INTERPOL

Statement by Ms. Tracy HITE, Coordinator of INTERPOL’s Firearms Program, INTERPOL General Secretariat, Lyon, France.

United Nations Conference to Review Progress made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, New York, 28 August 2012.

Madame President, on behalf of INTERPOL’s Secretary General, Mr Ronald K. Noble, thank you for your invitation to this very important meeting and for giving me the floor.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many delegations that in their statements have made reference to INTERPOL and our global tools and services. It is therefore a great pleasure for me to speak on behalf of the International Criminal Police Organization – INTERPOL.

Let me begin by giving you a brief introduction to the work of INTERPOL and I would then like to provide you with specific insight into INTERPOL’s firearms program.

All 190 INTERPOL member countries maintain a National Central Bureau (NCB) which serves as each country’s gateway for communication to and from the INTERPOL General Secretariat and between member countries. Each is connected through a secure communications system known as I-24/7. This gives police access to criminal databases containing millions of records contributed by countries across the world. We are developing web server solutions to extend access beyond our NCBs to frontline law enforcement, customs and border officials, allowing them to search our databases in real time.

Our unique system of Notices is used to alert member countries about fugitives, dangerous criminals, missing persons or other threats. Forensic experts provide targeted support to member countries in a variety of disciplines. Criminal intelligence analysts monitor and analyze information related to specific areas of crime and criminal organizations, and inform member countries about evolving trends and patterns. The success of international police investigations is dependent upon the availability and sharing of up-to-date, global data.
Among the Specialized Crime units, INTERPOL has a specific unit devoted to firearms. This unit has developed tools, services and processes for firearms investigation that serve to facilitate international cooperation in identifying and tracing firearms, investigating international firearms trafficking, and criminal misuse of firearms. Most notably, the INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table is a comprehensive web-based identification tool that gives investigators the ability to find the necessary identifiers for a firearm in addition to the serial number – namely the make, model, caliber, and country of origin or importer – thereby increasing the probability of successfully tracing the firearm’s origin. It is regularly updated with data supplied by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police which has also assisted us with the development of our firearms training initiatives.

In addition, the INTERPOL Ballistics Information Network (IBIN) is a database and a network for large-scale international sharing and comparison of ballistics data. Currently, 9 member countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, and the newest country the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) are contributing to IBIN, with more than 134,000 records in the database. Recently, just one cross-border hit in IBIN resulted in the linking of 51 investigations involving a criminal gang. The full value of this system can only be achieved if more countries participate.

Both of these databases are in operation today and are growing with regular updates and enhancements. Complementing these tools is a project under development, called the INTERPOL Illicit Arms Records and tracing Management System (iARMS). It will be the first global system that allows member countries to report and query lost, stolen, trafficked and smuggled firearms.

Modeled after INTERPOL’s Stolen and Lost Travel Document System which today contains more than 33 million entries, iARMS will feature a hit alarm to the country of report when a match is detected. Replacing our existing firearms tracing system, it will redirect users to trace firearms not found in the database, thereby linking the two processes of searching a database of reported lost, stolen, smuggled and trafficked firearms with firearms tracing. It will also enable states to capture their own statistics for crime-trend analysis and to assist them in meeting reporting requirements. iARMS has been a fast-tracked project which commenced in January of 2011. In just one month, iARMS will be piloted to 20 countries. Scheduled for release in January of 2013, iARMS is generously funded by the European Union.

Future enhancements are also envisioned to enable the existing national systems to directly link to iARMS and to provide an expert forum for the exchange of technical information.

In November 2011, at the latest INTERPOL General Assembly, our 190 member countries adopted a resolution on the “use of the tools developed under INTERPOL’s firearms program.” The resolution fully recognizes INTERPOL’s role with regard to the Firearms Protocol and the implementation of the POA, and the ITI and “strongly urges member countries to fully use
existing and future INTERPOL tools for firearms investigation, identification, tracing and cooperation.” It is the first INTERPOL General Assembly Resolution on firearms since 1997 and it truly demonstrates political will on behalf of our member countries in recognition of the work that still needs to be done in this important arena.

We are very pleased to be able to make available these technologically advanced tools to assist member countries and are greatly encouraged by the large interest and appreciation shown by other delegations. We are confident that their increased use will contribute to policing and greater security of all, and we are eager to facilitate their enhanced use by more countries.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that INTERPOL continues to respond to the needs of our member countries by building new and refining existing tools for firearms investigations, in furtherance of the implementation of the Programme of Action and the supplementary International Tracing Instrument.

Thank you very much Madame President.