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WAPIS NEWSLETTER



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EDITORIAL

I am honoured to have been offered the opportunity to write this editorial in the WAPIS Programme quarterly newsletter for two reasons: firstly, due to having formerly been the Programme's national point of contact (SPOC), but also because I am now Minister of Justice, which is the supervisory institution for the Integrated Criminal Information System (ICIS), which acts as the Data Collection and Registration Centre (DACORE).

There's no need to remind you of the prevailing security situation in the West African region, which is in the grip of activities by both organised criminal groups and terrorists.

In a shared community space which enshrines the principle of free movement of people and goods, the lack or weakness of information exchange between law enforcement agencies only profits the criminal organisations.

Hence, increasing the capacity of the law enforcement authorities in West African countries to combat transnational crime and terrorism through enhanced information sharing has become an imperative.

I can safely say that the member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have certainly got the measure of this imperative by requesting, through the ECOWAS Commission, that an information-sharing system between law enforcement agencies be set up.

The WAPIS programme came about in order to respond to these security challenges, by allowing efficient collection of police information thanks to an automated, centralized national system, offering the possibility of sharing information collected at national, regional and international levels.

As the Head of the WAPIS Programme has stated, "[...] digitizing police data in each country and the possibility of networking will change the history of the fight against organized crime in West Africa, as they have changed it in other parts of the world". I would add that we have, to this end, a reason to be even more committed, because we are not only contemporaries or witnesses of this historical upheaval, but key players.

Guinea-Bissau, my own country, has not been left behind in this regional dynamic. Included in the Programme as part of the 3EDF phase in 2017, it has done its utmost to satisfy the legal and technical prerequisites agreed in the MoU signed with INTERPOL.

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In November 2022, as part of the Programme implementation, I received the IT equipment offered to my country and, on 9 March 2023, I also attended the inauguration of the ICIS/DACORE.

I am grasping the opportunity to thank the European Union again, for agreeing to fund this Programme, ECOWAS for its political support, and also ICPOINTERPOL, who were entrusted with implementation.

Today I'm happy to see that the centre is up and running, and filled with investigators from different law enforcement agencies.

That said, the existence of DACORE in our countries should not be an end in itself, but the start of a real tradition of cooperation between different law enforcement officers, at national, regional and international level. These are indeed the three levels of implementation chosen by the Programme.

Dear readers and members of the WAPIS family, information can only really be of use in our daily battles when it comes from a source that is legal, of good quality and accessible securely.

This transition allows me to remind you that WAPIS is indeed a police tool, but it is also a tool that serves justice. I am aware that compliance with the law when using it, especially protection of personal data, is an important element. I therefore undertake to do my utmost to ensure that our legal system is strengthened and adapted to existing requirements.

I would also like, in this special month of March, use this platform to pay a heartfelt tribute to all the women, especially those working to promote justice and the rule of law in bringing about social peace around the world.

In conclusion, I wish INTERPOL every success as they continue to implement the WAPIS Programme in Guinea-Bissau and other West African countries.

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LEAD STORIES

First visit to West Africa by Stephen Kavanagh, INTERPOL's Executive Director of Police Services, in the context of WAPIS

In the context of monitoring implementation of the Programme, Stephen KAVANAGH, INTERPOL's Executive Director of Police Services, paid a strategic visit to Ghana and Nigeria in order to review the progress of WAPIS Programme implementation in these countries, and in particular, boost its adoption by the national authorities.

On a mission to Nigeria from 16 to 18 January 2023, INTERPOL's Executive Director of Police Services, accompanied by the Deputy Director Africa, Mr Theos BADEGE, and the Head of the WAPIS Programme, Mr Richard GOTWE, met the national authorities, notably the Minister of Police Affairs, Mr Muhammad Maigari Dingyadi, with a view to overcoming all the challenges involved in implementing the Programme. These challenges, which are mainly technical and organizational in nature, were discussed with the highest Nigerian authorities, who decided to organize a WANACO meeting in the near future in order to take decisions about the challenges that had been discussed.



Strategic visit to Nigeria by the INTERPOL delegation

One of the highlights of this visit was the meeting between the Executive Director and the new Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Dr Abdel Fatau Musah. This meeting provided an opportunity for INTERPOL's Executive Director to consolidate relations between INTERPOL and ECOWAS as part of building up their joint efforts to bring about a safer West African region. A number of initiatives were therefore discussed, especially concerning WAPIS, the cornerstone of security cooperation in West Africa.

In the same vein, other meetings were held, notably with the European Union delegation in Abuja, the Director General of the Nigerian National Police, and also the Head of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC).

It was in a similar context that he continued his visit to Ghana on 19 and 20 January 2023, where he met several WAPIS implementation partners in the country. During a meeting with the Private Secretary to the Minister of the Interior, Ms Adélaïde Anno-KUMI, the delegation explained the challenges encountered in implementing WAPIS in Ghana, a pilot country for the Programme since 2012. The authorities have promised to take the necessary measures to consolidate WAPIS in Ghana.



Strategic visit to Ghana by the INTERPOL delegation

This mission was punctuated by several other meetings, notably with His Excellency Irchad Razaaly, Head of the European Union Delegation in Ghana, with the aim of winning his support in making the national authorities aware of how to implement WAPIS effectively.

INTERPOL's Executive Director of Police Services also profited from the opportunity to meet those involved in implementing the Programme in Ghana, notably the Director of the National Police, the Director of the Narcotics Control Commission, the Director of prison services, and also the Deputy Director of immigration services.

Inauguration of the DACORE: Guinea is consolidating its security architecture to help combat transnational organized crime and terrorism

On Wednesday 25 January 2023, the government of Guinea, represented by its Minister of Security and Civil Defence, Mr Bachir DIALLO, inaugurated the police Data Collection and Registration Centre (DACORE) as part of implementation of the West African Police Information System (WAPIS).



DACORE inauguration ceremony – Conakry, Guinea, 25 January 2023

The DACORE is the national police Data Collection and Registration Centre, which will be responsible, in Guinea, for managing the national police information system. This centre will act as a catalyst for strengthening security and synergies between the various law enforcement agencies in the country, by involving them in the process

of collecting, centralising, backing up and sharing police data at national, regional and international levels, via INTERPOL's I-24/7 secure communications channel. The DACORE will thus make it easier for front-line agents to conduct their day-to-day work on criminal investigations, as well as to process the movement of people and goods at borders.

This inauguration marks the beginning of a new stage in Programme implementation with, in prospect, extension of the police information system to the law enforcement agencies and the courts of Conakry and to the provinces. INTERPOL will support this roll-out until November 2023, the Programme end date. For its part, Guinea will need to start familiarizing itself with and then continue to implement a territorial network with the budget allocated to the DACORE. In this regard, the European Union, ECOWAS and INTERPOL are still confident about the renewed commitment from the country's authorities.

The ceremony was attended by the Representative of the Head of the European Union Delegation in Guinea, Mr Raymond Lataste, the resident ECOWAS Representative in Guinea, His Excellency Louis-Blaise AKA-BROU, INTERPOL's Director of Operational Support and Analysis, Mr Cyril GOUT, the Head of the WAPIS Programme, Mr Richard GOTWE, as well as several ambassadors accredited in Guinea and various law enforcement agency managers.

The Integrated Criminal Information System Center (ICIS) opens its doors in Guinea Bissau to combat transnational crime and terrorism.

The WAPIS Programme has passed a crucial stage in Guinea-Bissau, with the inauguration of the Integrated Criminal Information System Center (ICIS) on 9 March 2023 in Bissau. This centre will be the nerve centre for collection, management and sharing of criminal information between various law enforcement agencies.

This ceremony was presided over by the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, in the presence of the President of the Supreme Court in Guinea-Bissau, the Head of the European Union Delegation in Guinea-Bissau, the resident ECOWAS Representative in Guinea-Bissau, Head of the WAPIS Programme, as well as several ambassadors accredited in Guinea-Bissau and various law enforcement agency managers.

Closing the ceremony, the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Teresa Alexandrina DA SILVA, reassured the partners of her personal commitment and that of the government to make WAPIS an indispensable tool in GuineaBissau's security architecture.

The inauguration was followed by signature of an agreement to extend the I-24/7 network between the Director of ISIC and Head of the Bissau NCB, in order to allow officers using WAPIS in GuineaBissau to have direct access to INTERPOL's databases via INTERPOL's I-24/7 secure communications channel.

Other inaugurations are due to take place in the coming months in other countries in the sub-region.



ICIS inauguration ceremony – Bissau, Guinea-Bissau, 9 March 2023

The WAPIS Programme presents its implementation status during the 17th General Assembly of the West African Police Chiefs Committee in Niamey, Niger.

The West African Police Chiefs Committee was held from 28 to 30 March 2023 in Niamey, Niger.

This general assembly constitutes a platform for the organisation of three meetings held consecutively with the main aim of exchanging information and sharing experiences on matters of regional security. These meetings were for Police Chiefs, Chiefs of Security Services and finally, ministers responsible for regional security.

On the agenda of this general assembly, the WAPIS Programme was the subject of a presentation by the Head of the Programme, Mr Richard GOTWE. As a reminder, the WAPIS Programme came about as a result of a meeting of Police Chiefs, which took place in Brussels in 2010.

This intervention was the opportunity for the WAPIS Programme to boost the commitment and ownership of those involved in the region's security so that WAPIS could be the standard for consolidation of the countries' security architecture and the fight against crime in all its forms.

After the deliberations, several specific recommendations for implementing WAPIS were adopted and validated by ministers responsible for security in the region:

For participating countries, taking all the necessary national measures for effective operationalization of WAPIS via:

- the adoption of the appropriate legal framework by member States who have not yet done so;
- the allocation and updating of an effective budget line;
- the assignment of qualified, dedicated staff;
- the deployment of WAPIS throughout the national territory, including land, sea and air borders;
- the obligation, for all law enforcement agencies concerned, to use WAPIS in searches, checks, investigations and criminal analyses;
- the systematic collection of complaints concerning vehicle theft, theft of identity documents, weapons and identifiable generic objects mandatory in a police report, so this information can be recorded in the national WAPIS databases and, consequently, shared at both a regional and international level.

As concerns ECOWAS, the adoption of the legal framework required for operation and permanence of the regional platform and the appointment or establishment of a coordinating body within ECOWAS, who will take over from INTERPOL when the WAPIS Programme comes to an end.

These recommendations will no doubt boost the commitment of participating countries to fully discharge their responsibility for effective implementation of WAPIS to ensure the peace, security and safety of people and property in the territory.



17th General Assembly of the West African Police Chiefs Committee – Niamey, Niger, 29 March 2023

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The WAPIS Programme is invited to share its experience with law enforcement officers from Southern Africa in Maputo, Mozambique

INTERPOL's Regional Office in Harare organised a workshop on extension of the I24/7 network from 20 to 24 February 2023 in Maputo, Mozambique.

This workshop provided an opportunity for the WAPIS Programme to introduce the system it has established in West Africa, share a number of good practices relating to its implementation, and above all, demonstrate WAPIS's innovative role in the fight against transnational crime and terrorism.

The participants listened with keen interest to this information delivered by the Head of the Programme, Mr Richard GOTWE. This interest materialised in a plea for countries in Southern Africa to have this system, which will doubtless strengthen the region's security architecture.

WAPIS is becoming an indispensable tool in Africa's security architecture. The desire of Southern African and central African states to equip themselves with this tool illustrates this perfectly.

WAPIS IT administrators are trained in managing and administering the system

The regional workshop for IT administrators on good practice in managing and administering the WAPIS system took place in Lomé, Togo, from 12 to 14 April 2023. This workshop was attended by IT administrators from 13 West African countries. These were Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, GuineaBissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

This workshop, run by experts from INTERPOL's WAPIS Programme, improved the administrators' ability so they understand how the system works and promoted good practice in IT security. It was also an occasion for participants to share their experiences of extending WAPIS beyond the Data collection and registration centres (DACOREs).

The opening ceremony for this workshop was attended by Representatives of the European Union, and Togo's Minister of the Interior and Civil Defence.



Group photo of the IT administrator training opening ceremony – Lomé, Togo, 12 April 2023

SPOTLIGHT ON AFIS

The West African AFIS project enters its practical training phase

An essential component of the WAPIS Programme, INTERPOL's regional AFIS project, which started in March 2022 with collection of data on the actual capacity of the forensics services in 16 West African countries, entered a new phase in January 2023, with practical training broken down into three subject areas: Forensic reporting, Crime scene management, Train-the-Trainer in techniques for organising and educating adults in the forensic science police (PTS).



Minister of the Interior of the Gambia, Mr SEYAKA SONKO (with cap), surrounded by trainees and the trainer

As a reminder, in July 2022, during its first steering committee, the project categorised the 16 West African countries in three separate groups, depending on whether or not there is an AFIS and the accompanying chain of custody.

We can therefore see how countries are split:

- Group 1: pilot countries where there is no AFIS, which need this tool to be installed;
- Group 2: countries where there is an AFIS, which need capacity building;
- Group 3: countries where there is no AFIS, which need advice on how to prepare for hosting an AFIS in future.

Countries in Group 1, namely Benin, the Gambia and Togo have benefited, since January 2023, from a series of practical training courses offered by the project and much appreciated by trainees in the field.

Togo's staff, forensic science police, police and gendarmerie therefore instigated a series of training courses, following refresher training on forensic reporting and crime scene management with fingermarks. It took place from 30 January to 10 February 2023. There were 18 trainees in total, including 10 from the gendarmerie with one woman, and eight from the police with no women.

As a country in which the AFIS project was being funded, from 13 to 24 February 2023, the Gambia then took over refresher training identical to that delivered in Togo, in which 12 trainees participated, including two women.

Finally, in Benin this time, namely Porto-Novo, a shared training course for Benin/Togo was held from 20 February to 24 March 2023, in the CID's Advanced Training Centre. This involved training trainers in educational resource techniques, with 10 trainees: five police officers from Benin with one woman, and five police and gendarmerie officers from Togo.

For countries in Group 2, the AFIS project is currently focusing its efforts on building the capacity of police and gendarmerie units and raising awareness of this operational tool that AFIS represents. Putting its money where its mouth is, the AFIS project is currently funding this refresher training for national police officers and forensic



Crime scene management: exercise in identifying, numbering and documenting traces and evidence.

police officers in Cabo Verde. This training took place from 27 March to 7 April 2023, with a total of 10 trainees, including two women.

For the other countries in Groups 2 and 3, the project is keen to state that they will be the focus of AFIS team work missions, which will offer them either activities designed to strengthen existing AFIS systems, or recommendations they can follow to become eligible to receive an AFIS during later phases of the project.

Moreover, the project has launched a call for tenders for the supply of three complete AFIS systems to the pilot countries, while awaiting delivery of the first batches of forensic equipment for countries already visited, planned for September 2023.

THE MEN AND WOMEN BEHIND THE SYSTEM



Inspector Aisha Manneh

Gambia Prison Services,
WAPIS Data Operator
at the WAPIS Centre in Banjul

"In response to the concern expressed by ECOWAS regarding the wave of transnational organized crime and terrorism affecting the region a unique platform called WAPIS was set up to facilitate the sharing of police information so as to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies in Africa.

I am proud to be part of the implementation process of the WAPIS Programme in Gambia. I wish the WAPIS and AFIS systems every success in ensuring the security of the people of Gambia, the sub-region, and the world.

Thank you".

"As a police officer, I am proud to see the WAPIS programme launched in Cabo Verde, and I am proud to be a part of it. It is a game-changer in terms of fighting crime and creating a safer West Africa for all our citizens."

The WAPIS programme is a crucial initiative aimed at creating a safer West Africa through an information-sharing platform for police forces. The objective is to improve national and regional cooperation between law enforcement agencies, allowing us to work together and share critical criminal justice information in real time, which is essential if we are to successfully prevent and combat crime and keep our communities safe.



Dilma Cruz

Judicial Police Inspector
WAPIS data Operator
Cabo verde

CONCLUSION



Richard GOTWE
Head of the WAPIS Programme

Dear readers,

I'm delighted to talk to you again in this new WAPIS Programme newsletter. This first quarter of 2023 was marked by a number of strategic and operational activities, some of which have been reproduced here.

I'll begin with the major meeting in the sub-region which has been expected for four years, namely the 17th General Assembly of the West African Police Chiefs Committee, followed by the 8th meeting of the Committee of Chief of Security Services and concluding with the 8th meeting of the forum of ministers responsible for security in West Africa. I have the honour and privilege of explaining the implementation status of the WAPIS Programme in ECOWAS Member States. All participants have recognised the important role the WAPIS system has to play in the fight against transnational organized crime and terrorism,

and also in the production of statistics and reports on criminal tendencies in the sub-region. A series of recommendations have been adopted and confirmed by the forum of ministers to ensure effective operationalization and permanence of WAPIS as part of the acceleration of setting up the regional platform for exchanging police information in the ECOWAS space.

I've had the immense privilege of accompanying INTERPOL's Executive Director of Police Services during his first visit to West Africa for WAPIS in January. We went to Nigeria, then to Ghana, where we talked to the national authorities about the challenges hampering WAPIS implementation and the improvement actions we propose.

We also inaugurated the Police Data Collection and Registration Centre (DACORE) in Guinea (January 2023) and the Integrated Criminal Information System (ICIS) in Guinea-Bissau (March 2023). These high-profile events are certainly important and are the culmination of numerous efforts made by all stakeholders, starting with the countries, but we have on every occasion indicated that these inaugurations marked the beginning of hard work, that the success of the WAPIS system relied on the different countries, and that even stronger ownership and measures to make it permanent were essential to make WAPIS an effective tool in the fight against transnational crime and terrorism. We hope to conclude these inauguration activities in the coming weeks in Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.

As part of the AFIS project, training activities are being carried out in the field. Togo, the Gambia and Benin were able to benefit from refresher training in forensics. Other beneficiary countries will soon receive this. Initial batches of forensic equipment will be delivered very soon, in line with the action plan drawn up and confirmed with each country.

As part of the 3EDF phase of the WAPIS Programme, numerous training activities have also taken place, with an emphasis on training investigators to use the WAPIS system.

The steering committees for the 3EDF phase of the WAPIS Programme and the AFIS project, which will take place from 23 to 25 May in Abidjan, will provide an opportunity to review project implementation, discuss forthcoming activities and define priorities for the next few months.

I will be delighted to share the conclusions of these two important meetings about the Programme with you in our next issue.

In the meantime, thank you for your continued support for the WAPIS Programme.

A green background featuring a map of Africa with a yellow overlay on the West African region. The map is set against a green circuit board pattern. The INTERPOL logo is in the top right corner, and contact information for the WAPIS Programme is in the bottom right.

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