Statement by The Netherlands on Tracing

Meeting Governmental Experts on Small Arms and Light Weapons,

Mr. Chairman,

Tracing in the meaning of ITI is limited to a simple search for the last legal owner of a firearm and tracking the lines of legal supply to the point at which they became illicit. The result is useful in the criminal case in which the firearm is confiscated. In the Netherlands we currently running a national project with the goal to extend the scope of tracing. Within the project we not only trace the firearm, but also systematically collect all other relevant data such as forensic data and police information. The strength of the project is to analyze all data and subtract investigation leads. The intelligence produced is crucial for identify trends, threats and in the end combat, controlling the illegal trade.

For tracing two important items are yet identified as conditional, marking, record keeping. Another important and also conditional item is the speed of tracing. Especially when the criminal is still in police custody. To speed up the process, operational national contact point are very helpful. The operational NCP can help to speed up the process of tracing by sharing police information bilateral ahead of the formal trace request. An ideal National Contact Point knows his/her way through the bureaucracy of their country and is the linking person between different law agencies, the military, relevant ministries and also the firearms branch.

As learned of previous presentations and discussions during this meeting, for a successful trace request a good description of the firearm is needed. Helpful to identify a firearm is also to consult experts outside the government. Think about manufactures, the traders but also collectors can play an important role. Good governmental contact with the manufacture is very important for first hand information about the explanation of serial numbers and secret markings. Sometimes is even necessary to bring the firearm to the manufacture for closer examination. More and more we learn that manufactures improve their marking and improve the impossibility of illegal exchange of components. A good example of traceability
of goods where the manufactures and governments worldwide are involved is the identification and registration of vehicles and their owners and users.

Beside the informal tracing, collecting information as before mentioned through Operational NCP, a formal request will be send via the national bureau of firearms within the police to the so called Interpol desk. To fill in an trace request it is necessary to copy all relevant data from the police register. Typing over data is not helping the willingness to trace a firearm. For example we recently confiscate hundreds of illegal firearms at once from a criminal. Sending out all trace requests at once will not only consume a lot of time but also the response time will increase obviously. In the Netherlands the police have to choose which crimes will be investigate in debt. The weighing is based on the assumed changes of success within a reasonable time.

Mr. Chariman,

With the idea to line up tracing within the EU there is an EU trace manual produced by European Firearms Experts. The manual is adopted by the EU Council as a recommendation for the Member States. The Manual should apply to a systematic tracking of firearms aiming at combating illicit manufacturing and illicit trafficking and using means and methods commonly agreed on and established by the EU Member States in the manual. The manual states minimal technical standards and templates for tracing. The templates are brought to the attention of both Europol an Interpol with the idea to implement them in their respectively systems and so smoothing the trace process. As mentioned by other speakers and pointed out in the side event from Interpol yesterday, success depends on the quality of data entered in the request. Expertise is required.

In 2010 in the Netherlands we introduced a decree for routing and investigate firearms within the police. With the introduction of the protocol, tracing is now one of the required methods of investigation, beside all relevant forensic investigation.

Thank you.