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**Tracing illicit small arms and  
light weapons**



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United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA)  
International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS) Inter-Agency Support Unit  
E-mail: [support@smallarmsstandards.org](mailto:support@smallarmsstandards.org)  
Web: [www.smallarmsstandards.org](http://www.smallarmsstandards.org)

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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>1 Scope</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>2 Normative references</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>3 Terms and definitions</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>4 United Nations Framework</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>5 General provisions</b> .....	<b>7</b>
5.1 Weapons to be traced .....	7
5.2 Sequencing of domestic and international tracing .....	7
5.3 Follow-up to tracing .....	8
5.4 Exceptions.....	8
<b>6 Identification of small arms and light weapons</b> .....	<b>8</b>
6.1 General .....	8
6.2 The frame/receiver as primary reference point .....	9
6.3 Essential information .....	9
6.4 Additional information.....	9
6.5 Tracing illicit parts, components and ammunition .....	10
<b>7 Domestic tracing operations</b> .....	<b>11</b>
7.1 National point of contact on tracing .....	11
7.2 Weapons subject to domestic tracing .....	12
7.3 Extent of domestic tracing .....	12
7.4 Previously exported small arms and light weapons .....	12
7.5 Domestic information exchange .....	13
7.6 Databases .....	13
7.7 Domestic tracing procedures .....	13
<b>8 International tracing operations</b> .....	<b>14</b>
8.1 Initiating an international tracing request .....	14
8.2 Content of an international tracing request .....	15
8.3 Responding to an international tracing request.....	15
8.4 Receiving a response to an international tracing request .....	17
<b>9 International cooperation and assistance</b> .....	<b>18</b>
9.1 General .....	18
9.2 INTERPOL .....	18
9.3 Regional organizations.....	20
9.4 Investigations of violations of UN arms embargoes .....	20
9.5 Nongovernmental actors .....	20
9.6 Information exchange.....	20
<b>10 Reporting on implementation of tracing measures</b> .....	<b>20</b>
10.1 Frequency of reporting .....	20
10.2 Content of reports .....	21
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>22</b>

## Foreword

The United Nations (UN) Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) mechanism strives to improve the UN's ability to work as one in delivering effective policy, programming and advice to Member States on curbing the illicit trade, uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. Established by the Secretary-General in 1998 with the task of coordinating the small arms work of the United Nations, CASA today unites more than 20 UN bodies active in policy development and/or programming related to small arms and light weapons.<sup>1</sup>

Building on previous UN initiatives to develop international standards in the areas of mine action (International Mine Action Standards)<sup>2</sup> and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants (Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards),<sup>3</sup> the United Nations has developed a series of International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS) with the aim of providing clear and comprehensive guidance to practitioners and policymakers on fundamental aspects of small arms and light weapons control. The present document constitutes one of more than 20 ISACS modules that provide practical guidance on instituting effective controls over the full life cycle of small arms and light weapons (all ISACS modules can be found at [www.smallarmsstandards.org](http://www.smallarmsstandards.org)).

ISACS are framed by existing global agreements related to small arms and light weapons control, in particular the

- *UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons In All Its Aspects* (UN PoA);
- *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons* (International Tracing Instrument); and
- *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).

Within this global framework, ISACS build upon standards, best practice guidelines, model regulations, etc. that have been elaborated at the regional and sub-regional levels. ISACS seek to cover the fundamental areas of small arms and light weapons control on which the United Nations may be called upon to provide advice, guidance and support.

ISACS were developed, and continue to be improved and supplemented, by a broad coalition of small arms control specialists drawn from the United Nations, governments, international and regional organizations, civil society and the private sector (a full list of contributors to ISACS is available at [www.smallarmsstandards.org](http://www.smallarmsstandards.org)).

ISACS modules were drafted in accordance with the rules set out in ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2, *Rules for the structure and drafting of International Standards*, under the oversight of the CASA Working Group on ISACS, co-chaired by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

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<sup>1</sup> For a full listing of CASA partners, see [www.poa-iss.org/CASA/CASA.aspx](http://www.poa-iss.org/CASA/CASA.aspx).

<sup>2</sup> [www.mineactionstandards.org](http://www.mineactionstandards.org)

<sup>3</sup> [www.unddr.org](http://www.unddr.org)

## 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.

# 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.

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

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

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

ISACS 05.30, *Marking and recordkeeping*

ISACS 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 ISACS 01.20, *Glossary of terms, definitions and abbreviations*, and the following apply.

In all ISACS 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.
- 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

Small arms or light weapons recovered in contexts that breach, or are suspected of breaching, national and/or international law should be traced in order to determine the point at which they may have become illicit; and in order to take action to punish those responsible and to prevent similar diversions from re-occurring. 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 ISACS 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 ISACS 03.10, *National controls over the manufacture of small arms and light weapons*); or
- e) suspected of having been transferred without licences or authorizations from competent State authorities (see ISACS 03.20, *National controls over the international transfer of small arms and light weapons*).

### 5.2 Sequencing of domestic and international tracing

An 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 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**

Where a tracing operation (domestic or international) identifies the point in time and space at which a small arm or light weapon became illicit, action should be taken by the State in whose jurisdiction the diversion took place in order to

- a) prosecute those responsible for diverting the weapon, in accordance with international human rights norms and standards; and
- b) prevent similar diversions from re-occurring, including by strengthening legislative and regulatory frameworks.

The State undertaking such actions may request assistance from other States in doing so. States so requested should provide their assistance.

### **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 ISACS 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).

NOTE 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 The frame/receiver as primary reference point

For the purpose of identifying a small arm or light weapon, primary attention shall be paid to markings on the frame/receiver of the weapon, which, for the purpose of identification, may be considered to be the weapon.

Markings on parts and components other than the frame/receiver

- a) should be used to assist in the identification of a weapon by providing information supplementary to that contained on the frame/receiver; and
- b) shall be used to assist in the identification of a weapon if the frame/receiver
  - 1) is unmarked; or
  - 2) has markings that have been rendered unreadable (see Clause 6.4.3); or

## 6.3 Essential information

The unique identification of a small arms or light weapon for the purpose of tracing shall include its

- a) make,
- b) model,
- c) caliber,
- d) serial number,
- e) country of manufacture, and
- f) country of most recent import (if the weapon bears an import mark).

## 6.4 Additional information

### 6.4.1 Physical characteristics

Additional relevant information regarding the physical characteristics of a small arm or light weapon should also be provided when identifying a weapon, e.g.

- a) the location of the serial number;
- b) the type of action;
- c) the type of stock (e.g. fixed, folding, removable, etc.); and
- 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.).

### 6.4.2 Other markings

Other markings, along with their location on the weapon, should be provided in order to furnish a complete, detailed description of the weapon. Such additional information may include

- a) the manufacturer;
- b) proof marks;
- c) assembly numbers;

## ISACS 05.31:2012(E)V1.0

- 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, information on the following markings should be provided:

- a) security markings (where they exist; see Clause 5.7.3 of ISACS 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 frame/receiver of a weapon differs from a serial number marked on another part (or parts) of the weapon, this can indicate that the weapon

- a) is assembled from parts of two or more different weapons; or
- b) contains one or more replacement parts.

In such cases, the serial number marked on the frame/receiver shall be the primary source for identifying the weapon.

### 6.4.5 Photographs

In addition to the information set out in Clause 6 above, high-resolution, digital photographs should also be used to illustrate the essential and additional information required to uniquely identify a small arm or light weapon.

## 6.5 Tracing illicit parts, components and ammunition

The guidance contained in this document can also be applied to tracing illicit parts, components and ammunition of small arms and light weapons.

**NOTE** 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.

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) diameter of the bullet/projectile at its widest point,
  - 2) length of the cartridge case (i.e. not including the bullet/projectile); and

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

## **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 illicit small arms and light weapons.

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.

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

#### **7.1.2 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 in order to determine whether illicit small arms and light weapons became illicit while under the jurisdiction of the State and, if so, when, where and by whose intervention;
- b) initiate and follow through on international tracing requests in relation to illicit small arms and light weapons that were recovered domestically but that are suspected of having entered the State by illicit means;
- c) respond to incoming international tracing requests in relation to illicit small arms and light weapons that were recovered abroad but that are suspected of having become illicit while under the jurisdiction of the State; and
- d) report on national implementation of international commitments related to tracing illicit small arms and light weapons (see Clause 10).

#### **7.1.3 Resource requirements**

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

- a) a clear mandate from the National Authority on small arms and light weapons (see ISACS 03.40) to carry out the functions set out in Clause 7.1.2;
- b) a sufficient number of staff
  - 1) trained to retrieve information from national records of small arms and light weapons, and
  - 2) with access to the resources and equipment required to do so;

- c) 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);
- d) access to regional resources and databases related to tracing illicit small arms and light weapons, where these exist; and
- e) 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. through 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, it should be possible to exchange information in a timely manner between the different tracing systems in use. 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.

## 7.7 Domestic tracing procedures

### 7.7.1 General procedure

On the recovery of an illicit small arm or light weapon, the following general 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,  
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**

International tracing requests shall be addressed, in writing, by the national point of contact making the request to the national point of contact on tracing in 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).

The initiation of international tracing requests may be facilitated by INTERPOL or regional organizations (see Clause 9).

## **8.2 Content of an international tracing request**

### **8.2.1 Essential information**

An international tracing request should 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 Clause 6;
- c) 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
  - 1) the last legal owner of the weapon, and
  - 2) the circumstances under which the weapon became illicit (e.g. theft, loss, intentional diversion, etc.); and
- d) 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.

### **8.3.3 Information to be provided**

#### **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

## **ISACS 05.31:2012(E)V1.0**

- 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.

### **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

- d) may be released only to competent authorities designated by the requesting State and/or authorized personnel;
- e) may be used only for purposes consistent with tracing illicit small arms and light weapons; or
- f) 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
- 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 UN *Programme of Action Implementation Support System* (PoA-ISS) website – [www.poa-iss.org/matching](http://www.poa-iss.org/matching) – may be used by the National Point of Contact on small arms and light weapons to request assistance related to tracing illicit small arms and light weapons.

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 reporting tool available on the PoA-ISS website – [www.poa-iss.org/reporting](http://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) provides valuable assistance to its Member States in tracing small arms and light weapons recovered in crime, including through its

- a) Firearms Reference Table;
- b) Online Firearms Identification Training;
- c) Firearms Tracing System;
- d) Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS)
- e) Ballistics Information Network; and
- f) Orange Notices.

States that are members of INTERPOL should take full advantage of this assistance in tracing and should ensure that their INTERPOL National Central Bureau, which links national police to the global INTERPOL network, is fully operational.

### 9.2.2 Firearms Reference Table

The INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table (IFRT) enables an investigator to identify a firearm correctly and significantly increases their chances of identifying its ownership history following submission of a trace request. The IFRT contains more than 250,000 firearms references, detailed descriptions and more than 57,000 high quality images. Its operating languages are English and French and it is regularly updated using data supplied by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

### 9.2.3 Online Firearms Identification Training

The INTERPOL Online Firearms Identification Training course is designed to give users an understanding of the composition, assembly, function and identification of all types of firearms: knowledge that is fundamental to any investigation involving firearms. The course comprises several modules and is available via INTERPOL's restricted website.

### 9.2.4 Firearms Tracing System

The INTERPOL Firearms Tracing System (IFTS) is an international communications tool that allows an investigator to request a firearm's ownership history from the country of manufacture or most recent import. It is available to all INTERPOL member countries through INTERPOL's secure global police communications system, I-24/7.

**NOTE** INTERPOL created IFTS in specific recognition of the need to give police the tools to combat firearms violence, as outlined in the UN Programme of Action, and to support its member States in fulfilling their commitments under the International Tracing Instrument.

### 9.2.5 Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS)

Recognizing the need to share critical law enforcement information quickly and reliably, INTERPOL is developing a global repository of information that will be accessible to its Member States for reporting and querying lost, stolen, smuggled or trafficked firearms, to be known as the INTERPOL Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS). Authorized users will be able to query iARMS and instantly determine whether a firearm they have seized has been reported to INTERPOL by another Member State.

**NOTE** INTERPOL expects iARMS to be operational at the beginning of 2013, at which point it will replace the INTERPOL Firearms Tracing System.

### 9.2.6 Ballistic Information Network

Every firearm leaves unique microscopic markings on the surface areas of fired bullets and cartridge cases; in other words, a ballistic fingerprint that can identify the weapon from which a round of ammunition was fired. The INTERPOL Ballistic Information Network (IBIN) is the first platform for the large-scale international sharing and comparison of ballistics data.

INTERPOL Member countries or territories that have Integrated Ballistic Identification System (IBIS) technology can participate in IBIN. INTERPOL member countries that do not have IBIS technology can also participate in IBIN when investigating high-profile crimes through a customized process facilitated through the INTERPOL General Secretariat.

**NOTE** Over time, INTERPOL anticipates that analysis of shared ballistic data will help to detect illicit firearms trafficking routes and provide police with critical information about firearms traffickers and other violent criminals.

### 9.2.7 Orange Notices

The Orange Notice is a tool used by INTERPOL to warn police, public entities and other international organizations about potential threats posed by disguised firearms and weapons, as well as parcel bombs, other dangerous materials, and when dangerous criminals have escaped police custody. The Orange Notice provides a warning about weapons when there is reason to believe that it will help law enforcement and security officials to identify a threat they may not detect under normal circumstances.

### **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).

## **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 may form part of national reports on implementation of the UN Programme of Action.

The reporting tool available on the UN Programme of Action Implementation Support System (PoA-ISS) website – [www.poa-iss.org/reporting](http://www.poa-iss.org/reporting) – may be used for the purposes of reporting on both the International Tracing Instrument and the UN Programme of Action.

## 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
    - received timely responses, in accordance with Clause 8.3.4,
    - resulted in successful traces (i.e. the point of diversion was identified), and
    - 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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United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA)  
International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS) Inter-Agency Support Unit  
[support@smallarmsstandards.org](mailto:support@smallarmsstandards.org) | [www.smallarmsstandards.org](http://www.smallarmsstandards.org)