

UNODC background note on judicial networking and 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) which is now a part of the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust).
- 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 response to the requests from the countries in the region, 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. Three regional meetings were held with the participation of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam with the support of the Secretariat for the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters (ASEAN Mutual Legal Assistance Secretariat).
- During the first regional meeting, representatives of the EJN, Eurojust, the WACAP and the GLJC network spoke about the functions and benefits of their networks. During the second meeting, experts of the UNODC Corruption and Economic Crime Branch and the Terrorism Prevention Branch conducted training on asset recovery and electronic evidence respectively.
- During the third regional meeting held by videoconference on 30 March 2020, the participants from eight countries in the region (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste

and Viet Nam) ¹agreed 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.

- Like the other UNODC networks, the SEAJust will hold 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 July 2020, the SEAJust network has already facilitated nine pending MLA matters, including with countries outside the region (like Uzbekistan in collaboration with the CASC network).
- For 2020-2021, the SEAJust project aims to organize events and activities which enhance cooperation beyond the region, such as a study trip to the plenary meeting of the EJN, an inter-regional meeting with other existing judicial cooperation networks/central authorities outside of the region, and side events during the Crime Congress. In collaboration with the relevant UNODC thematic programme, the network wishes to organize training to respond to the needs of the member countries including asset freezing/recovery, cybercrime, weapons trafficking in the context of MLA.
- 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. UNODC welcomes the participation of interested central authorities to the meetings/events of the SEAJust as experts/observers. The coordinator of the SEAJust Network is Ms. Kaori Matsumoto from UNODC: kaori.matsumoto@un.org.

¹ Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, who were not able to attend the third regional meeting will be also invited to the upcoming meetings/events for their further consideration of participation to the SEAJust.