WAPIS NEWSLETTER

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IN THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

This new edition of the WAPIS Programme bulletin is an opportunity to share with you the achievements and progress made over the past year. The WAPIS Programme, which plays a crucial role in upholding the rule of law and combating transnational organized crime in the West African region, remains a model of successful collaboration.

Currently, WAPIS plays a central role in INTERPOL's Mayor Event Support Team (IMEST) in Côte d'Ivoire, securing the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN). Under my leadership, this initiative reflects an unwavering commitment to strengthening international police cooperation and securing major events. The success of the IMEST CAN operation attests to the commitment and collective efforts of our partners in the region.

The financial support of 56 million euros received from the European Union since 2012 has been crucial in bringing the WAPIS Programme to its current position. This funding has not only facilitated support for the creation of infrastructure, the DACOREs, but has also contributed to strengthening the daily operations of police services at the national and regional levels. It underscores the collective commitment of the international community to collaboratively address security challenges.

In the face of the persistent threat of terrorism and the activities of criminal networks, the urgency and effectiveness of the WAPIS Programme are evident. By disrupting the economic models used by these networks, we actively contribute to cutting the potential sources of funding for armed terrorist groups, promoting peace and stability not only in West Africa but worldwide.

Recognizing the need for a robust foundation for police and criminal information processing, WAPIS has successfully established national data exchange systems that are now operational. These systems, soon to be interconnected at the regional level, are already linked for some countries globally through the INTERPOL I-24/7 system. They provide domestic security services with a collective memory and a

standardized exchange framework, enabling more resilient handling of criminal cases.

WAPIS adds value not only to the security of major events such as the CAN but also in the realm of unsolved criminal investigations. This dual functionality underscores the adaptability of the WAPIS Programme, allowing it to address all aspects of security challenges in the region.

May this year bring even more progress in the fight against transnational organized crime, contributing to lasting peace, security, and prosperity in West Africa and beyond.

Together, for a safer world.

Best regards,

Cyril Gout, Director of Operational Support and Analysis.

LEAD STORIES

WAPIS Ensures Safety at Africa Cup of Nations

Checks at the Felix Houphouet Boigny Stadium, 24 January 2024.

INTERPOL, supported by the West Africa Police Information System, played a crucial role in securing the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) in Côte d'Ivoire amidst heightened regional terror challenges.

From January 13 to February 11, the CAN attracted 24 national football teams to compete in various cities.

Collaborating with Côte d'Ivoire's national police, INTERPOL, supported by WAPIS national centers, conducted thorough checks at border checkpoints to ensure a secure environment for the three million fans which attended the competition.

INTERPOL's Mayor Event Support Team, implemented by INTERPOL HQ Command Control Center (CCC) Unit, assisted Côte d'Ivoire by cross-referencing passenger manifests against criminal databases, identifying potential threats. Local police, equipped to perform biometric checks against records of suspected terrorists, enhanced security.

WAPIS officers, thanks to the Head of DACOREs network provided real-time access to information, enabling swift identification of potential threats, and fostering collaboration among law enforcement agencies. It facilitates comprehensive data cross-checks against national, regional, and global databases.

WAPIS, in collaboration with INTERPOL, showcases the effectiveness of international police cooperation in ensuring safety and security during major events, leveraging shared resources and expertise on a global scale.

November is Steering Committees month: 9th WAPIS and 3rd AFIS Steering Committee Meetings results.

The 9th West African Police Information System (WAPIS) and the 3rd Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) Project Steering and Coordination Committee meetings were successfully convened in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire on 14-16 November 2023.

The 3rd AFIS Steering Committee meeting held on 14 November 2023 aimed to provide a comprehensive update on the progress of the AFIS Project since the last Steering Committee meeting in May 2023.

The discussions delved into addressing challenges encountered during implementation, formulating strategic and operational plans.

Photo of the Exchange of Best Practices WAPIS , 15 November 2023, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)

The delegates presented their operational activities. They adopted a series of recommendations for the next 6 months and urged the pilot countries, Benin, Gambia and Togo, to commit the funds to support the cost of the maintenance of the system beyond the current EU financed phase of the Project.

Family photo of the ceremony WAPIS Steering Committee, 16 November 2023, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)

On November 15-16, the WAPIS Exchange of Good Practice and the WAPIS Steering Committee meetings took place. Chaired by representatives of the European Union and the ECOWAS Commission, the Steering Committee meeting primarily involved Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) from participating countries and directors of the Data Collection and Registration Centres (DACOREs).

AFIS Steering Committee, 14 November 2023, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)

The discussions during the 9th WAPIS Steering Committee meeting focused on the overall implementation progress of the program in each participating country since the previous Steering Committee meeting in May 2023.

At the conclusion of these meetings, a series of recommendations were issued to all participants to bolster and enhance the implementation actions of the WAPIS and AFIS projects.

AFIS CORNER

The WAPIS Programme, through its AFIS Project, is about to reach a pivotal moment in INTERPOL´s mission to enhance biometric identification capabilities in West Africa.

Donation of AFIS equipment to Gambia (Banjul)

Over the last quarter of 2023, the AFIS Project concluded the procurement process required to set up an AFIS system.

In parallel, it conducted capacity building activities which will contribute to producing ten-print cards and collecting latent prints with the quality required to feed the AFIS system and other international databases.

Over 90 trainees attended a refresher course in Togo, Benin, The Gambia, Cabo Verde and Côte d´Ivoire on fingerprint enrolment and crime scene management techniques. Around 40 of them received a ToT training prior to launching national training sessions. Additional refresher and ToT training sessions are scheduled to take place in Guinea and Mauritania in the first quarter of 2024.

The national counterparts already launched their national training sessions. In Togo, The Gambia and Cabo Verde, national trainers administered courses on first responders and enrolment techniques to over 150 members of forensic units.

To sustain this activity, the AFIS Project opted to provide enrolment and crime scene management equipment. From September to December 2023, it handed over forensic kits to practitioners in Togo, Benin, The Gambia, Cabo Verde and Mauritania.

The donation ceremonies were attended by Heads of police forces and forensic departments in the respective countries, the European Union and ECOWAS. Forensic experts who had already taken part in training sessions administered by the AFIS Project proceeded with a demo of the donated equipment.

The representatives of the national law enforcement agencies praised the crucial role of an AFIS system in crime prevention by supporting investigations, enabling accurate identification of individuals, helping track the criminal record of individuals and solving cases.

Anticipating on the upcoming installation of the AFIS system in forensic units, the AFIS Project refurbished the forensic offices of the national police and national gendarmerie in Togo.

The AFIS Project provides an AFIS infrastructure, technical and legal capacity-building resources to first responders, criminal investigators and judicial courts, with the aim of enhancing the forensic chain of custody. As a component to the WAPIS Programme, it brings biometric data to the WAPIS system.

INTERPOL is confident that this project will make a substantial contribution to global security by enhancing the use of biometric data during criminal investigation and its exchange among law enforcement agencies at the national, regional and international levels.

THE MEN AND WOMEN BEHIND THE SYSTEM: DIRECTOR'S AND SPOC'S ROLE!

Leadership takes center stage in steering the WAPIS revolution. Strategy, coordination, guidance, collaboration – these are the focal points within the framework of implementing the WAPIS Programme. Let's now shed light on the Director of WAPIS national systems in Guinea Bissau, Ms. Cornélia Té, and Mr. Moussa Souleman Mahamat, SPOC for the Systeme Information Policiere du Tchad (SIPT) project spin-off of the WAPIS Programme. They are among the driving forces behind the scenes, orchestrating the successful management of WAPIS in their respective countries.

Ms. Cornélia Té
Director of the Sistema Integrado de Informação Criminal (SIIC-WAPIS) presentes Guinea Bissau DACORE

1. Can you explain the role of the SIIC Director within the WAPIS Programme and how it contributes to strengthening security in Guinea-Bissau?

A: The SIIC Director plays a crucial role in ensuring that all the objectives outlined in the creation of SIIC are effectively and efficiently met, always respecting national laws and agreements stemming from its establishment to ensure national and regional peace and security. This is the only way we can truly combat transnational crime.

2. How does the WAPIS Programme contribute to enhancing the capabilities of law enforcement agencies in Guinea-Bissau and improving the management of security-related information?

A: The WAPIS Programme is undoubtedly a breath of fresh air for capacity-building in law enforcement and all entities working in this field, provided that all recommendations and teachings administered by the facilitators are well applied. It is a project that brings a national platform enabling real-time intercommunication of all criminal information.

3. What potential challenges might Guinea-Bissau face in the implementation of the WAPIS Programme, and what measures are being taken to overcome them?

A: Our main challenge is to ensure the extension to all law enforcement institutions, and to overcome this, awareness will be raised through meetings with different entities.

4. How does the WAPIS Programme contribute to combating transborder threats such as terrorism, organized crime, and illicit trafficking in the Guinea-Bissau region?

A: It will contribute by making it easier to obtain information about individuals entering our country through real-time information atomization, thus ensuring proactive investigation.

5. Can you share specific examples of success stories or situations where the WAPIS Programme had a positive impact on national security in Guinea-Bissau?

A: Thanks to the inclusion of data with criminal relevance and other pertinent information, successful legal proceedings were ensured, both in the case of drug combat investigation by the Anti-Drug Unit and in the brigade for crimes against women and children in the National Directorate of the Judiciary Police.

6. How can the citizens of Guinea-Bissau directly benefit from the programme's implementation in terms of security and stability in their daily lives?

A: They can benefit through the dissemination of the programme's importance and the accessibility of information. Also, with the programme being well-administered and the extension carried out effectively, we will have a safer country in terms of preventing crime.

Mr. Moussa Souleman Mahamat
SPOC for the Systeme Information
Policiere du Tchad (SIPT)

1. Can you explain the role of the SPOC (Single Point of Contact) within the Systeme d'Information de la Police du Tchad (SIPT) project and how this contributes to enhancing security in Chad?

A: The SIPT National Focal Point co-ordinates the implementation of the programme with participating law enforcement agencies in Chad and is the main point of contact for the Government of Chad for all SIPT-related communications to INTERPOL. The SPOC ensures that donations of equipment as part of the SIPT Programme receive the necessary authorizations and exemptions from customs duties, import taxes and any other similar measures from the Chadian authorities.

2. What are the main objectives and benefits of the WAPIS-SIPAO project for regional security, and how is Chad helping to achieve these objectives?

A: The objectives of the WAPIS-SIPAO project for regional security are to create a common police information platform for the various members of ECOWAS, Mauritania and Chad. This will have the advantage of strengthening police cooperation between member states. Chad will also decide to share certain data in complete sovereignty, once the contours are well defined and the legal framework has been signed by the country.

3. As SPOC, what are your specific responsibilities and how are you working with other national and international players to ensure the success of the project in the Chadian context?

A: As SPOC, I am responsible for implementing the SIPT Project and leading it to achieve its objective. With this in mind, Chad police is going to bring together all the players who can help to ensure the success of the project. We are only at the beginning of its implementation, but we plan to establish strategic partnerships with bodies that have common interests and many other international organisations that are active in the field of improving the country's security conditions.

4. How is the WAPIS SIPAO project helping to build the capacity of law enforcement agencies in Chad and improve the management of security-related information?

A: The WAPIS project enables law enforcement agencies to be interconnected in their investigations and to have the police information they need instantaneously from the common national, regional and even international police database via Interpol's I-24/7 channel. This digitised data is stored in the system and can be used immediately.

5. What are the potential challenges that Chad could face in implementing the WAPIS SIPAO project, and what measures are being taken to overcome them?

A: The main challenge facing WAPIS is its sustainability. When the Programme comes to an end, the Data Collection Center (DACORE - CentRe Enregistrement des DOnnées de Police in French, CREDOP) will be set up as an institution with management autonomy, so that it can benefit from a substantial budget commensurate with its objectives. This will only be possible if politicians can see the impact of SIPT in improving the country's security situation. We will work hard to facilitate this through our results.

6. In what way is regional cooperation essential to the success of the project, and what initiatives are in place to facilitate coordination between the participating countries, particularly within the Sahel region?

A: Regional cooperation makes it possible to support national initiatives to combat all forms of crime by sharing intelligence and police data, as the Sahel countries are all members of WAPIS, this coordination will take place within the framework of the WAPIS regional platform.

7. How is the SIPT project helping to combat cross-border threats such as terrorism, organised crime and illicit trafficking in the Chad region?

A: Within the framework of regional cooperation and access to Interpol databases via the I-24/7 channel at international level, the SIPT project is helping to combat all forms of crime in Chad through the intelligence and police data accessible on these platforms.

CONCLUSION

Richard GOTWE
Head of the WAPIS Programme

Dear readers,

As we start 2024, I am proud to throw back on the collective achievements of the WAPIS Programme in 2023. The completion of all DACOREs, enabling effective national data sharing in every country, is a significant milestone.

Over 550,000 cases have been inserted into the WAPIS national databases. More than 700 Law enforcement officers attended the 50 training sessions we have organized. 12 countries have extended the WAPIS beyond the DACORE. The Proof of concept of the regional exchange platform has been developed and demonstrated during the Steering Committee held in November. 10 countries have their WAPIS national system connected to I24/7 allowing direct consultation of the INTERPOL databases.

In the framework of the AFIS project, the provider for the AFIS system for the three pilot countries (Benin, The Gambia and Togo) has been selected following an international call for tenders. Several countries have received Forensic equipment.

The resume of the Chad component is also one of our key achievements. In less than 6 months the country has adopted all the required legal frameworks for the project and has assigned a building to host the "Système d'Information Policière pour le Tchad" (SIPT).

Looking forward, our goals for 2024 are the following:

WAPIS 3EDF component

Our shared goal with the participating countries is to reach 750,000 cases by 2024, underlining our dedication to advancing the WAPIS Programme and enhancing national, regional and global security, for a safer world.

In recognizing the importance of sustainability, we are actively working towards securing the WAPIS system's longevity in each participating country.

The effective use of the system in fighting against transnational organized crimes and terrorism will make it a key tool in countries' security architecture, therefore ensuring the allocation of a budget which requires enormous sacrifices from Governments.

At the regional level, we will try to make adopted the ECOWAS supplementary act governing the exchange of Police data in the region and draft the SOP for the regional platform. And start the pilot of the regional platform with 2/3 countries.

WAPIS-AFIS Project

Our main priority in 2024 will be to have the AFIS system fully implemented and operational in the 03 pilot countries namely, Benin, The Gambia and Togo.

WAPIS CHAD project

Our main priority in 2024 will be the completion of the renovation of the building assigned to host the SIPT and to make the SIPT fully operational so that the users in Chad will start recording criminal data.

Before I conclude, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the stakeholders for their invaluable support and collaborative spirit. The successes, we have achieved in 2023, are a testament to the power of teamwork and our collective determination to make WAPIS a force for positive change in West Africa. Let's carry this momentum into 2024, overcoming challenges and making WAPIS an exemplar of regional law enforcement collaboration.

I wish you a joyous and prosperous New Year.

INTERPOL