

Good morning:

Angela has provided a context, that will allow us to discuss over the next three days, what exactly makes up or can be defined as “crimes that affect the environment” and can the international community prevent these crimes and how should we go about prioritizing our actions.

Over the 12 plus years that UNODC has been working on wildlife, forest and fisheries, and more recently, waste, and minerals, one factor stands out – each crime type is specific with particular characteristics and individual complexities which require us to be strategic and act on evidence.

Moving forward there is nothing gained by conflating estimates or perpetuating here say. Evidence based interventions must be the operational norm. This requires that we invest in understanding the crime- we need to dissect it – study the supply chain, understand the cost benefit ratios and the psychology behind the crimes.

Legal markets – really complex

When we disassemble environmental crimes we are left with a complex scenario- there are legal markets for many natural resources just as there are illegal markets. And there are many clues available by understanding how the supply and value chains work. Each supply/value chain of a natural resource has its own set of stages – each with its own vulnerability apt for exploitation by crime.

Equally complex are the legislative frameworks - there are strong laws for some and for others merely civil or administrative fines.

Many natural resource crimes have yet to be made “ serious crimes” in national legislation under the definition of the UNTOC. Indeed, crimes that affect the environment continue to be classified as “ emerging crimes”. The latter coupled with the complexities of the crime types often puzzle investigators, prosecutors and Judges. This results in a plethora of shortcomings in the investigation and legal process resulting in less than strong, appropriate or dissuasive adjudication.

What can we do?

If there is one thing we have learned is that we cannot enforce our way out of crime. Enforcement is essential but must be accompanied by commensurate efforts in supply, demand and livelihoods. We must all advocate for and implement a balanced approach –

We need not reinvent all new tools and instruments – UNODC for example has a large variety of tools available that we’ve designed for other crimes. Some can be used easily and quickly, and others require some modification. However, we need not start from zero-just tailor our actions based on evidence and context. –

Similar to what can be done is what should not be done and that is pander unequivocal statements without facts for the sake of headlines, brevity of attention– this only confuses Law-makers and the public.

Today day one- it is all about Prevention. We always hear the proverb an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure – with natural and finite resources – this is the case.

Prevention when it comes to natural resources means stopping the exploitation before it happens – reducing demand or reducing the need of communities to exploit and/or preventing the crime by ensuring there are strong and dissuasive penalties.

There are many strategies for each and it is my hope that over the course of the day we will hear from colleagues, each an expert in a particular piece of this complex puzzle.

Prevention is possible – I'd would like to believe it is – and although there some examples of success they are limited and all indications suggest that natural resources continue to be exploited at alarming rates. In most cases the COVID pandemic has only served to exacerbate the situation.

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In order to prevent and engage other agendas we need to understand how crime is linked to the broader “ nature” agenda – need to demonstrate the quantifiable and visible impacts of crime

( fragile ecosystems = less carbon sync – negative impact on Biodiversity loss =climate)

( waste – impact on ecosystems – negative impacts on Biodiversity loss -climate)

( illegal mining= toxics in ecosystems = negative impact on Biodiversity loss =climate) – a few examples-

Closing-

Existential threat

Not much time to act and make changes-