

Intelligence is crucial in order to track down the illegal brokering and sale of arms. With 179 Member States, Interpol is second only to the UN in terms of membership and would seem to be best placed for developing a database of illicit weapons seizures. The Interpol Weapons and Explosives Tracking System database (IWETS), covering all small arms right up to anti tank missiles, is the only completely international database for stolen and recovered weapons. However, the IWETS database has not been used to its full capacity. The vast majority of participation in the database, around 85 percent, is from European countries whilst information and co-operation from the American hemisphere is less than 5 percent.⁸ Interpol plans to provide developing countries with computers, software packages and training but they remain under resourced.

Recommendations

- Allocate more resources to Interpol for the further development and implementation of the IWETS database in developing countries.
- Develop a system for centralized information collection and dissemination to provide accessible data on national legislation, international agreements and statistics on firearms-related issues, such as gun deaths, seizures and control efforts (e.g. public destruction, amnesties).
- Promote transparency of light weapons flows through the development of international and regional registers or databases on the import, export and national production of light weapons (e.g. through regional organisations such as OAS)
- Register all arms brokering agents and require them to be subject to licensing procedures. All brokers should be registered on a centralized database.
- Promote development of regional and/or global databases of authorised manufacturers, importers, exporters carriers of firearms, as discussed in OAS negotiations.
- Make statistics on seizures publicly available to facilitate research and policy development.
- Provide the United Nations with country reports on illicit trafficking, as directed by UNGA resolution.

4. Stem recycling and trafficking

Direct measures designed to prevent and interdict illicit light weapons trafficking are the first element in a comprehensive control program. Governments need to develop more international laws in this area, and institute stiffer penalties for smuggling and illegal possession. They must also improve border control through co-operation and technological improvements. In addition, more resources need to be dedicated to intercepting and uncovering illicit weapons, and facilitating improved policing, border control, information exchange and technological development.

Governments and regional bodies should also prioritise destruction. Weapons seized or collected after a conflict or through civilian amnesties are seldom destroyed. They later return to circulation as the result of poor stockpile management, theft, or discrepancies between domestic control efforts and export policies. In times of tension, warehouses can be broken into and weapons stolen, as occurred recently in Albania. The only way

⁸ Victoria L Lester, Senior Crime Analyst, Firearms and Explosives, IWETS Program, Interpol.