Key Findings

• The flow of cocaine through West Africa appears to have declined to about 18 tons, down from a peak of 47 tons in 2007. These 18 tons would be worth US$1.25 billion at wholesale in Europe, providing West African traffickers with substantial income.

• Modes of conveyance for cocaine from South America to Europe via West Africa have shifted over time in response to enforcement efforts. Much of the cocaine headed to West Africa today transit through Brazil, where Nigerian crime groups are exporting the drug. Recently, these groups have been moving into containerized consignments and maritime shipping, adopting these methods in addition to their traditional methods of air couriering and postal shipments. From West Africa, an increase in the use of Benin as a departure point for air couriers has been noted.

• Methamphetamine production in the region is a growing concern, with two methamphetamine laboratories detected in Nigeria in 2011-2012. The main market for West African-made meth is East Asia, and to a lesser extent, South Africa. The income from trafficking West African-made methamphetamines to East Asia is remarkably high for such a new flow, but the long-term prospects are limited in light of competition from producers located in the destination markets.

• Due to the economic downturn, the flow of smuggled migrants from West Africa to Europe has declined in recent years. The prominence of the many routes has shifted significantly, with routes moving eastwards.

• Given the number of weapons still circulating from past conflicts in the region, there is very little need to import large numbers of weapons into West Africa. Most of the illicit flow of weapons in the region is diverted or stolen from licit national stocks held by the police and military. The recent flood of 10,000 to 20,000 firearms from Libya does represent a serious threat to stability in the region, a threat that appears to have been realized in northern Mali.

• The prevalence of fraudulent medicines is highest not in the markets where profits would be the greatest, but in those where chances of detection are lowest. At least 10% of the imported medicines circulating in West Africa are fraudulent, posing a grave threat to public health and safety.

• Maritime piracy has generated renewed attention in the Gulf of Guinea, with 22 pirate attacks occurring off the coast of Benin in 2011. In 2012, Togo became the new hotspot for attacks on petroleum tankers. These vessels are attacked because there is a booming black market for fuel in West Africa.

• Unless the flows of contraband are addressed, instability and lawlessness will persist, and it will remain difficult to build state capacity and the rule of law in the region. Each of these flows requires a tailored response, because the commodities involved respond to distinct sources of supply and demand.