

## **New UNODC campaign raises consumer awareness of links between organized crime and \$250 billion a year counterfeit business**

Vienna, 14 January 2014 – A new global campaign by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was launched today to raise awareness among consumers of the \$250 billion a year illicit trafficking of counterfeit goods. The campaign – **‘Counterfeit: Don’t buy into organized crime’** – informs consumers that buying counterfeit goods could be funding organized criminal groups, puts consumer health and safety at risk and contributes to other ethical and environmental concerns.

The campaign is centred around a new [Public Service Announcement](#) which will be launched on the NASDAQ screen in New York’s Times Square on 14 January and aired on several international television stations from January. The campaign urges consumers to ‘look behind’ counterfeit goods to boost understanding of the serious repercussions of this illicit trade.

The illicit trafficking and sale of counterfeit goods provides criminals with a significant source of income and facilitates the laundering of other illicit proceeds. Additionally, monies received from the sale of counterfeit products can be channelled towards the further production of fake goods or other illicit activities.

As a crime which touches virtually everyone in one way or another, counterfeit goods pose a serious risk to consumer health and safety. With no legal regulation and very little recourse, consumers are at risk from unsafe and ineffective products and faulty counterfeit goods can lead to injury and, in some cases, death. Tyres, brake pads and airbags, aeroplane parts, electrical consumer goods, baby formula and children’s toys are just some of the many different items which have been counterfeited.

Fraudulent medicines also present a serious health risk to consumers. Criminal activity in this area is big business: the sale of fraudulent medicines from East Asia and the Pacific to South-East Asia and Africa alone amounts to some \$5 billion per year. At the very least, fraudulent medicines have been found to contain no active ingredients, while at their worst they can contain unknown and potentially harmful chemicals. The list of fraudulent medicines is extensive, and can range from ordinary painkillers and antihistamines, to ‘lifestyle’ medicines, such as those taken for weight loss and sexual dysfunction, to life-saving medicines including those for the treatment of cancer and heart disease.

A wide range of ethical issues can also be overlooked when considering the impact of counterfeiting. Labour exploitation is also an aspect of producing counterfeit goods, with low paid workers facing safety and security concerns with little or no benefits and unregulated conditions. The problem of migrant smuggling is also further exacerbated by the counterfeit business, with reports that a number of those smuggled are coerced into selling counterfeit goods to pay off smuggling debts.

From an environmental standpoint counterfeiting poses a significant challenge: with no regulations in place, there is a real chance that harmful toxic dyes, chemicals, and unknown components used in counterfeit electrical goods are not disposed of properly, leading to serious environmental pollution.

As UNODC's Executive Director Yury Fedotov notes, "In comparison to other crimes such as drug trafficking, the production and distribution of counterfeit goods present a low-risk/high-profit opportunity for criminals. Counterfeiting feeds money laundering activities and encourages corruption. There is also evidence of some involvement or overlap with drug trafficking and other serious crimes."

Criminal groups use similar routes and modi operandi to move counterfeit goods as they do to smuggle illicit drugs, firearms and people. In 2013, the joint UNODC / World Customs Organization Container Control Programme (CCP) detected counterfeit goods in more than one-third of the seized containers, despite being set up initially to intercept drugs.

**Relevant links:**

- [Public Service Announcement](#)
- [Campaign website](#)
- [Downloads / Focus Sheet: 'The illicit trafficking of counterfeit goods and transnational organized crime'](#)

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