Illicit firearms: Operation Trigger IX nets 14,260 arrests across Latin America

18 avril 2023

Drugs worth USD 5.7 billion also seized in INTERPOL-led operation targeting key trafficking routes and organized crime groups

LYON, France – In the biggest firearms operation ever coordinated by INTERPOL, authorities in Central and South America have made 14,260 arrests and seized some 8,263 illicit firearms, as well as 305,000 rounds of ammunition.

With illicit firearms used by criminals to commit armed robberies and murder, they are also closely associated with the proliferation of a wide range of other crimes using the same trafficking routes.

The links between illicit firearms and drug manufacturing and trafficking were thrown into sharp relief, with the seizure of 203 tonnes of cocaine and other drugs together worth some USD 5.7 billion, and 372 tonnes of drug precursors during Operation Trigger IX (12 March – 2 April).

Law enforcement across INTERPOL’s 195 member countries have reported record drug seizures in the past year and, in many cases, a spike in drug-related violence, fueled by the traffic of illegal firearms.

The operation, which saw an unprecedented level of cooperation across 15 countries, also identified a range of other crimes such as corruption, fraud, human trafficking, environmental crime and terrorist activities.

Operational highlights

INTERPOL gathered firearms experts from participating countries at an operational hub in Foz do Iguaçu in the
On the ground, coordinated actions led to the disruption of 20 organized criminal groups, including the arrest of members of Primeiro Comando da Capital, Mara Salvatrucha and the Balkans Cartel, all involved in firearms trafficking.

In Uruguay, 100,000 pieces of ammunition trafficked internationally by two European nationals were seized by authorities, marking the country’s largest-ever such seizure.

Authorities in Brazil and Paraguay shut down several firearms dealerships following the identification of irregular transfers and unlicensed sales.

Other operational results include:

- 11 victims were rescued in Paraguay, when authorities dismantled a human trafficking ring.
- In cooperation with Venezuela, police in Colombia arrested a Venezuelan national subject to an INTERPOL Red Notice for terrorism and arms trafficking.
- A 32 year old woman was arrested at the land border between Paraguay and Brazil with eight pistols and 16 chargers taped to her body.

Looking ahead, some 30 investigations were opened as a result of actions on the ground, and authorities identified 15 new modus operandi for the illicit manufacturing, trafficking and concealment of firearms, with INTERPOL’s Purple Notice leveraged to help alert member countries.

### INTERPOL’s global reach

“The fact that an operation targeting illicit firearms resulted in such massive drugs seizures is further proof, if needed, that these crimes are intertwined,” said INTERPOL Secretary General Jürgen Stock.

“The results, coming just weeks after our Americas Regional Conference was highlighting the need for greater information sharing on these linked organized crime activities, also demonstrate the unique value of INTERPOL in supporting efforts in the field.

“The organized crime networks behind all of these illicit activities have only one priority, which is profit. We, as law enforcement, must be equally determined to dismantle them across every region and globally,” concluded Secretary General Stock.

Valdecy Urquiza, INTERPOL’s Vice-President for the Americas, highlighted the value of joint initiatives such as Trigger IX in prioritizing national and regional efforts against illicit flows. “Intelligence-led investigations and operations enable police to cooperate internationally and remove illicit firearms from circulation to protect the public,” said Mr Urquiza.
INTERPOL global tools used by investigators during the operation include the Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS), the only global database of illicit firearms, including stolen, lost and trafficked/smuggled firearms.

Authorities also had immediate access to the INTERPOL Ballistic Information Network (IBIN), enabling law enforcement officials to compare images of ballistic fingerprints from fired casings and projectiles to establish links between crimes worldwide.

Tracing the history and ownership of recovered firearms provides crucial investigative leads. Every firearm is unique and can be identified by its serial number, make, model and calibre as well as by its ballistic ‘fingerprint’. Comparing ballistics evidence of recovered cartridge casings and ammunition is therefore crucial to investigations.

During the operation, INTERPOL's Firearms Programme was supported by INTERPOL's Regional Bureaus in Argentina and El Salvador, its Drugs and Fugitives units, and its Command and Coordination Centre.

More than 100 national law enforcement agencies were involved in the operation, including the collaboration of US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), which supported participating countries.

**Participating countries:** Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay.

Operation Trigger IX was funded by the European Union and carried out under the framework of Project Disrupt.
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**PAYS CONCERNÉS**

- ARGENTINE
- BRÉSIL
- PARAGUAY
- URUGUAY
- VENEZUELA
- COLOMBIE

**VOIR AUSSI**

- Trafic d’armes à feu
- Trafic de stupéfiants
- Criminalité organisée
- Système INTERPOL de gestion des données sur les armes illicites et du traçage des armes (iARMS)
- Réseau d’information balistique d’INTERPOL

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