

Background note for the South East Asia Justice Network (The SEAJust)

- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Organized Crime Branch (OCB), Global Programme to Support the Capacity of member States to Prevent and Combat Serious and (transnational) Organized Crime (GP-TOC), facilitates international cooperation in criminal matters by supporting the development and implementation of regional judicial cooperation networks. The GP-TOC has supported the establishment of four judicial cooperation networks. These include the Judicial Cooperation Network of Central Asia and Southern Caucasus (CASC), the West African Network of Central Authorities and Prosecutors (WACAP), the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network (GLJC) and most recently, the South East Asia Justice (SEAJust) Network. These networks are based upon the model and working methods of the European Judicial Network (EJN).
- The networks provide a framework to promote expeditious execution of mutual legal assistance (MLA) requests for all forms of serious and organized crime. The networks work through formally appointed contact points who serve as “active intermediaries” to facilitate judicial cooperation in criminal matters with competent authorities of other networks or countries, if requested. In addition to the case work performed by the network contact points, the networks may convene or establish working groups on specific thematic issues on a temporary or a permanent basis. The networks may also facilitate training and the development or dissemination of practical tools and guides on international cooperation in criminal matters through the networks’ regional meetings and capacity building activities.
- In 2019, with funding from the Government of Japan, the GP-TOC together with the UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific (ROSEAP) undertook an initiative to support the establishment of a judicial cooperation network in Southeast Asia. UNODC has held three meetings to introduce the concept and benefit of judicial cooperation network to the central authorities from the region and to the ASEAN Mutual Legal Assistance Secretariat. During the third regional meeting held by videoconference on 30 March 2020, eight countries in the region (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam) agreed on the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the new judicial cooperation network called, “South East Asia Justice (SEAJust) Network”. It was also decided that UNODC would serve as a coordination body responsible for the organization of all the SEAJust functions, such as, the organization of the meetings, maintaining the list of contact points, sharing information on challenges and achievements, establishing and maintaining relations with central authorities from other countries, with other judicial cooperation networks, and fundraising. Following those eight countries, the Philippines confirmed its membership to the SEAJust in November 2020 and Malaysia followed as tenth member country in January 2021.
- Like the other UNODC networks, the SEAJust holds yearly plenary meeting to allow direct interaction between the contact points. The SEAJust provides other operational support. For example, bilateral meetings can be organized upon request for speeding up and/or resolving MLA matters. As of January 2021, the SEAJust

network has already facilitated 30 pending MLA matters, including with countries outside the region in collaboration with CASC, EJM and WACAP.

- After its establishment, in 2020, the SEAJust network organized events and activities which enhance cooperation beyond the region, such as an inter-regional meeting with other existing judicial cooperation networks/central authorities outside of the region. In collaboration with the relevant UNODC thematic programme, the network also organized training to respond to the needs of the member countries including asset freezing/recovery, digital evidence, arms trafficking, wild life trafficking in the context of MLA. The SEAJust network will be officially launched during the high level event in the Crime Congress in 9 March 2021.
- It should be also highlighted that the membership of the SEAJust was agreed to be open to other countries and territories outside of the region. In this regard, the SEAJust has a great potential to serve as a unique platform that can mutually benefit various counterparts beyond the region. The coordinator of the SEAJust is (Ms)Kaori Matsumoto, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer, Regional Office on Southeast Asia and the Pacific(Bangkok office), email:kaori.matsumoto@un.org.