



**Statement Opening the
Macdonald-Laurier Institute
Anti-Contraband Tobacco Meeting
Ottawa, Ontario
25 November 2014**

Countering illicit trade in tobacco products

Illicit trade in tobacco products (ITTP) is a global occurrence, affecting all regions and countries. It holds an allure for criminals as tobacco products are light, small, easy to transport and to conceal, and usually highly taxed. Tobacco is one of the most smuggled commodities in the world, allowing offenders to amass huge profits. Penalties are often not sufficient enough to act as a deterrent.

The ITTP holds many challenges for governments. One of the biggest is the involvement of **organized criminal networks** which employ increasingly sophisticated and varied methods to counterfeit and smuggle tobacco products. The vast profits obtained are then used to support other criminal ventures such as illegally trading in drugs, arms and human beings, exploiting known routes and methodologies to expand their criminality.

A specific challenge for governments is arriving at creative solutions to the problem which need to explore the issue from all angles in order to keep abreast of the criminals. Exploring the regulation of **key components** (cellulose acetate tow, cigarette paper, cigarette filters) essential for the manufacture of cigarettes is a worthy exercise. This would entail ensuring that manufacturers of key components are accountable for the supply of their product and abide by due diligence requirements, normal conduct for most business practice. Curbing the supply of such products would essentially make it difficult to manufacture cigarettes and be an efficient way of tackling the ITTP.

The last few years have seen the expression of a global concern surrounding ITTP. The World Health Organization adopted the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products in 2012 which is awaiting entry into force. Thus, this is a hot topic on national agendas and in the international arena.

INTERPOL recognizes the ITTP as a growing issue threatening the security of States. A joint and coordinated effort is needed to find and implement lasting solutions to this multi-faceted problem. Any response to the ITTP requires the active and coordinated involvement of a number of different stakeholders nationally and internationally, including: customs authorities, tax authorities, law enforcement, government policy makers, health departments, consumer protection and trade departments, consumers, and the private sector.

INTERPOL's Office of Legal Affairs is working with INTERPOL Member States to provide creative legal solutions to support law enforcement action in the area of illicit trade and to raise awareness and understanding of the issues amongst criminal justice officers, including policy makers, legislators, judges, prosecutors, police and customs officers.

It is encouraging to view meetings such as this one taking place. Taking the time to explore the issue with a view to informing policy, enacting legislation and strengthening implementation is no small feat. We commend your efforts and wish you a fruitful and productive meeting.