INTERPOL

INTERPOL FIREARMS PROGRAMME

The most recent research on global distribution of firearms estimates that as of 2007, there were approximately 875 million firearms in the world\(^1\). According to this study, almost three quarters were owned by civilians, easily outnumbering those in military and law enforcement possession. Most of illegal firearms enter the illicit market through distribution, theft, leakage, divergence, pilferage or resale. Hundreds of thousands of small arms in government arsenals are also vulnerable to theft, loss and diversion. Once acquired by traffickers, these weapons are smuggled across national borders in various ways. The increased number of armed conflicts have led to easier access to firearms in conflict regions and also to the illicit firearms proliferation. Moreover, the frequent global terrorist activities have stressed the need to focus and to improve efforts against firearms trafficking and firearm related crimes, namely through effective identification and tracing of firearms capabilities of international and national law enforcement organizations. In fact, INTERPOL Policing Capabilities (iARMS, IFRT, IBIN) were developed in order to provide such abilities to the disposal of its member countries.

INTERPOL illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS)

Funded by the European Union under the Instrument for Stability and Peace, the INTERPOL Illicit Arms Records and tracing Management System (iARMS), is a state-of-the-art tool that facilitates information exchange and investigative cooperation between law enforcement agencies in relation to the international movement of illicit firearms, as well as licit firearms that have been involved in the commission of a crime. iARMS can be functionally divided into three components. Firstly, the Firearm Records Management Module provides a set of web-based interfaces whereby users may report and query lost, stolen, trafficked and smuggled firearms rapidly and securely as well as conduct a search against existing records of illicit firearms and notify a country quickly when a recorded firearm is seized. Secondly, the Trace Requests Management Module provides a set of web-based interfaces to manage international firearm trace activities on crime-related firearms. It provides an easy-to-use platform for approved law enforcement users to submit a trace request; to read, monitor and export incoming/outgoing trace requests; to respond to or comment on an incoming trace request and to update the status of a trace request. Lastly, the Statistics and Reports Module supports INTERPOL member countries by analysing national data information on firearm-related crime and tracing, and generating tailored reports. This module will also support the INTERPOL General Secretariat in conducting analysis of the data contained in iARMS to better assist member countries in intelligence led policing efforts.

iARMS is the largest global illicit records database and tracing management system. Its access is extended to all 190 INTERPOL member states and as of February 2016, 146 countries were connected to iARMS. iARMS currently has more than 785,000 illicit firearms records and more

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\(^1\) Small Arms Survey 2007, the Small Arms Survey estimated the number of civilian firearm ownership worldwide at approximately 875 million. Almost three quarters of those were believed to be owned by civilians, with the remainder in the possession of military and law enforcement services.
than 12,000 trace requests were received by member countries. Therefore, iARMS is strategically placed to be a tool to implement both the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA) and the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (ITI) which mentions INTERPOL as a mean to transmit sensitive and confidential criminal intelligence regarding firearm-related crime and also encourage Member states to cooperate with INTERPOL in order to improve the identification and tracing of firearms.

**INTERPOL Ballistic Information Network (IBIN)**

The INTERPOL Ballistic Information Network (IBIN) is the only large-scale international ballistic data sharing network in the world and it is available to all 190 INTERPOL member countries. It supports the global networking of Integrated Ballistics Identification Systems and provides a global platform for the centralized collection, storage and cross-comparison of ballistics data. IBIN provides the opportunity to find critical investigative leads, even if crimes are committed thousands of kilometers apart.

As of March 2016, IBIN stores more than 714,500 records and more than 18,300 international searches have been executed between its 22 connected members. These searches resulted in 36 confirmed hits between countries, affecting at least 72 investigations.

**INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table (IFRT)**

The INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table (IFRT) is an interactive online tool for authorized law enforcement users. The IFRT provides a standardized methodology to identify and describe firearms, and enables an investigator to obtain or verify the details of a firearm — including the make, model, caliber, country of origin and serial number. It contains more than 250,000 firearms references and 57,000 firearms images.

**Training and capacity building**

INTERPOL also offers a variety of capacity building initiatives that deal with the specialized crime area of firearms. The aim is to equip police and their law enforcement partners with the knowledge, skills and best practices to meet today's firearm crime challenges. The courses focus on international cooperation in all forms, including through the use of INTERPOL Policing Capabilities (iARMS, IBIN and IFRT).

From a basic online course on firearms identification to intensive classroom-based courses on detecting and combating firearm-related crime, INTERPOL provides a range of learning opportunities. INTERPOL takes an inter-agency approach, and provides intercultural, bilingual training as appropriate.
**International alert system**

INTERPOL’s unique system of notices is used to alert member countries of firearm-related threats. Orange Notices can be issued to warn police, public entities and other international organizations about potential threats posed by disguised firearms which they may not detect under normal circumstances.

Purple Notices can be issued to share information about specific firearms, their parts and related objects, as well as modus operandi for firearm-related crime including firearm trafficking.

Red Notices may be issued with the aim of seeking the location and arrest of a wanted person by a judicial jurisdiction or an international tribunal for firearms trafficking or firearm related crime.