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Tracing illicit small arms and light weapons

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MOSAIC
Good practices for safer societies.

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Foreword

What is MOSAIC?

MOSAIC translates into practice the objectives of key global agreements aiming to prevent the illicit trade, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, including:

- the Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons
- the International Tracing Instrument
- the Firearms Protocol supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- the Arms Trade Treaty.

MOSAIC modules are based on good practices, codes of conduct and standard operating procedures that have been developed at (sub-)regional levels. They were developed by the UN, benefitting from the very best technical advice from experts around the world.

MOSAIC is a completely voluntary toolkit.

MOSAIC supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16 to promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies and its target 16.4 that includes a significant reduction in illicit arms flows.

Who developed MOSAIC?

Governments often call upon the UN system to provide advice and support on issues related to small arms and light weapons control — including on legislative, programmatic and operational matters.

UN agencies decided that the best way to ensure that the United Nations as a whole could consistently deliver high-quality advice and support in response to such requests, was to develop international guidance on small arms and light weapons control, similar to the standards the UN developed in the areas of mine action (International Mine Action Standards – IMAS); disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (Integrated DDR Standards – IDDRS); and ammunition (International Ammunition Technical Guidelines – IATG).

The compendium is the result of a decade of coordinated work within the UN system, involving 24 partner entities with expertise ranging from development and weapons management to gender and public health. An external expert reference group of over 300 specialists, from NGOs to industry, completed the sturdy process of establishing each module.

Who can use MOSAIC?

MOSAIC can be used by any government or organization. Properly basing small-arms control endeavours on MOSAIC modules, reduces the risk of weapons falling into the hands of criminals, armed groups, terrorists and others who would misuse them.

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Introduction

Most illicit small arms and light weapons begin as legally manufactured or imported weapons that are subsequently diverted to the illicit realm.

Tracing is the systematic tracking of illicit small arms or light weapons from their point of manufacture or most recent import, through their lines of supply, to their last legal title-holder, in order to determine the point, in space and time, at which they became illicit.

Reliably identifying the point of diversion is crucial to preventing future diversions. Tracing the origin of small arms and light weapons that are recovered in crime, for example, enables law enforcement officials to develop investigative leads that may link a weapon to a suspect in a criminal investigation, identify suspected arms traffickers or detect patterns of intra-state and international arms trafficking.

Similar benefits accrue from tracing illicit small arms or light weapons recovered in the context of armed conflict. The challenges are often greater in such cases, however, since circuitous arms trafficking routes are often involved, not to mention falsified documents, weapons with numerous previous owners that may have been produced decades before, etc.

For such reasons, the tracing of small arms and light weapons recovered in the context of armed conflict is rarely carried out. This leaves under-used an important means to identify the actors responsible for small arms and light weapons trafficking, to hold them to account, and thereby to contribute to preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Successfully tracing an illicit small arm or light weapon involves the following steps:

a) unique identification of the weapon based on its markings and physical characteristics;

b) a domestic tracing operation to establish whether the weapon

    1) became illicit while under the jurisdiction of the State that recovered it (e.g. following its domestic manufacture or import), or

    2) possibly entered the country by illicit means;

c) an international tracing operation, if the weapon is suspected of having entered the country by illicit means;

d) the tracing operation (domestic or international) identifies the point in time and space at which the weapon became illicit;

e) action is taken to prosecute those responsible for diverting the weapon and to prevent similar diversions from re-occurring; and

f) data from the tracing operation is included in a biennial national report on tracing illicit small arms and light weapons.

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Tracing illicit small arms and light weapons

1 Scope

This document provides guidance on tracing, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons. It covers the unique identification of small arms and light weapons as well as the establishment of an effective national infrastructure for tracing illicit small arms and light weapons and for initiating and responding to international tracing requests. It also provides guidance on sources of international cooperation and assistance related to tracing illicit small arms and light weapons and on national reporting on the implementation of global commitments related to tracing.

2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

MOSAIC 01.20, *Glossary of terms, definitions and abbreviations*

MOSAIC 03.10, *National controls over the manufacture of small arms and light weapons*

MOSAIC 03.20, *National controls over the international transfer of small arms and light weapons*

MOSAIC 05.30, *Marking and recordkeeping*

MOSAIC 05.40, *Voluntary collection of small arms and light weapons*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in MOSAIC 01.20, *Glossary of terms, definitions and abbreviations*, and the following apply.

In all MOSAIC modules, the words 'shall', 'should', 'may' and 'can' are used to express provisions in accordance with their usage in International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards.

a) **“shall” indicates a requirement:** It is used to indicate requirements strictly to be followed in order to conform to the document and from which no deviation is permitted.

b) **“should” indicates a recommendation:** It is used to indicate that among several possibilities one is recommended as particularly suitable, without mentioning or excluding others, or that a certain course of action is preferred but not necessarily required, or that (in the negative form, 'should not') a certain possibility or course of action is deprecated but not prohibited.

c) **“may” indicates permission:** It is used to indicate a course of action permissible within the limits of the document.

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d) **"can" indicates possibility and capability:** It is used for statements of possibility and capability, whether material, physical or casual.

4 United Nations Framework

This document provides practical guidance on the implementation of commitments related to the tracing of illicit small arms and light weapons that are contained in United Nations multilateral instruments related to small arms and light weapons control, including the

a) *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons* (International Tracing Instrument);

b) *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (UN Firearms Protocol); and

c) *United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects* (UN Programme of Action).

5 General provisions

5.1 Weapons to be traced

The aim of tracing is to determine the point at which they may have become illicit; and to take action to punish those responsible and to prevent similar diversions from re-occurring.

National regulations or administrative procedures should exist for the tracing of small arms and light weapons.

Small arms or light weapons should be traced when recovered in contexts that breach, or are suspected of breaching, national or international law. The same applies to essential parts and components of small arms and light weapons. Ammunition may also be traced, where technically feasible.

NOTE 1 It can be difficult to trace illicit ammunition, especially if ammunition manufactured as a single lot (and bearing a unique lot number) is divided up and transferred to multiple different users. Under some circumstances, however, illicit ammunition can be successfully traced; e.g. if a single lot of ammunition (bearing a unique lot number) is transferred in its entirety to a single recipient (e.g. a military force) and the transfer is adequately recorded.

This includes recovered small arms and light weapons that are

a) considered illicit under the law of the State within whose territorial jurisdiction the small arm or light weapon is found;

b) suspected of having been transferred in violation of arms embargoes decided by the Security Council in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations;

c) not marked in accordance with national requirements (see MOSAIC 05.30, *Marking and recordkeeping*);

d) suspected of having been manufactured or assembled without a licence or authorization from the competent authority of the State where the manufacture or assembly took place (see MOSAIC 03.10, *National controls over the manufacture of small arms and light weapons*);

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e) suspected of having been transferred without licences or authorizations from competent State authorities (see MOSAIC 03.20, *National controls over the international transfer of small arms and light weapons)*; or

f) lacking supporting documentation demonstrating their legal status.

Such small arms and light weapons should be considered illicit until such time as their chain of custody is established and their legal status is confirmed.

NOTE 2 Small arms and light weapons ammunition recovered in such contexts should also be traced, if technically feasible.

5.2 Sequencing of domestic and international tracing

A suspected illicit small arm or light weapon should first be subject to a domestic tracing operation in order to ascertain whether the weapon was diverted while under the jurisdiction of the State that recovered it (e.g. following its domestic manufacture or import).

If, based on a domestic tracing operation, the weapon is suspected of having been illicitly trafficked into the jurisdiction of the State that recovered it (e.g. as a result of the weapon not showing up in domestic records), it should be subject to an international tracing operation.

5.3 Follow-up to tracing

In response to tracing operations which successfully identify the point of diversion, the State in whose jurisdiction the diversion took place should

a) prosecute those responsible for diverting the weapon, in accordance with international human rights norms and standards; and

b) implement legislative, regulatory and operational countermeasures to prevent future diversion.

Assistance may be requested from other States when undertaking follow-up actions to tracing. States so requested should provide their assistance.

NOTE 1 A tracing operation can be deemed successful if it identifies the point in time and space at which a small arm or light weapon became illicit.

5.4 Exceptions

Illicit small arms and light weapons need not be traced if

a) they have been recovered as part of a weapons collection programme complying with the standards of anonymity and amnesty set out in MOSAIC 05.40, *Voluntary collection of small arms and light weapons*;

b) doing so would unduly impede the timely destruction of larger quantities of small arms or light weapons or increase the chances of their diversion while awaiting destruction; or

c) they are of a type that

   1) are likely to have been used in military operations,

   2) were manufactured prior to 1946,

   3) do not bear an import mark or other marks dating from after 1946, and

   4) were recovered individually (i.e. not as part of a larger batch of similar weapons).

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NOTE 1 The likelihood of successfully tracing a weapon that fulfils all of the criteria set out in 1-4 above is very low, due mostly to inadequate recordkeeping at the time and to the fact that weapons frequently changed hands through capture during the first and second World Wars.

6 Identification of small arms and light weapons

6.1 General

The correct initial identification of an illicit small arm or light weapon is vital to maximizing the chances that a tracing operation will be successful. The goal of identification is to use the markings on and physical characteristics of an individual small arm or light weapon in order to set it apart from all other small arms or light weapons as a unique object whose history can be traced.

6.2 Markings on primary and secondary traceable components

The serial number of a small arm or light weapon is a principal means of identifying it for tracing purposes. Primary attention shall be paid to markings on the weapon's primary traceable component, which may be treated as the weapon itself for identification.

The frame/receiver is typically the primary traceable component. However, what constitutes a frame or receiver may depend on firearms design and national legal definitions. In some weapon families, such as AK and AKM patter rifles, a different component serves as the primary traceable element. In such cases, markings on that component shall be used for identification (see *MOSAIC 05.30: Marking and Recordkeeping)*.

Markings on parts and components other than the primary traceable component

a) should be used to assist in the identification of a weapon to be traced; and

b) shall be used to assist in the identification of a weapon to be traced if the primary traceable component

    1) is unmarked; or

    2) has markings that have been rendered unreadable (see Clause 6.4.3).

6.3 Essential information

The unique identification of a small arms or light weapon to be submitted in a tracing request shall include its

a) make,

b) model,

c) calibre,

d) serial number,

e) country of manufacture, and

f) country of most recent import (if the weapon bears an import mark).

NOTE 1 Including essential information in tracing requests is vital for the success of tracing operations. Serial numbers, for instance, might be unique only in relation to the weapon's make or model and would not be traceable without such information.

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6.4 Additional information

A tracing request should incorporate contextual information describing the circumstances in which the small arm or light weapons to be traced was found, collected or seized.

6.4.1 Physical characteristics

A tracing request should contain additional relevant information regarding the physical characteristics of a small arm or light weapon when identifying a weapon, including

a) the location of the serial number(s);

b) the type of action;

c) the type of stock (e.g. fixed, folding, removable, etc.);

d) the materials from which different parts of the weapon are made (e.g. wooden or polymer stock, grip or fore-grip, metallic or polymer frame, etc.);and

e) Any missing components.

NOTE 1 If missing components are not mentioned, responses to the tracing request could indicate that the weapon's physical characteristics shown in the picture do not match the design specifications for the weapon with that serial number.

6.4.2 Other markings

Other markings, along with their location on the weapon, should be provided in a tracing request for a complete, detailed description of the weapon. Depending on the presence of additional markings, this includes

a) the manufacturer;

b) proof marks;

c) assembly numbers;

d) military or police identification marks and/or numbers; and

e) patent numbers or patent use numbers.

6.4.3 Unmarked frame/receiver

If the frame/receiver of a weapon is unmarked, or its markings have been rendered unreadable, tracing requests should include information on the following markings:

a) security markings (where they exist; see MOSAIC 05.30, *Marking and recordkeeping*); and

b) markings on other parts and components of the weapon, including their location.

6.4.4 Multiple serial numbers

If the serial number marked on the primary traceable component of a weapon differs from a serial number marked on another part (or parts) of the weapon, this can indicate that the weapon is assembled from parts of two or more different weapons or contains one or more replacement parts.

In case of multiple serial numbers, the serial number marked on the primary traceable component shall be the primary source for identifying the weapon to be traced. The tracing request should also include all other serial numbers as additional information (see Clause 6.2).

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NOTE 1 If components with a differing serial number are deemed traceable and an additional tracing request is made, it is important to specify in the contextual data of the tracing request that the component was co-located with small arm or light weapon bearing a different serial number.

6.4.5 Photographs

Tracing requests frequently contain incomplete or inaccurate identifying information (e.g., regarding make, model, calibre, or serial number details), which can delay or prevent a successful trace. High-resolution photographs help confirm the weapon's identity and improve the likelihood of a successful trace.

High-resolution photographs should accompany tracing requests to illustrate the essential and additional information required to uniquely identify a small arm or light weapon.

6.5 Tracing ammunition

In order to correctly identify illicit ammunition, information should be provided on as many of the following elements as possible:

a) manufacturer (or manufacturer's code),

b) country of manufacture,

c) lot or batch number,

d) year of production, and

e) cartridge designation, i.e.

   1) calibre of the bullet/projectile

   2) length of the cartridge case (i.e. not including the bullet/projectile); and

   3) overall length of the cartridge (including the bullet/projectile).

f) the number of cartridges recorded of this type.

7 Domestic tracing operations

7.1 National point of contact on tracing

7.1.1 General

States shall designate one or more national points of contact on all matters relating to tracing suspected illicit small arms and light weapons and provide it with a corresponding mandate.

States should designate a single point of contact on all matters related to tracing operations. Given the nature of tracing operations, this point of contact should be established within the national police force or military.

Where a single national point of contact is designated, it shall have the authority to trace illicit small arms and light weapons in all relevant domestic records.

7.1.2 Where two or more national points of contact are designated, it shall be specified which domestic records each is authorized to use in conducting tracing operations,

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e.g. those pertaining to law enforcement agencies, manufacturers, dealers, civilians, the military, etc. Functions

The national point of contact on tracing should be mandated and capacitated to, in a timely and reliable manner,

a) undertake domestic tracing operations across all departments of the state;

b) initiate and follow through on international tracing requests (see Clause 88.1);

c) respond to incoming international tracing requests (see Clause 5.2); and

d) report on national implementation of international commitments related to tracing illicit small arms and light weapons (see Clause 10).

The mandate of the national point of contact should require all keepers of domestic records under its purview (see Clause 7.1.1) to cooperate and respond to its tracing requests. This should include

a) the police;

b) the military;

c) the office responsible for export control;

d) manufacturers;

e) and other relevant private sector entities.

The mandate of the national point of contact should authorize it to trace small arms and light weapons at all life-cycle stages and across all legal statuses, including those that were

a) legally manufactured and/or assembled under national jurisdiction;

b) legally imported into national jurisdiction;

c) that otherwise entered national jurisdiction;

d) that left national jurisdiction;

e) that were identified as domestically diverted.

7.1.3 Resource requirements

The national point of contact on tracing should have available adequate resources and capacity to enable it to carry out its functions in a timely and reliable manner. In particular, the point of contact should have

a) a sufficient number of staff

   1) trained to retrieve information from national records of small arms and light weapons;

   2) trained in the tracing processes of relevant entities, including domestic and foreign government offices and industry actors, enabling them to include the relevant information in a tracing request and to address a request to the appropriate points of contact; and

   3) with access to the resources and equipment required to do so;

b) access to INTERPOL’s small arms training, identification and tracing resources, in cases where a State is a member of INTERPOL (see Clause 9.2);

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c) access to regional resources and databases related to tracing illicit small arms and light weapons, where these exist; and

d) adequate financial resources to cover staff, equipment and operational costs.

7.1.4 Standard operating procedures

Standard operating procedures should be established to provide detailed instructions and comprehensive guidance to the national point of contact on tracing.

Such standard operating procedures should define the roles of the point of contact as well as the methodologies and procedures to be followed in tracing operations and in handling information exchanges as part of such operations.

The national point of contact on tracing should be trained in the application of the standard operating procedures.

7.2 Weapons subject to domestic tracing

A national tracing system shall make possible the timely and reliable domestic tracing of illicit small arms and light weapons that

a) were legally manufactured and/or assembled under national jurisdiction;

b) were legally imported into national jurisdiction;

c) otherwise entered national jurisdiction (e.g. through recovery from the illicit sphere);

d) left national jurisdiction (e.g. through export or alleged destruction); and

e) were identified as domestically diverted (e.g. through theft or loss).

7.3 Extent of domestic tracing

A national tracing system shall make possible the timely and reliable domestic tracing of illicit small arms and light weapons from their manufacture, import or other point of entry into national jurisdiction up to

a) the last legal owner of the weapon; or

b) the point at which the weapon left national jurisdiction (e.g. though destruction or export).

7.4 Previously exported small arms and light weapons

In cases where a recovered illicit small arm or light weapon is determined to have previously left the national jurisdiction through export, the national tracing system should make it possible to identify

a) the recipient of the weapon;

b) the actor(s) involved in the transfer (e.g. transport agents, brokers, etc.); and

c) the associated financial transactions, if applicable.

7.5 Domestic information exchange

Separate systems may be used, at the national level, for tracing small arms and light weapons that are held and/or controlled by different agencies of the State (e.g. law enforcement, armed forces, etc.). In such cases, information exchange between the different tracing systems should be possible in a timely

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manner. To achieve this, a legislative or regulatory framework may be put in place to enable the timely exchange of information, at the national level, regarding domestic tracing operations.

7.6 Databases

The centralized collection and analysis of data on recovered illicit small arms and light weapons and on their tracing can assist in the identification and design of counter-measures to prevent future diversions of small arms and light weapons.

One or more national electronic databases containing the details of all illicit small arms and light weapons recovered within the jurisdiction of the State, should be created. These databases should also record the progress and outcomes of domestic and international tracing operations.

Where more than one database exists, they may be networked so as to allow for the efficient searching of all databases from a single location.

Such databases shall be accessible only to law enforcement and other government officials authorized by a competent State authority.

Records of tracing operations shall be maintained for at least 20 years and should be maintained indefinitely.

7.7 Domestic tracing procedures

7.7.1 General procedure

On the recovery of an illicit small arm or light weapon, the following domestic tracing procedure should be followed:

a) The national point of contact on tracing of the State in whose jurisdiction the weapon was recovered should be informed and provided with details of the weapon's identification, in accordance with Clause 6.

b) The point of contact should first attempt to locate the weapon in domestic records, in order to ascertain whether it was legally

    1) manufactured in the State;

    2) imported into the State;

    3) held by an armed service of the State (law enforcement or military);

    4) held by a private individual within the jurisdiction of the State; or

    5) exported from the State.

c) If the weapon cannot be located in domestic records, the point of contact should investigate the possibility that it

    1) was illicitly manufactured in the State, or

    2) entered the State by illicit means.

d) If it is suspected that the weapon in question was

    1) diverted while under national jurisdiction, or

    2) illicitly manufactured within national jurisdiction,

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investigations shall be carried out with the goal of

3) determining the point, in space and time, of the diversion or illicit manufacture,

4) prosecuting the individuals responsible for the diversion or illicit manufacture, and

5) taking action to ensure that similar diversions or illicit manufacture do not re-occur, including by strengthening national legislative and regulatory frameworks.

e) If, on the other hand, it is suspected that the weapon in question

1) was diverted after having left national jurisdiction (e.g. following export), and/or

2) entered the State by illicit means,

the national point of contact on tracing should direct an international tracing request in accordance with Clause 8.1.

7.7.2 Specific procedures

The specific procedures for tracing illicit small arms and light weapons in domestic records will depend on the nature of the national tracing infrastructure. A point of contact in a State that maintains a centralized record-keeping system will usually begin the tracing process by consulting the centralized system.

A point of contact in a State that maintains a non-centralized record-keeping should first determine which records need to be consulted (e.g. those held by official State agencies or by private manufacturers and dealers) and then request the tracing-related information from the relevant State or non-state body.

7.7.3 Domestic tracing operations in response to international tracing requests

The procedures outlined in this Clause should also be applied when conducting domestic tracing operations in response to international tracing requests.

8 International tracing operations

8.1 Initiating an international tracing request

An international tracing request should be made to the State that, according to the results of a domestic tracing operation, most recently exercised jurisdiction over the weapon in question. Moving from most- to least-recent, these may be

a) the State to which the weapon was exported, if applicable (derived from domestic records);

b) the State that most recently imported the weapon (derived from import markings on the weapon, if present), or

c) the State in which the weapon was manufactured (derived from markings on the weapon).

International tracing requests should be addressed by the national point of contact making the request to:

a) the national point of contact on tracing in the requested State;

b) the permanent mission of the requested State to the United Nations in New York if no national point of contact is known; or

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c) the national, regional or international entity officially mandated to receive or facilitate the transmission of tracing requests, if and where applicable.

8.2 Tracing requests shall be in writing. The initiation of international tracing requests may be facilitated by INTERPOL or regional organizations (see Clause 9.2). Content of an international tracing request

8.2.1 Essential information

An international tracing request shall contain

a) information describing the illicit nature of the small arm or light weapon in question, including

1) the legal justification of its illicit nature and,

2) the circumstances under which the weapon was found;

b) a correct identification of the weapon, in accordance with Clause6;

An international tracing request should contain a request for information regarding the history of the weapon while under the legal jurisdiction of the State in receipt of the international tracing request, including information on

a) the last legal owner of the weapon, and

b) the circumstances under which the weapon became illicit (e.g. theft, loss, intentional diversion, etc.); and

c) the intended use of the information being sought.

8.2.2 Additional information

An international tracing request should also contain any additional information that might assist in tracing the weapon in question, e.g. the quantity, date, and place of recovery of the weapon(s), the individuals who were detained with the recovered weapon(s), etc.

8.3 Responding to an international tracing request

8.3.1 Acknowledgement of receipt

A State shall acknowledge receipt of an international tracing request. Acknowledgement of receipt should reach the requesting State within seven days of the request being received.

8.3.2 Verification of completeness

An incoming international tracing request should first be checked for completeness in accordance with Clause 8.2.

A request that does not contain the information set out in Clause 8.2 should be returned with a request to re-submit it with all of the necessary information. Re-submitted tracing requests shall be acknowledged in accordance with Clause 8.3.1.

Where the requesting point of contact on tracing indicates that it is not possible to provide all of the information set out in Clause 8.2, but where the information provided is sufficient for a tracing operation to have a reasonable chance of success, the request should be processed in accordance with the remainder of this clause.

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8.3.3 Information to be provided in response to an international tracing request

8.3.3.1 General

In responding to an international tracing request, the requested State shall provide, subject to the provisions of Clause 8.3.4.2, all available information sought by the requesting State that is relevant for the purpose of tracing illicit small arms and light weapons. This shall include information on

a) the last legal owner of the weapon before it was diverted within the jurisdiction of the State; and

b) the circumstances under which the weapon became illicit (e.g. theft, loss, intentional diversion, etc.); or

c) the recipient of the weapon if it was legally exported from the State.

8.3.3.2 In case of legal manufacture or import

If the weapon concerned was legally manufactured in or imported into the jurisdiction of the requested State, information in response to a tracing request may include

a) confirmation of the manufacture or import;

b) relevant information on the manufacturer or importer;

c) date of manufacture or import; and

d) any additional information that could assist in tracing the weapon.

EXAMPLE Examples of such additional information include hidden or other identification markings, special characteristics, the date of technical testing, identification of the testing body, etc.

8.3.3.3 In case of internal transfer

If the weapon concerned was transferred legally within the jurisdiction of the requested state, information in response to a tracing request may include

a) the date of transfer(s);

b) information on the final consignee(s); and

c) details of the transfer license(s), if applicable.

8.3.3.4 In case of export

If the weapon concerned was exported from the requested state, information in response to a tracing request may include information on

a) the date of export;

b) the importing State;

c) transit states (if applicable);

d) the final consignee; and

e) details of the import, export and transit authorizations.

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8.3.3.5 In case of internal diversion

If the weapon concerned was diverted while under the jurisdiction of the requested State, information in response to a tracing request may include

a) confirmation and details of the diversion; and

b) information on the last legal owner of the weapon.

In the case of internal diversion, the requested point of contact should also specify whether an investigation into the circumstances of the diversion has been launched or is envisaged.

8.3.4 Timeframes

8.3.4.1 General

Responses to international tracing requests shall be timely. Responses should be provided within 8 weeks of receipt of the request.

8.3.4.2 Delays and restrictions

A State may delay or restrict the content of their response to an international tracing request, or may refuse to provide the information sought

a) if releasing the information would

    1) compromise ongoing criminal investigations, or

    2) violate laws providing for the protection of confidential information;

b) if the requesting State cannot guarantee the confidentiality of the information; or

c) for reasons of national security consistent with the Charter of the United Nations.

Restrictions on the use of information contained in a response to an international tracing request may include, inter alia, that the information

a) may be released only to competent authorities designated by the requesting State and/or authorized personnel;

b) may be used only for purposes consistent with tracing illicit small arms and light weapons; or

c) may not be released to anyone else without the prior consent of the State providing the information.

If a State delays or provides a restricted response to an international tracing request, or refuses to provide the information sought, on grounds set out in (a)-(c) above, it shall inform the requesting State of the reasons for this. The requesting State may subsequently seek clarification of this explanation.

States should place as few restrictions as possible on the use of information contained in responses to international tracing requests, in order to facilitate the successful tracing of illicit small arms and light weapons.

8.4 Receiving a response to an international tracing request

A State in receipt of a response to an international tracing request (the requesting State) shall

a) guarantee the confidentiality of the information it contains; and

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b) respect any restrictions placed by the responding State on the use of the information it contains (see Clause 8.3.4.2).

Where for legal, constitutional or administrative reasons, the requesting State cannot comply with a) and b) above, it shall inform the requested State of this at the time the tracing request is made.

9 International cooperation and assistance

9.1 General

Where necessary, States should request international cooperation and assistance to build their capacity to trace illicit small arms and light weapons. Such cooperation and assistance may be requested from other States, from international and regional organizations, and/or from relevant non-governmental actors.

The “Matching Needs and Resources” mechanism on the PoA reporting database may be used on one hand by the National Points of Contact on small arms and light weapons to request assistance related to tracing illicit small arms and light weapons, and on the other hand by potential donors and implementing agencies to identify themes, regions and countries of prospective projects and international assistance. Requests for assistance related to weapons tracing are indicated with an icon.

Requests for international cooperation and assistance related to tracing may also be incorporated into national reports on implementation of the International Tracing Instrument, using the online reporting: tool available on the PoA-ISS website – www.poa-iss.org/reporting.

Cooperation and assistance that is requested should be provided where possible. This can be technical or financial in nature and can be provided bilaterally or multilaterally. Examples of international cooperation and assistance include

a) upgrading national recordkeeping systems on small arms and light weapons;

b) equipping and networking national points of contact on tracing;

c) training national points of contact on the conduct of domestic and international tracing operations;

d) training law enforcement officials in

   1) uniquely identifying small arms and light weapons, and

   2) interacting with their INTERPOL Nation Central Bureau (see Clause 9.2.1); and

e) transfer of technology that facilitates the tracing of illicit small arms and light weapons.

9.2 INTERPOL

9.2.1 General

The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) helps its Member States trace small arms and light weapons recovered in crime. It does this through providing a set of tools, databases, protocols and services:

a) INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table (IFRT);

b) Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS);

c) INTERPOL Ballistics Information Network (IBIN);

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d) ARSENAL Criminal Intelligence File;

e) INTERPOL Firearms protocols and trainings;

f) Intelligence-led operations

g) INTERPOL Communications Channels and Notices.

A State can only reach these tools through its INTERPOL National Central Bureau, which links national police to the global INTERPOL network. States that are member to INTERPOL should make full use of this assistance when tracing weapons and should ensure that their INTERPOL National Central Bureau is fully operational.

9.2.2 Firearms Reference Table

The INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table (IFRT) is an online catalogue of small arms. It provides law enforcement officers with a consistent description of the markings and visual characteristics of a small arm that are required to correctly identify it for the purpose of tracing. Each entry records the make, model, calibre and other defining characteristics of a particular small arm and contains a photograph of the weapon. IFRT is based on the Canadian Firearms Reference Table and is maintained and regularly updated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

9.2.3 Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS)

The Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS) is a global database that records small arms and their essential components which INTERPOL member States have reported as diverted, i.e., due to loss, theft, suspected trafficking or suspected smuggling. A member State may query iARMS to establish whether a recovered small arm or essential component has been reported as diverted by another member State. A member State may also use iARMS to submit an international trace request.

9.2.4 INTERPOL Ballistic Information Network (IBIN)

The INTERPOL Ballistic Information Network (IBIN) is an international platform for sharing and comparing ballistic data. Ballistic data are the distinctive marks that a small arm leaves on the cartridge cases and bullets it fires; because these marks are characteristic of a particular weapon, they can be used to link a recovered small arm to evidence found elsewhere. IBIN allows INTERPOL member States to connect a small arm to ballistic evidence internationally and to connect the same ballistic evidence to several crime scenes in different jurisdictions.

By making these links, IBIN strengthens criminal investigations and prosecutions, supports forensic cooperation between States, and assists in identifying transnational trafficking networks. Ballistic comparison is particularly valuable where a weapon cannot be traced by its markings — for example, arms without serial numbers.

INTERPOL member countries and territories that hold Integrated Ballistic Identification System (IBIS) technology may participate in IBIN directly. Those without IBIS technology may access IBIN when investigating high-profile crimes, through a tailored process arranged by the INTERPOL General Secretariat.

9.2.5 ARSENAL Criminal Analysis File

ARSENAL is a secure, restricted-access criminal analysis platform used to detect and counter global arms trafficking. It brings together and analyses data on small arms trafficking and tracing from a range of sources, including INTERPOL databases, contributions from INTERPOL member States, and operational activity. This analysis serves to identify trafficking routes, the methods used by criminals, and links between individuals and organized crime groups. The results support operational and strategic analysis, inform law enforcement decisions, and assist international cooperation on the identification and tracing of small arms.

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9.2.6 INTERPOL Firearms Protocols and Trainings

INTERPOL develops operational and investigative guidance to address emerging threats and changing criminal practices. This includes the Firearms Recovery Protocol 2.0, which supports the systematic collection and analysis of intelligence from recovered small arms. It also includes the Investigative Protocol, which directs investigators to relevant intelligence sources; indicators of arms trafficking, which help identify significant cases; and recommended questions for the interview of suspects, which improve the gathering of intelligence. These tools promote consistent, intelligence-led investigative practices among member States and support the detection and documentation of diversion.

To operationalise these resources with the support of member states, INTERPOL provides tailored training modules for the global law enforcement community that instruct officers in how to maximise the use of tools such as IFRT, iARMS, and IBIN in their investigations.

9.3 Regional organizations

A State that is not a member of INTERPOL but that is a member of a regional organization that facilitates the tracing of illicit small arms and light weapons should make use of the assistance provided by the regional organization.

EXAMPLE The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is mandated to assist member States in tracing illicit small arms and light weapons. An ECOWAS member State may request the ECOWAS Commission to initiate and conduct an international tracing operation on its behalf. Other examples of regional organizations with activities related to tracing illicit small arms and light weapons include EUROPOL and the Task Force on Organized Crime in the Baltic Sea Region (in particular its ‘Crossfire’ programme).

9.4 Investigations of violations of UN arms embargoes

In the context of tracing illicit small arms and light weapons, all possible cooperation shall be provided to UN panels investigating possible violations of arms embargos mandated by the UN Security Council.

9.5 Nongovernmental actors

Nongovernmental actors can provide valuable cooperation and assistance in building national capacity to trace illicit small arms and light weapons, e.g. by providing training in the correct identification of small arms and light weapons. Research by nongovernmental actors can also uncover previously unknown cases of diversion that can be followed up on and investigated.

9.6 Information exchange

International information exchanges in the context of tracing operations can facilitate the identification of points of diversion and overall trafficking patterns. The following types of information can be useful in this regard:

a) nationally authorized small arms and light weapons manufacturers, brokers and dealers;

b) marking systems and techniques used for marking small arms and light weapons at the time of manufacture and import;

c) the means of concealment and conveyance, and the routes used by criminals, in transporting illicit small arms and light weapons; as well as suggested methods of detecting concealed illicit weapons;

d) transfers of small arms and light weapons (information concerning national legislation, existing practices and controls, etc.); and

e) practices in relation to existing government stockpiles (e.g. management, security, surplus, losses, theft and destruction).

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10 Reporting on implementation of tracing measures

10.1 Frequency of reporting

National reports detailing efforts to implement the International Tracing Instrument shall be submitted every two years to the UN Secretary-General, via the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs. Such reports are integrated into PoA/ITI online reporting. Designated National Points of Contacts or Permanent Missions should request country-specific username and password to: conventionalarms-unoda@un.org.

The PoA/ITI online reporting is available: PoA Reporting App can be used for the purposes of reporting on both the UN Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument, as well as designating and updating contact information of National Points of Contact (NPC).

10.2 Content of reports

National reports on tracing illicit small arms and light weapons should include

a) contact details of the National Point(s) of Contact on tracing;

b) details of national efforts to implement the International Tracing Instrument;

c) national experiences in tracing illicit small arms and light weapons, including

    1) the main challenges encountered,

    2) the percentage of issued and received international tracing requests that

        i) received timely responses, in accordance with Clause 8.3.4,

        ii) resulted in successful traces (i.e. the point of diversion was identified), and

        iii) resulted in criminal prosecutions;

d) measures taken to ensure that the national tracing system is capable of undertaking timely and reliable domestic traces and of initiating and responding to international tracing requests;

e) information on national practices on the marking of small arms and light weapons at the time of their manufacture and import; and

f) measures taken in the field of international cooperation and assistance on tracing including, as relevant,

    1) international cooperation and/or assistance rendered and/or received;

    2) priority assistance needs; and

    3) types of assistance and cooperation that can be offered to build national tracing capacities.

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