

*Speech by Minister of Justice and Security Ferdinand Grapperhaus  
at the UN Crime Congress, 26 February 2021*

*Tackling transnational organised drug crime: the Netherlands' approach*

Madam President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Netherlands prides itself on being the 'gateway to Europe'.

The port of Rotterdam is the biggest in Europe,

and Amsterdam Schiphol Airport is one of the continent's main airports.

Unfortunately, this fact is not lost on producers and traffickers of illegal drugs.

That makes the Netherlands a transit country for tonnes of cocaine

that's distributed to the rest of Europe and even beyond.

What's more, there's the embarrassing fact that the Netherlands is one of the main producers and exporters of synthetic drugs.

Four years ago, the Dutch government decided that this had become a national problem.

The impact was enormous:

drug-related violence in our streets,

money laundering on a massive scale,

infiltration of the legal economy,

vulnerable young people seduced into a life of crime,

and environmental destruction caused by chemical waste.

So, in recent years, we've tackled this problem head on.

By attacking drug criminals and their facilitators from all sides.

This requires not only a lot of police and customs officers,

but also the involvement of schools, communities and parents.

It's their job to prevent children from getting involved in drug crime,

and they have a key role in detecting suspicious activities

that can uncover drug labs or illegal cannabis cultivation.

This approach requires banks and other financial actors to flag suspicious transactions,

or real estate owned by people with no legal income.

It requires skilled people

to patrol the internet and telecom networks searching for criminal activity, whether that's engaging in illegal trade on the dark web

or abusing the IT systems of legal companies.

Because as it is, criminals know exactly where to find containers in a terminal where they can rip off concealed bags of cocaine.

It also requires integrity checks of law enforcement officers and administrative personnel,

to make sure they're not susceptible to bribery.

Furthermore, the 'cyber' aspect of organised drug crime is rising in importance, for both criminals and law enforcement alike.

Dutch police recently cracked the encryption of special phones being used by criminals.

This produced millions of messages that can now be used as evidence in court.

Dozens of drug criminals have been arrested, including in foreign countries, and more will follow.

Last but definitely not least: our approach requires international cooperation.  
With countries of origin, transit countries and countries of destination.

To really crack down on international drug cartels we need to step up  
information-sharing, administrative and legal assistance,  
extradition arrangements, and confiscation of criminal assets.

In other words: we need you!

So I ask you to make sure that this kind of international cooperation is possible  
under your legislation.

To make sure that there is no safe haven for criminals or the proceeds of their  
crimes.

The Netherlands is making an extra effort

to strengthen international cooperation and crack down on organised crime,  
and not only in the Netherlands and Europe,  
but in other continents, too.

I hope you will join us.

I wish you a fruitful Congress.

Thank you.