of such a system for the law enforcement agencies of Member States is that it will make it easier for law enforcement officers to launch a trace of a U.S. firearm allegedly used in the commission of a crime. Once the system has been system has been tried and tested, Interpol will approach other Member States who manufacture arms and attempt to negotiate their integration into IWeTS.

In order to live up to second aspect of the mandate, the identification of illicit SALW, Interpol will make available to the law enforcement services of Member States a Firearms Reference Table developed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). This product is appropriately known as the Canadian Firearms Reference Table (CFRT), and is not only the most comprehensive of its kind, but is also updated continually.

The CFRT provides the officer the opportunity to make a correct identification of the seized firearm prior to submitting the firearm for tracing. Used in conjunction with IWeTS Interpol will be able to offer its users a web based solution to identifying and tracing illicit SALW.

## **Benefits to Member Countries using IWeTS**

There are also other incidental benefits for the law enforcement community to digitalizing the process in identifying and tracing illicit SALW. In essence these benefits mean that while a Member State submits a firearm trace via the I-247 system:

- The name of the individual from whom the firearm/s, alleged to have been used in the commission of a crime, has been seized, will be checked against Interpol's nominal data base for known criminals,
- the Firearms will be checked to see if they have been reported lost, or stolen in any other Member Country,
- should the individual suspected of having committed an offence possess a passport, that passport too will automatically be checked through the Interpol stolen and lost travel documents database, and finally,
- should such a person possess a vehicle, this will automatically also be checked through the Interpol Stolen Vehicle database

Member States are automatically notified if any of these queries reveal any information in the Interpol data bases. Interpol will benefit by populating its databases with information related to crime, gained from Member Countries requesting the tracing of firearms.

Four countries; South Africa, Brazil, Tunisia and Czech Republic have been identified as candidates to run the first IWeTS pilot programs, predominantly to verify the integrity of the systems and procedures. Once feedback from these pilot programs have been collected and analyzed, IWeTS will be systematically made available to other Member States.

The final phase of IWeTS will be the connecting Interpol's I-247 system to the various databases on illicit SALW maintained by other weapon manufacturing Member States. This will allow Member States to use Interpol as a crucial central point for identifying and tracing of firearms throughout the international law enforcement community.

### **Illicit brokering of SALW**

The issue of the illicit brokering of small arms and light weapons is of great concern to Interpol, especially due to the threat such brokering poses to the safety and security of the citizens in countries particularly subject to this criminal activity. This activity seems to be prevalent in countries engaged in civil conflict.

Together with the International Criminal Court, the United Nations and associated agencies, Interpol has launched a pilot project focusing on the African Great Lakes District consisting of collecting and analyzing information regarding key figures involved in such activities and their modus operandi. This could provide an additional tool to the international law enforcement community in the prevention and combating of such criminal activities.