

Prime Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My thanks to Kenya for hosting this meeting, and for the great partnership that my Office enjoys with your beautiful country. Ministers, I thank you all for participation – I interpret your engagement as a reflection of the concern that we all share about the impact of organized crime and drugs on East Africa.

Indeed, East Africa is under threat from all sides – smuggling and piracy along its coast, trafficking through its airspace and across porous borders, and the spill-over of threats from unstable neighbours. The region is vulnerable because of conflict, poverty, and weak rule of law.

Warning lights are flashing

This vulnerability is being exploited by criminals who:

- illegally import deadly products (like drugs, weapons, hazardous waste, and counterfeit medicines);
- smuggle out the region's resources (like minerals, wood, endangered species, and people); and
- strip its assets (through corruption and money laundering).

As a result, East Africa is becoming a sinister bazaar for the trafficking of almost everything. Illicit trade is facilitated by a large pool of weapons, an army of unemployed youth, and legions of corrupt officials.

This has a dangerous impact on the region.

- Health is at risk by the spread of HIV, drug addiction, the dumping of fake medicines, and the theft of humanitarian assistance.
- Security is threatened by criminal groups that profit from vice and conflicts, launder their money into the financial system, and facilitate terrorist attacks.
- The rule of law is undermined by the bullet and the bribe, and the impunity enjoyed by criminals and their accomplices.
- Development (including the achievement of the MDGs) is threatened by the flight of social and human capital, the loss of tourism, and the diversion of public funds.

All of these factors add an immense burden to a region already suffering from so many tragedies. And they endanger international trade, peace and security.

Let us not repeat the mistakes that were made in West Africa – where the world woke up very late to the threats posed by drugs and crime. In East Africa, warning lights are flashing. We must react immediately.

Diverse region, common threat

East Africa is a diverse region, but all of its countries share a common threat: transnational organized crime. Since this is a threat without borders, only a regional response will do.

I therefore call on your support for the Regional Programme that is before you today. It follows a model that we have successfully used in other parts of the world – like West Africa and Central America – and compliments the African Union Plan of Action on drug control and crime prevention 2007-2012.

The Regional Programme focuses on three main areas: i) crime; ii) justice and integrity, and iii) health and development.

Under attack from all sides

First, organized crime – what is the nature of the threat? East Africa has become a gateway for **drug trafficking**. Cannabis and khat have long been consumed and trafficked in this region. What is new is the dramatic increase in heroin trafficking. By our estimates, some 30-35 tons of heroin are being trafficked to Africa every year, much of it via East Africa. There is also growing evidence of cocaine trafficking into the region.

Another acute threat is **piracy**. In the first half of this year, there were more than 150 reported attacks off the coast of Somalia – that's 50% of the global total, and a steep increase over last year. Kidnap for ransom on the high seas netted pirates around \$30 million in 2008. This money is creating local heroes along the Somali coast, as well as enriching anti-government forces in regions where the attacks originate. It may also be a source of terrorist financing.

The region's fragile **eco-system is under attack**. East Africa's national parks are being plundered by loggers cutting down precious hardwood, and by poachers killing elephants and rhinos for their horns and body parts. The rewards are great: a kilo of ivory bought in Africa for \$15 can fetch \$850 in Asia. Rosewood logs taken from Madagascar are sold for 600 times what the Malagasy people receive. But the costs are even greater – not only to tourism, but to the bio-diversity of this beautiful region that is unparalleled and irreplaceable.

Crime is infecting the region's **big cities** as public services and public security can not keep pace with rapid urbanization. Kidnapping and gang violence are becoming common place in parts of East Africa.

Crime is also ravaging **rural communities**. Cattle theft – involving gangs of more than 100 raiders – is terrorizing pastoral communities. For example, in the past five years, in the border region of Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda, there were more than 2,000 reported violent incidents: nearly 200,000 livestock were stolen, and around 3,700 people were killed.

Criminals are armed and dangerous thanks to **easy access to weapons** – either from conflict zones, or poorly guarded government stockpiles. Some of these weapons are also finding their way into the hands of terrorists – as we see in Somalia, or the failed attempt in 2003 to bring down a commercial airliner over Mombassa with a SAM missile.

Even attempts to escape this violence are exploited by criminals. **Smuggling of migrants** is a booming business in East Africa, either across the Gulf of Aden to Yemen and into the Gulf; or across the Sahara via Egypt and Libya to the Mediterranean. This second route now accounts for the greatest number of migrants being smuggled from Africa into Europe.

Trafficking in persons is bringing victims from East Africa to the Gulf and the Middle East, as well as moving them within the region for domestic labour and sexual exploitation. Thousands of East Africa's children have been abducted and forced to be soldiers and sex slaves. I have just returned from Gulu, Uganda (with the actor Nicholas Cage) where UNODC is working to help child soldiers, and their victims, to rebuild their lives.

Justice and integrity

Second, justice and integrity. Where these two are weak, organized crime is strong. The worst case is Somalia where instability on land has led to piracy at sea. That is why UNODC and other partners in the UN are strengthening the capacity of local officials – for example in Puntland and Somaliland – to reassert the rule of law, as well as helping countries in the region – like Kenya and the Seychelles – to bring pirates to justice.

Somalia is an extreme case, but other criminal justice systems in the region are under pressure. This is manifested by low police to population ratios, and too many people in pre-trial detention.

An increase in capacity is needed. But even the best run system can be undermined by corruption. Indeed, the greatest threat to the rule of law is the impunity of those who flaunt it. In many parts of East Africa, the proceeds of crime are buying real estate, luxury goods, and power. This is undermining democracy, threatening security, and even leading to social unrest. People are fed up with police and other public officials asking for bribes, and Members of Parliament who live royalty lifestyles despite low salaries.

Health and development

Briefly, turning to the third pillar, health and development, there are alarming signs that heroin use is on the rise in East Africa, adding to already high levels of cannabis and khat consumption. There are also indications of rising synthetic drug use.

The health risks faced by East Africa are being compounded by the dumping of fake medicines into this region. People desperately in need of life-saving drugs are consuming professionally packaged chalk and water. Organized crimes is reaching need depths of depravity.

Mapping the road ahead

So what is the solution to these many challenges? The Regional Programme that you have before you contains a rich variety of activities that can strengthen human security and the rule of law in East Africa. Allow me to map the way forward.

First, we need to recognize and assess the threat. This meeting – and your political declaration – are important first steps.

Second, we must ensure that policy is based on evidence. I urge you to increase the pool of information on drugs and crime in your countries in order to create a clearer picture of the situation, and to identify your needs. I also urge you to improve intelligence-sharing amongst yourselves in order to identify and disrupt criminal networks operating in East Africa.

Third, there must be a firm legal basis. Strong international instruments exist – like the UN Conventions against organized crime and corruption. UNODC can help you put them into practice.

Fourth, we must increase capacity. Many of the threats that you face require your prosecutors and law enforcement officials to learn new skills. UNODC can offer a long menu of technical assistance, and provide training – from forensics to witness protection, from container security to prison reform, and from financial intelligence to asset recovery. Please call on us.

Fifth, we must reduce marginalization. This includes: ensuring universal access to drug treatment; working with young people to help them make the right choices in life; helping the victims of crime; finding alternatives to imprisonment; and helping groups at risks in prison settings.

Sixth, all of this can only be achieved if we accept a sense of shared responsibility: among states in the region; with donors and partners; and within local communities by engaging all stakeholders including the private sector, the media, and civil society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The situation is very fragile, and potentially explosive. There is no time to lose. By signing the Political Declaration and endorsing the Regional Programme, you demonstrate your resolve to prevent drugs and crime from plaguing your region, and to strengthen the rule of law and human security in East Africa.