
Information Sharing and Regional Co-operation

Tholakele Gina, INTERPOL Regional Bureau/SARPCCO Secretariat

The Interpol Regional Bureau for Southern Africa based in Harare, Zimbabwe serves as a representative of the General Secretariat of the International Criminal Police Organization. It comprises of twelve member countries: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Its primary function is to:

- strengthen and improve international cooperation;
- provide support to the National central Bureaux in the region in their daily work;
- study and evaluate regional crime trends by effective monitoring of cross border crimes and advise the respective national law enforcement agencies on any particular trend and effects thereof, so that they may take necessary steps to counter the incidence of crime as individual countries or as a region through joint operations facilitate a smooth and effective exchange of criminal information between the Sub Regional Bureaux, the National Central Bureaux and the General Secretariat of Interpol.

The Bureau has a list of priority crimes, amongst which is firearms trafficking.

The Bureau has dedicated a desk to the problem of illicit firearms trafficking. The role of the Firearms Desk Officer is:

- to strengthen and improve international cooperation;
- to facilitate a smooth and effective exchange of criminal intelligence and to evaluate regional crime trends by monitoring cross-border crimes.

The availability of small arms has been of particular concern to the region owing to their frequent use in the perpetration of violent crimes.

The region has been very active in trying to address the issue of illicit trafficking in small arms. All firearms trafficking routes that have been identified are being monitored by our law enforcement agencies. It has to be mentioned that the region has in place a protocol known as SADC Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials whose objectives include cooperation and information sharing. Hopefully this Protocol will be in force in July 2004.

We are gathered here today to view and identify the problems of arms brokering and brokering activities. When we look at relevant international, regional and sub-regional protocols, declarations, agreements and programmes of action on the implementation of the UNPOA to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, it is stated that member states are to develop common understandings of the basic issues and the scope of the problems related to illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons with a view to preventing, combating and eradicating the activities of those engaged in such brokering and the SADC Protocol is no exception.

Without adequate information sharing, it is difficult to know the following:

- Who are the brokers?
- What activities are involved?
- Is brokering a national or regional problem?
- How to solve this problem?

The regulation of the activities of international brokers in small arms is a critical element in a comprehensive approach to combating illicit trafficking in all its aspects.

Participating states should consider national systems for regulating the activities of those who are engaged in brokering. This could include measures such as:

- requiring registration of brokers operating within their territory;
- requiring licensing or authorisation of brokering; or
- requiring disclosure of import and export licences or authorizations, or accompanying documents, and of the names and locations of brokers involved in the transactions.

It has to be mentioned that SARPCCO is very fortunate to have the Legal Sub-Committee which is responsible for legal assistance in the harmonisation of legislation in the region and there is no doubt that the issue of brokering looked into and changes will be put in place to meet international requirements amongst which will be to look at extra-territorial jurisdiction.

It is our hope that with regular information sharing, we will curb this scourge.