Statement by Tech 4 Tracing

Constructive Dialogue on the UNTOC and Protocols' review process following the conclusion of the eleventh meeting of the Working Group on Firearms

5 April 2024

Thank you, Chair. My name is Emile LeBrun and I'm pleased and honored to be participating in this year's Constructive Dialogue on UNTOC and its Protocols once again, and I'm here speaking on behalf of Tech 4 Tracing, or T4T.

T4T is the only international NGO focused exclusively on incubating, testing and deploying new technology-based tools for improving the detection, identification, documentation, and mapping of illicit weapons and explosives. Supported by the European Union, T4T works directly with national authorities to provide them tailored **new technology-enabled tools for criminal intelligence investigations, operations and rapid response**—and to generate digital evidence for legal accountability mechanisms. We are a partner in EMPACT (the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats) and its Operational Action Plan focused on illicit firearms trafficking, and our work was recently cited in the [UN Secretary-General's 2023 Report on Small Arms and Light Weapons (S/2023/823)](#).

The [**Background Paper of the Working Group on Firearms**](#) (CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/2) on 'Operationalizing the Firearms Protocol in view of technological developments relating to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition,' provides an excellent summary of many of the critical issues facing law enforcement arising from new technologies. It also serves as a valuable reference for identifying where the critical role of non-governmental can be in implementing the Firearms Protocol in this domain.

In particular, and responding to the guiding question for today's Agenda item IV on *States parties' technical assistance needs and non-governmental stakeholders' engagement*, I

would like to make three points in line with **Recommendation 8, paragraph 42** of the Working Group's Background Paper, on the **'Use of new technology to enhance criminal justice responses.'** That recommendation reads, in part:

> *'States are encouraged to explore the use of technology to enhance responses related to technological developments and changing modi operandi in the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. . .'*

Point one. As criminals evolve in their use of new technologies, States' parties' technical assistance needs to effectively respond will only grow. **What we are now seeing is only the start of a technology race between criminals and law enforcement in the domain of illicit weapons manufacture.** Unfortunately, this will be a long race, and the finish line will continue being pushed back as criminals innovate new ways to undermine controls, to which law enforcement then must respond with new tools of their own.

Dear colleagues, **much of the technological expertise needed to beat the criminals in this race lies with non-governmental stakeholders, with NGOs and the private sector**. There are a number of ways to draw in and leverage that expertise for law enforcement's gain, and not all of them imply costly contracts with private companies. There are other models, built around common public security, arms control and armed violence prevention objectives, informed by NGO expertise in both arms control and new technology.

Point two. In the fight against illicit firearms manufacture and trafficking, **information exchange is critical**, whether organized bilaterally or through regional and international mechanisms and platforms. Key examples of such platforms include iARMS, iTRACE, and the planned Europol Firearms Intelligence Hub.

For information exchange mechanisms to be effective, however, **it is essential for national authorities to 'speak the same technical language' when it comes to illicit weapons data**. A number of standard universal reference lists exist for firearms, including the Interpol Firearms Reference Table, but no such reference exists for firearms ammunition. For this reason, working in consultation with law enforcement entities, T4T is developing the

international **SMall Caliber Ammunition Reference Table (SMART)**, which could be extremely useful to States for documenting and then sharing information on seized illicit ammunition.

Point three, and to conclude. Automating **the detection and documentation of privately-manufactured firearm parts and components needs special attention** given how fast they are proliferating and their increasing prominence in seizures. Because of their unique geometry, these objects—like explosives and munitions—are amenable to detection and identification using artificial intelligence (AI) computer vision. This is another important area where specialized non-governmental entities can work closely with law enforcement to ensure that they have the leading technologies they need to combat criminal manufacture and trafficking, and to thereby more effectively implement the Firearms Protocol.

I thank you, Chair.

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