

Thematic Segment: The criminal misuse of information and communications technology for illicit drug activities is increasing.

I attended this event as part of the IDPC delegation, an NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC but what I present here today was done at the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Our research work seeks to place Africa at the heart of understanding public debate on global issues.

Digitization ought to be a force of good. The wind of the digital revolution is blowing across Africa with its tectonic, disruptive and transformative tendencies, thereby breaking the boundary of innovation and possibilities. Some analysts insist that digitization will help African economies recover quickly from associated shocks due to the covid 19 pandemic to build back better. The exponential growth of information technology in Africa has come with greater accessibility to the internet. In Nigeria, my home country alone has an estimated 154 million internet users with a teledensity of about 203.5 million subscriber base. This cheering news comes with its downside as some want to use these positive potentials to advance criminal intentions.

Although Africa remains the continent with one of the lowest connectivity globally, organized criminal groups continue to take advantage of the internet in the region. One of the consequences of the pandemic is that people had to remain indoors, making the internet the only companion of many. Some decided to misuse the opportunity to perpetrate cybercrime that robbed the world of nearly \$1 trillion in 2020 alone.

Advances in technology in Africa is giving the drug trade the secrecy it needs to become borderless and more lucrative. The continent remains a transit hub for trafficking a range of narcotics. These individuals' use of dark web through the Onion Router and Virtual Private Networks enable users to hide their internet protocol (IP) address to bypass censorship, and they wander anonymously in their mission. Regrettably, the illicit trade of drugs remains one of the most successful markets on the dark web. Some drug vendors ply their trade on the 'clear web' as well, advertising their products through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Their resort to payment using cryptocurrency is part of their latest move to ensure that they remain undetected.

The revelation from researchers is that Africa will see an additional 14 million people who use drugs IN 2050. It sounds an alarm that a new approach is necessary if we intend to reverse this trend. In this regard, I wish to commend the African Union for including online drug traders and markets under its crime prevention and criminal justice reform activities. To disrupt and stay ahead of online traders, law enforcement agents must boost their cybercrime investigative capabilities to pursue and apprehend these dubious and deadly vendors and suppliers. We must encourage building a new set of skills to allow these security agents to successfully eavesdrop on the dark world. These criminals believe that they are sophisticated, but we need a unique partnership to overcome them. Thank you most sincerely.