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FIREARMS RECOVERY PROTOCOL

**Gather, share and analyse all criminal-related
firearm information to combat terror,
violent offenders and firearms traffickers**



FIREARMS RECOVERY PROTOCOL

INTERPOL Firearms Programme

INTERPOL's Firearms Programme focuses on the interception, tracing and ballistic comparison of illicit firearms material as key components of the fight against terrorism through the preventive dismantling of firearms trafficking and violent criminal organizations across international borders. **To this end, quality data inputting into our databases as part of this Protocol for all crime guns recovered in your jurisdiction is of primary importance.**

Only then will INTERPOL's Firearms Programme fully benefit you through proper gathering, sharing, and analysis of both the firearm and ballistic-related intelligence, leading to further arrests and convictions of firearms traffickers. **We can work together to break the firearms supply to terrorist groups and violent individuals.**



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Firearms Recovery Protocol

LAW ENFORCEMENT WORK

Step 1: National firearms registry search and lost/stolen database search

Step 2: **iARMS** Search/Trace (international search of lost, stolen, and trafficked/smuggled firearms)

Step 3: Evidence Recovery and Suspect Interview

FORENSIC LABORATORY WORK

Step 4-5: Latent fingerprint examination of firearm (in close coordination with DNA experts)

Step 4-5: DNA examination of firearm (in close coordination with fingerprint experts)

Step 6: National and/or International **IBIN** ballistic comparison of cartridge casings / bullets

COORDINATION

Step 7: Gather the data collected from Steps 1 to 6 to develop investigative leads

Step 8: Provide the investigators with the immediately known intelligence

Step 9: Analyze the intelligence generated for indicators of firearms trafficking

INTERPOL's Firearms Programme has developed the Firearms Recovery Protocol as a suggested guide into uncovering firearms trafficking. Traditionally, investigations ended with the seizure of the firearm. The Protocol suggests that the recovery is just the beginning. Through suspect and other associated interviews, laboratory examinations and database queries such as **the INTERPOL Illicit Arms Records and tracing Management System (iARMS)** and **the INTERPOL Ballistic Information Network (IBIN)**, a comprehensive view of firearms trafficking may steer investigators to target the true source of the firearms that are recovered in one's country. With the assistance of the protocol, investigators and intelligence units can collect and analyse more effectively the intelligence that can be obtained from inside and outside the weapon. Coordinating this intelligence may prove crucial **to preventing terrorism, and solving firearms trafficking and other related violent crimes.**

From the outside of the gun comes identifying data in the form of make, model, calibre and serial number that can be used to identify the firearm's stolen or lost status, and track its transaction history (e.g. iARMS), plus latent fingerprints (e.g. AFIS Gateway), and DNA (e.g. DNA Gateway). The suspect may provide valuable leads as well when asked the proper questions to ascertain trafficking. These INTERPOL systems can help answering the question: *Who has had contact with this firearm?*

From the inside of the gun comes ballistics data in the form of unique markings left on fired ammunition and cartridges by the internal working parts of a gun, which can be used to link crimes, guns, and suspects across widely separated geographical boundaries (e.g. IBIN). It can help answering the question: *In what crimes has this gun been used?*

The combined analysis of database queries, laboratory examinations and suspect and other interviews is likely to significantly increase the ability of law enforcement agencies to prevent and combat firearm-related crimes, particularly through the identification of firearms traffickers and other criminals.

1. LAW ENFORCEMENT WORK

INTERPOL suggests there may be a need to refocus our ideas of firearms investigations: the primary goal of a firearms investigation is to identify and prosecute the trafficker, the true source of your city's or country's illegal firearms problem. To this end, the Firearms Programme has developed this Firearms Recovery Protocol in order to provide guidance to law enforcement authorities when finding or recovering a firearm or expended ammunition cartridge. **The Protocol has both a law enforcement and forensics components with the ultimate goal of both parties sharing information to solve firearms trafficking.**

1.1 Step 1: National firearms registry search and lost/stolen database search (if your country has such a domestic database)

Valuable intelligence and investigative leads can be developed in this step to ascertain the firearms trafficking problem in your city or country and prosecute offenders. Initial investigative interviews can be identified and should be followed-up with any positive hits to these searches.

1.2 Step 2: **iARMS** Search/Trace (international search of lost, stolen, and trafficked /smuggled firearms)

- ✓ **For proper firearms identification and in order to ensure success in queries and traces, please refer to the INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table (IFRT) accessible via the iARMS database**

INTERPOL member countries with access to iARMS may record firearms whose location is unknown and report them as “stolen”, “lost”, or “trafficked/smuggled”.

In the course of a police intervention in any INTERPOL member country, firearms may be found or seized for which no valid license is produced or which cannot be found in national databases. Law enforcement services may then query iARMS in order to ascertain if the firearm was reported internationally as lost, stolen, or trafficked/smuggled.

Should the search trigger a hit result, the source of data on that particular firearm, the user country and the INTERPOL General Secretariat receive a notification. Further cooperation can subsequently ensue between the two INTERPOL member countries and can be facilitated by the General Secretariat.

If iARMS search is negative then the trace is begun

Should the firearm not be found in iARMS, the member country conducting the investigation has the option of sending specific firearm trace requests to any other INTERPOL members it

designates through iARMS in order to obtain additional information on the firearm in its possession, such as purchaser information.

Any of the member countries contacted through a trace request may respond providing additional information on that firearm. The trace response form consists of a free-text box where the requested member country may enter any data it wishes to enter in relation to the firearm.

Valuable intelligence and investigative leads can be developed in this step to ascertain the firearms trafficking problem in your city or country and prosecute offenders. Once you have recovered, queried and received a positive match on a firearm, consider asking the country for information surrounding the report of the firearm as “stolen”, “lost”, or “trafficked/smuggled”. This information could include an interview of person(s) involved or follow-up police reports. The key is to determine the movement of the firearm.

✓ For further information regarding iARMS, please refer to the Firearms Programme Presentation available on our website

1.3 Step 3: Evidence Recovery and Suspect Interview

Evidence Recovery:

- The recovery of the firearm is important for recording the serial number and other identifying information for database searches and tracing. All recovered expended cartridge casings and bullets should be collected at crime scenes as well for entry into the ballistic comparison database. This includes recoveries any time police report to a scene where shots were fired and no firearm was recovered. Also, all recovered firearms should be test-fired and the expended cartridge casings and bullets submitted for entry into the ballistic comparison database.

Conduct interviews with all suspects and witnesses in relation to the firearms recovery:

- Where did they get the firearm (specific location)?
- From whom (provide physical description)? Do they have contact information of this person?
- How much did they spend or trade?
- Were other firearms available?

Also, by finding more people to interview, you increase your chances of developing investigative leads on who are the violent offenders and/or traffickers.

Valuable intelligence and investigative leads can be developed in this step to ascertain the firearms trafficking problem in your city or country and prosecute offenders. Follow-up on any lead is necessary.

✓ For further information regarding the Suspect Interview, please refer to the Suggested Interview Questions Document available on our website

2. FORENSIC LABORATORY WORK

Examination of all samples – How to preserve the firearm-related evidence?

Many forensic laboratories choose to conduct fingerprint and DNA examinations to identify victims and perpetrators, and possibly link these perpetrators to other firearms that have been used in previous crimes

If conducting fingerprint and DNA analysis prior to ballistic comparison, the order between fingerprints and DNA depends on the case circumstances and needs to be coordinated between the forensic departments.

There is no strict, pre-determined order between those two forensic disciplines, but instead the investigator needs to be aware of the possibility of both and needs to talk to the laboratory in order to determine which evidence to collect and in which order.

As well, ensure that you protect handguns from fingerprint and DNA contamination by employing proper crime scene evidence collection techniques. For instance, only touch firearms with fresh disposable gloves, use clean packaging material, and DNA-free fuming chambers for fingerprint examination (do not re-use agents for multiple cases).

2.1 Step 4-5: Latent fingerprint examination of the firearm

To allow a good processing of the firearm for latent fingerprints, the gun must be handled only by the grip or non-smooth surfaces since latent prints develop easier on smooth surfaces, most notably of the barrel, the magazine or the ammunition. Latent fingerprints can also be found on the bullets or cartridges if they have been dropped into the barrel.

2.2 Step 4-5: DNA examination of the firearm

Firearms and related evidence may also be processed for DNA (especially those recovered not from a specific person, but for example from a crime scene); possible serial number restoration can be done afterwards.

Through the screening of firearms evidence for traces of contact (e.g. blood or skin cells), DNA analysis has the potential to help establish a link between a possible perpetrator and a gun or a link between a victim and a gun. Suitable areas for sample collection are gun grip, trigger, cylinder or gun slide, hammer, magazine release and/or magazine (floorplate and top of magazine) as well as, to a limited extent, cartridges or spent cartridge cases.

Cross check with different databases

Use national databases, INTERPOL (e.g. **The INTERPOL DNA & AFIS Gateways**) and other capabilities.

Valuable intelligence and investigative leads can be developed in this step to ascertain the firearms trafficking problem in your city or country and prosecute offenders.

2.3 Step 6: Ballistic comparison of cartridge casings / bullets to link crime scenes /IBIN

Along with the other steps in a crime gun recovery methodology such as registry searches, fingerprint and DNA examinations, ballistics comparison is a key component of a trafficking investigation. To maximize the opportunity for investigative leads, it is recommended that investigators should insist and laboratory professionals conduct ballistic examinations on all recovered firearms and cartridge casings. Often a firearm recovered from a minor offense can be linked to a major crime like homicide by ballistic comparison. If firearms recovered from these "minor" offenses are not compared, valuable investigative leads will be lost.

Just as fingerprint data links crimes and criminals across international borders, the international sharing of ballistics information permits the connection of evidence and crime scenes. Every firearm leaves unique microscopic markings on the surface areas of fired bullets and cartridge cases. Technology enables us to read and catalogue this microscopic evidence through the capturing of high-resolution ballistics images, which can be shared and compared rapidly to ballistics exhibits in multiple jurisdictions, countries.

For all cartridge cases and bullets recovered and submitted to the laboratory, a national database cross-search should be performed automatically.

International IBIN searches are performed in order to determine if the same firearm was used across borders. Hence, searches have to be conducted against strategically selected IBIN members. The choice of targeted countries can be facilitated by law enforcement officers willing to share valuable information regarding the firearm and its possessor to their national laboratory. It is worth noting that computer-assisted searches can only be confirmed by laboratory professionals.

These examinations are designed to provide investigative leads by linking multiple crimes and crime scenes to recovered weapons. In high-profile international cases, all INTERPOL member countries can benefit from the IBIN's reservoir and cross compare ballistics data with IBIN Members using test-fires or resin replicas of the cartridge cases.

✓ **For conducting efficient IBIN Searches, please refer to the IBIN Search Protocol available on our website**

Ballistics data shared via IBIN has already revealed links between gun-related crimes in different countries, providing valuable investigative leads for police.

✓ **For further information regarding IBIN, please refer to the Firearms Programme Presentation available on our website**

3. COORDINATION

3.1 Step 7: Gather the data collected from Steps 1 to 6 to develop investigative leads

The comprehensive data for all recoveries must be gathered into a central location such as an intelligence unit or a national firearms focal point.

As noted above, the intelligence will be generated from the conducted:

- Database queries, including **iARMS** Search/Trace;
- Laboratory examinations, including ballistic comparison of cartridge casings / bullets, and the use of **IBIN**, when applicable; and
- Interviews of all persons associated with the recovered firearm(s).

3.2 Step 8: Provide the investigators with the immediately known intelligence

Immediately known investigative leads should be provided to the investigators who initially submitted the recovered firearm(s). These leads may help solve international crimes and provide support to the investigators in identifying traffickers.

3.3 Step 9: Analyse the intelligence generated for indicators of firearms trafficking

The intelligence collected from a recovery should be analysed, but also compared to all firearms recoveries in order to look for common traits with respect to the indicators of firearms trafficking. The indicators may lead to a specific person or region as the source. The primary goal of a firearms investigation remains to identify and prosecute the trafficker, the true source of your city's or country's illegal firearms problem. This intelligence should be shared with the investigative team that will target firearms traffickers.

- ✓ **For further information regarding indicators of firearms trafficking, please refer to the Firearms Trafficking Indicators Document available on our website**



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**Please visit Firearms Trafficking at:
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