



European Union

**EU Statement
General Debate**

**32nd session of the Commission on
Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

Vienna, 22-26 May 2023

Distinguished Chair,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to be here with you today and speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Albania*, Ukraine*, Republic of Moldova*, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Iceland*, Liechtenstein*, Andorra and San Marino.

I welcome this opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to this international forum at a time when the rules-based multilateral system is under great strain.

While we speak, the Russian Federation continues to wage its war of aggression against Ukraine, in blatant violation of the UN Charter, destroying the lives of thousands of civilians. Russia, Belarus and all those responsible for war crimes and the other most serious crimes will be held accountable for their actions, in accordance with international law. We reiterate our previous calls to the Russian Federation to immediately stop its military operations and withdraw all its troops and military equipment from Ukraine.

The EU supports the investigations of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and notes the arrest warrants issued by the Court, against Russia's President and his Commissioner for Children's Rights, for the war crime of unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia. The EU supports the establishment of an appropriate mechanism for the prosecution of the crime of aggression, which is of concern to the international community as a whole. In this regard, the EU welcomes the new International Centre for Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine

* Candidate Countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

* Iceland and Liechtenstein are members of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

(ICPA) which is being set up in The Hague within the Joint Investigation Team supported by Eurojust.

The EU welcomes the upcoming negotiations on a new Convention on international cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other international crimes. We have been standing with Ukraine since day one of Russia's full scale invasion and will continue to do so.

We are extremely concerned over the spill-over effects of the war on organised crime. Studies have shown heightened crime patterns in trafficking in human beings and sexual and gender-based violence in particular. Russia must immediately ensure the safe return of Ukrainians, notably children, who have been forcibly transferred and unlawfully deported to Russia, some with the complicity of Belarus.

While horrific and reprehensible, Russia's illegal actions will not deter our critical work in this Commission – work that is vital to help Member States to protect their citizens and foster international cooperation to address a wide range of crimes.

The rule of law is essential for the stability, security and development of our societies. Access to justice for all is a basic principle of the rule of law. We must ensure that all citizens have a full and equal access to law and justice, irrespective of their circumstances.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While much progress has been achieved on human rights protection over the years, the universal values of human dignity and equality in rights, including gender equality remain under threat in many countries. We must ensure that mainstreaming of gender and human rights is included in strategies and policies. This allows member states to develop more effective and evidence-based preventive approaches.

Fundamental rights, including fair trial rights are essential for ensuring citizens' access to justice and their confidence in the justice system. This includes, among others, respect for the presumption of innocence and the right to be present at the trial, access to legal aid for anyone suspected or accused of a crime, and specific safeguards for children and support to victims. The EU has launched a number of actions to support victims, including protecting them from war crimes. The abolition of the death penalty and humane detention conditions are also essential in criminal justice systems.

Current developments, foremost the increasing digitalization of justice, require further efforts to bolster our protective framework of fair trial rights, in particular for persons who, due to, for instance, their age, gender identity, health, disability

or low level of digital literacy, are unable to access justice on an equal footing with others.

Madam Chair,

We share the conviction that the rule of law and sustainable development are interlinked. The EU and its Member States remain committed to contributing to the achievement of all the SDGs, including SDG 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Civil society and other multi-stakeholders play an indispensable role in this regard and must be fully supported in their efforts. As one of the main donors the EU also wants to commend and support the important efforts by UNODC.

Now, in this Decade of Action, is the time to step up our efforts to deliver the goals by 2030 and, during the UN SDG Summit in September, to advance their implementation. We are glad to announce that for the first time, also the EU will be presenting its Voluntary Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2023, which complements the national reviews of EU Member States.

In our daily work in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice, we should take into account the evolving nature of crimes, including environmental crimes, which exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, inequalities, and injustices, and undermine our collective efforts to protect the environment, promote the rule of law and achieve sustainable development.

For these reasons, we would like to welcome the overall topic of the 15th UN Crime Congress in 2026 on “Accelerating crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law: Protecting people and planet and achieving the sustainable development goals in the digital age”.

We also look forward to receiving UNODC’s presentation on the information gathered from Member States related to illicit trafficking in wildlife, aimed at reinforcing the international legal framework.

In conclusion, the EU reiterates its full support for your efforts, Madam Chair, to have a productive and successful meeting and we look forward to engaging with Member States and observers in an open and constructive dialogue.

Thank you, Madam Chair.