

PRESS RELEASE

UNODC Executive Director Calls for Stronger International Cooperation, on 10th Session of the Conference of the Parties

12 October 2020

VIENNA, 12 October 2020 - Ghada Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), opened the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime today, calling attention to the COVID-19 crisis as an accelerator for criminal activity and urging governments to take a multilateral approach in combating organized crime.

“The pandemic has also heightened the vulnerability of migrants to the risk of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. International cooperation through the Convention against Transnational organized crime is more urgent than ever. We need to come together to prevent exploitation and protect the vulnerable,” said United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in his video message.

The opening session was also addressed by the outgoing President of the 9th session, H.E. Mr. Alessandro Cortese, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Italy, H.E. Mr. Mohamed El-Molla, Permanent Representative of Egypt, and other high-level speakers.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Palermo Convention and Ms. Waly highlighted the need for governments to work together in order to amplify the impact of the Convention and its protocols, and protect the most vulnerable.

She said, “Important work lies ahead this week, as we mark the Convention’s 20th anniversary by advancing the fight against transnational organized crime, strengthening prevention and enhancing protection of crime victims. We are all gathered here, in person or virtually, because we believe in the power of the Convention and its Protocols to drive solutions to problems that no country can face alone, and to keep our societies safer and able to prosper.”

The 10th session follows on from the 2018 session of the Conference, where members agreed on new resolutions for strengthening the implementation of the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, and on international cooperation.

The UNODC Executive Director called for stronger international cooperation in the face of the global health and criminality crisis.

“It is essential that the world unites around common frameworks to take urgent action, as criminals are taking advantage of opportunities created by the COVID-19 crisis and new threats are multiplying,” she said. “UNODC has supported Convention implementation in over 130 countries, through its global programmes and extensive field office network.”

The Convention against Transnational Organized Crime has achieved near-universal ratification, with 190 State parties. The Protocols have achieved a similarly high level of acceptance, with 178 States parties to the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, 149 to the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol; and 119 to the Firearms Protocol.

117 registered delegations including 874 delegates of Member States and 101 observers will meet this week at the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Government representatives, crime experts and civil society partners will address the effective implementation of the Convention and its Protocols, as well international cooperation in criminal matters and new and emerging crimes within the context of the global pandemic, such as the emergence of falsified medical products.

For further information please visit:
[10th Session of the Conference of the Parties](#)
[2020 Programme](#)
[Join via Webcast](#)
[UNTOC 20](#)

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Transcript

Video message of the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres

On the occasion of the opening of the 10th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

I'm pleased to greet the 10th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN convention against Transnational organized crime.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of this landmark measure to protect the rule of law, bring criminals to justice, support victims and promote human rights.

Today the Convention has 190 parties and enjoys near global adherence. We'll also have an important new mechanism for reviewing its implementation.

This is a crucial support tool for States to identify technical assistance needs and has international cooperation to tackle the transnational organized crime and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

And it is especially vital now.

Criminals are seeking to profit from the COVID-19 crisis.

The pandemic has also heighten the vulnerability of migrants to the risk of human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

International cooperation through the Convention against Transnational organized crime is more urgent than ever.

We need to come together to prevent exploitation and protect the vulnerable.

I urge you to make the most of this conference to strengthen multilateral solutions for justice.

Thank you.

Opening of the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against
Transnational Organized Crime
Monday, 12 October 2020

Distinguished President,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to welcome you to this opening session, both the delegates here in this room at the Vienna International Centre, and the many more joining us virtually.

We are here because international cooperation is an investment in our common future. It is a testament to the basic truth that together we are stronger, and that the power of human resilience and solidarity can see us through even the most difficult of challenges.

Today we meet under special circumstances, in a year like no other.

All of our countries continue to struggle with the devastating effects of the global pandemic. COVID-19 has infected more than 37 million people. More than one million lives have been lost.

In the face of these terrible challenges, we remain committed to building towards our fairer future, recovering better and leaving no one behind.

Safeguarding our societies from the threats of organized crime represents an important element of that commitment.

It is in this spirit that I thank you for joining us for the 10th session of the Conference of Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Throughout this week, and for all essential events and meetings during this unprecedented time, we are working to ensuring that Member States' representatives and all participants are safe and feel comfortable.

The health and safety of all delegates and staff remain our highest priority.

Thanks to technology and the dedication of UN staff working behind the scenes, nearly three-quarters of the nearly 1,100 delegates have registered to join us virtually and can take part in the proceedings in any of the UN official languages via a remote interpretation system.

Nearly 60 virtual side events will be held.

I am grateful for these possibilities because important work lies ahead this week, as we mark the Convention's 20th anniversary by advancing the fight against transnational organized crime, strengthening prevention and enhancing protection of crime victims.

Two decades ago, as a result of negotiations that took place here in Vienna, the General Assembly adopted the Convention.

Opened for signature in Palermo, the Convention represented a landmark global achievement in its recognition of the cross-border nature of the organized crime threat, and of the need for cross-border cooperation to bring criminal groups to justice and protect people.

The Convention remains the only global legal instrument against transnational organized crime, accompanied by three protocols to prevent and counter trafficking in persons, especially women and children; smuggling of migrants; and the illicit manufacturing of, and trafficking in, firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.

The international community has embraced the Convention. Its 190 parties have adapted their legal frameworks and are making use of UNTOC's impressive international cooperation toolkit, with essential provisions on extradition, mutual legal assistance, asset confiscation and law enforcement cooperation.

The human trafficking, migrant smuggling and firearms protocols have seen their number of parties rise steadily to reach 178, 149 and 119 parties respectively.

I can only encourage the Member States who are not yet parties to the Convention and its Protocols to launch or complete their accession process.

It is essential that the world unites around common frameworks to take urgent action, as criminals are taking advantage of opportunities created by the COVID-19 crisis and new threats are multiplying.

One such emerging threat which poses an acute danger to human life is the sale of falsified medical products online.

Organized crime groups are selling substandard and falsified medical products, targeting individuals, health facilities and public agencies through internet scams.

Falsified COVID vaccines will soon be a lethal reality and governments need to be prepared to counter this threat.

Healthcare systems continue to face cyberattacks. Lockdowns have precipitated a rise in online child sexual abuse. And restrictions on movement have made migrants more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

Criminal activity is threatening the world's COVID response and compromising the COVID recovery. Crime groups are already diverting stimulus funds from those in need, and infiltrating the legal economy with their profits.

We need to continue to rely on the Convention and its Protocols to actively counter organized crime's attack on our post-COVID future and on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime has been working for two decades to support governments in making the best use of the Convention and its Protocols.

Our Office provides specialized assistance towards this objective, in the form of advice on adapting legal and policy frameworks; trainings for policymakers and criminal justice practitioners; as well as data collection, research and analysis to expand the evidence base on crime and inform policy.

In the past three years, UNODC has supported Convention implementation in over 130 countries, through its global programmes and extensive field office network.

UNODC is helping Member States improve their management of land, maritime and air borders, enhance cooperation to enable cross-border investigations, and strengthen criminal justice responses.

In 2018 and 2019, UNODC supported INTERPOL's live operations "Andes" and "Turquesa" against the smuggling of migrants to the Americas.

The operations led to 170 arrests of smugglers and traffickers and enabled the identification of 23 criminal organizations and the opening of over 100 investigations.

UNODC facilitated 12 inter-regional drug investigation forums in 2019-2020, where prosecutors and investigators from source, transit and destination countries agreed cross-border investigative actions.

The work of our Global Programme against Money Laundering led to over one billion dollars' worth of criminal assets being frozen, seized and confiscated in Southern Africa in 2016-2019.

These are just some of the many examples of the impact of our work and of the excellent collaboration we enjoy with governments, national agencies, intergovernmental organizations and other important stakeholders.

As a connector and a convenor, UNODC has supported the establishment of four regional judicial cooperation networks in Asia and Africa, focused on international cooperation and in particular, mutual legal assistance.

To strengthen prevention against evolving threats, we have engaged with thousands of educational institutions to raise teachers', parents' and children's awareness of cybercrime. We have built strong partnerships on this issue across the UN system, with global tech companies, and with civil society.

UNODC has also continued to develop specialized legislative guides on particular crime types, for example on combatting wildlife crime, waste trafficking or falsified medical products.

We support policymakers with our research and analysis, most recently the Global Study on Firearms launched in July, and a research brief on the impacts of COVID on crime.

Later this year, the new edition of our biennial Global Report on Trafficking in Persons will provide a comprehensive update on trafficking dynamics.

We strive to make knowledge and resources available on a broad scale, notably through SHERLOC, the Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime knowledge management portal.

The portal now contains more than 3,000 case summaries covering 15 crime types.

UNODC stands ready to pursue and expand these assistance activities, under your guidance and with your support, in response to your needs and priorities.

Seven resolutions will be brought to the attention of the Conference this year - the highest number the Conference has ever seen. It is an indicator of the importance given by the international community to the fight against organized crime in all its forms.

You can rely on UNODC for action on mandates emerging from these resolutions, on effective implementation of the trafficking in persons protocol and the Convention; strengthening international cooperation against illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms; falsified medical products; environmental crime; and trafficking of cultural property.

Crucially, the Conference has now before it the task to adopt the resolution launching the first phase of the review mechanism of the Convention.

You made history by establishing the mechanism in 2018 – after nearly a decade of negotiations.

You will make history again by bringing this mechanism to life, which will help to build global knowledge on the fight against organized crime, engage civil society in a constructive dialogue, assess gaps and enable more targeted implementation support.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Our work is needed more than ever, in a post-COVID world that is poorer and more fragile, and thus more vulnerable to crime.

As criminals exploit people and planet for profit, a vicious cycle of poverty and inequality is reinforced.

People all around the world are calling on us to help break this cycle.

In the UN's 75th anniversary survey, over one million respondents called for fairer societies, with better access to basic services and equal opportunities.

They also made it clear that they wanted more international cooperation to tackle the world's greatest challenges.

We are all gathered here, in person or virtually, because we believe in the power of the Convention and its Protocols to drive solutions to problems that no country can face alone, and to keep our societies safer and able to prosper.

UNODC is here to support you in your work for justice and for those in need.

Allow me to reiterate my gratitude to those who have joined us and to my colleagues working behind the scenes.

My thanks to Ambassador Cortese, President of the 9th session, and my congratulations to the President of the 10th session, Ambassador El-Molla.

I wish you a fruitful Conference. Thank you.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Adopted by the UN General Assembly: 15 November 2000, by resolution 55/25

Entry into force: 29 September 2003, in accordance with article 38 of the Convention

Signatories: 147

Parties: 190 (as of 9 October 2020)

UN General Assembly resolutions adopting the UNTOC and its Protocols

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000, is the only global legally binding instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime. It opened for signature by Member States at a High-level Political Conference convened for that purpose in Palermo, Italy, on 12-15 December 2000 and entered into force on 29 September 2003. The Convention is further supplemented by three Protocols, which target specific areas and manifestations of organized crime: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition.

The Convention represents a major step forward in the fight against transnational organized crime and signifies the recognition by Member States of the seriousness of the problems posed by it, as well as the need to foster and enhance close international cooperation in order to tackle those problems. States that ratify or accede to this instrument commit themselves to taking a series of measures against transnational organized crime, including the establishment of domestic criminal offences (participation in an organized criminal group, money laundering, corruption and obstruction of justice); the provision of legal basis for using mechanisms for international cooperation in criminal matters, including for extradition, mutual legal assistance and law enforcement cooperation; and the promotion of training and technical assistance for building or upgrading the necessary capacity of national authorities.

Status: [Status of Ratification](#)

Full text of the Convention and its Protocols

[ARABIC](#) - [CHINESE](#) - [ENGLISH](#) - [FRENCH](#) - [RUSSIAN](#) - [SPANISH](#)

More information: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>

THE PROTOCOL TO PREVENT, SUPPRESS AND PUNISH TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Entry into force: 25 December 2003, in accordance with article 17 of the Protocol

Signatories: 117

Parties: 178 (as of 9 October 2020)

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, was adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25. It entered into force on 25 December 2003. It is the first global legally binding instrument with an agreed definition on trafficking in persons. The intention behind this definition is to facilitate convergence in national approaches with regard to the establishment of domestic criminal offences that would support efficient international cooperation in investigating and prosecuting trafficking in persons cases. An additional objective of the Protocol is to protect and assist the victims of trafficking in persons with full respect for their human rights.

Status: [Status of Ratification](#)

Full text of the Convention and its Protocols

[ARABIC](#) - [CHINESE](#) - [ENGLISH](#) - [FRENCH](#) - [RUSSIAN](#) - [SPANISH](#)

More information: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>

THE PROTOCOL AGAINST THE SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS BY LAND, SEA AND AIR

Entry into force: 28 January 2004, in accordance with article 22 of the Protocol

Signatories: 112

Parties: 149 (as of 9 October 2020)

The Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25, entered into force on 28 January 2004. It deals with the growing problem of the involvement of organized criminal groups in the smuggling of migrants, often at high risk to the migrants and at great profit for the offenders. A major achievement of the Protocol was that, for the first time in a global international instrument, a definition of smuggling of migrants was developed and agreed upon. The Protocol aims at preventing and combating the smuggling of migrants, as well as promoting cooperation among States parties, while protecting the rights of smuggled migrants and preventing the worst forms of their exploitation which often characterize the smuggling process.

Status: [Status of Ratification](#)

Full text of the Convention and its Protocols

[ARABIC](#) - [CHINESE](#) - [ENGLISH](#) - [FRENCH](#) - [RUSSIAN](#) - [SPANISH](#)

More information: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>

THE PROTOCOL AGAINST THE ILLICIT MANUFACTURING OF AND TRAFFICKING IN FIREARMS, THEIR PARTS AND COMPONENTS AND AMMUNITION

Entry into force: 3 July 2005, in accordance with article 18 of the Protocol

Signatories: 52

Parties: 119 (as of 9 October 2020)

The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition was adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/255 of 31 May 2001. It entered into force on 3 July 2005. The objective of the Protocol, which is the first legally binding instrument on small arms that has been adopted at the global level, is to promote, facilitate and strengthen cooperation among States Parties in order to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. By ratifying or acceding to the Protocol, States make a commitment to adopt a series of crime-control measures and implement in their domestic legal order three sets of normative provisions: the first one relates to the establishment of criminal offenses related to illegal manufacturing of, and trafficking in, firearms on the basis of the Protocol requirements and definitions; the second to a system of government authorizations or licensing intending to ensure legitimate manufacturing of, and trafficking in, firearms; and the third one to the marking and tracing of firearms.

Status: [Status of Ratification](#)

Full text of the Convention and its Protocols

[ARABIC](#) - [CHINESE](#) - [ENGLISH](#) - [FRENCH](#) - [RUSSIAN](#) - [SPANISH](#)

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20 YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Overarching/UNTOC

- Near universal adherence with **190 Parties** to UNTOC.
- The preparatory phase of the **UNTOC Review Mechanism** (2018-2020) paved the way for the operation of the review process; ready for the adoption of the draft resolution to launch the review phase of the Mechanism.
- Support to the establishment of four networks of **international judicial cooperation** in criminal matters to overcome some of the ongoing challenges to the formal processes of legal cooperation. The West African Network of Central Authorities and Prosecutors ([WACAP](#)), the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network, the Judicial Cooperation Network for Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, and most recently, the South East Asia Justice Network (SEAJust).
- Freezing, seizure and confiscation of **criminal assets** to assure that “crime does not pay”. In 2018/19, for example, with support of the Global Programme against Money Laundering, USD 1 billion-worth were either frozen, seized and/or confiscated in Southern Africa.
- Resource portal in regard to organized crime issues. The Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime knowledge management portal ([SHERLOC](#)) is continuously expanding and contains now over 10,000 annotated legislative excerpts and more than 3,000 case summaries covering 15 crime types. SHERLOC, which also contains databases of strategies, treaties and publications, offers filters which allow users to explore linkages between crime types. There are nearly 340,000 users in 2019, which is an increase of 21% to 2018 and testimony to the usefulness of the portal.
- Since its adoption, UNTOC and the Protocols thereto, have fostered the designation of central and competent authorities (**CNAs**) mandated to cooperate with their counterparts on topics such as extradition (UNTOC article 16), transfer of sentenced persons (UNTOC article 17), mutual legal assistance (UNTOC article 18) and the prevention of organized crime (UNTOC art. 31). As of today, more than 500 UNTOC-related central and competent authorities exist globally, ensuring a smooth cooperation across countries in the prevention and combat of transnational crime. [CNA Directory in SHERLOC](#)
- Increasing work focused on **emerging forms of crime** and the prevention and investigation of specific areas of organized crime: UNODC developed specialised legislative guides to assist States parties in implementing UNTOC with respect to particular crime types, i.e. combatting [wildlife crime](#), waste trafficking or crime related to [falsified medical products](#).
- In regard to **illegal deforestation**, [UNODC](#) provided extensive support to national authorities in over 10 countries and established networks and task forces to identify, investigate and analyse timber trafficking cases, resulting in the inception of illegal timber shipments, for example in countries in the Latin America and Asia Pacific regions.





20 YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Firearms Protocol

➤ During the last two years, UNODC carried out its most comprehensive collection of **data on firearms trafficking** to date, gathering details from survey responses and other sources of more than 100 countries and territories. The data, which was collected in the context of the Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative and analysed in the [Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020](#), was published on the UNODC data portal in October 2019 and since then has been accessed almost 11.000 times, enhancing information exchange and the evidence base on firearms trafficking and related data.

➤ Within the last two years, UNODC, through its **Global Firearms Programme**, carried out over 70 technical assistance activities and brought together more than 1,300 national stakeholders from more than 70 countries in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa region, the Western Balkans, the Americas and Central Asia. In 2019, for example, the Global Firearms Programme implemented 'Operation KAF0', the first cross-border law enforcement operation against illicit firearms trafficking coordinated by UNODC and implemented in cooperation with the International Criminal Police Organization ([INTERPOL](#)). The seven-day operation targeted people and networks behind firearms trafficking in three countries in West Africa and involved 110 police, customs, border police and prosecution officials from all three countries. Thousands of checks for lost and stolen firearms, wanted persons, stolen and lost travel documents and stolen motor vehicles were conducted during the operation.

Smuggling of Migrants Protocol (SOM)

➤ In 2019 alone, the **initiatives** of the [Human Trafficking and Migrant smuggling](#) section of UNODC reached **more than 70 countries**. In November 2019, for example, less than a year ago, the joint [INTERPOL-UNODC](#) operation "Turquesa" against smuggling of migrants to the Americas was conducted. The initiative led to 152 arrests for SOM, Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and other offences, the identification of 23 criminal organizations and the opening of 107 investigations.





20 YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Trafficking in Persons Protocol (TIP)

- In 2019, UNODC and [MINUSMA](#) developed the **first anti-trafficking training for peacekeepers** resulting in an increase in the number of detected cases and follow-up.
- **Data** collected by UNODC shows that countries are improving their investigation and prosecution rates with more time and a greater investment in capacity. Increasingly, light is being shone on the less visible forms of exploitation, such as TIP for organ removal, and the groups of persons who may be most vulnerable – including domestic workers, migrants on the move or seeking asylum, children and of course, women.
- One of the [Global Reports on TIP](#) has shown that the longer countries have anti-trafficking legislation in place the more successful their **criminal justice response**, which simply points to the need for long term interventions and efforts.
- UNODC also supports countries (e.g. Jordan and Lebanon) which host huge **refugee populations** in their territories which are often especially vulnerable to trafficking in persons, while commonly overlooked in anti-trafficking efforts. UNODC has and will continue to focus its attention to both prevent vulnerable populations from falling prey to traffickers and networks and to enable access to justice for victims of the crime of trafficking.

COVID-19 related work

- With regard to COVID-19 and its **impact on trafficking in persons**, UNODC published a preliminary assessment, "[The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons](#)", including on the short and long-term impact that the COVID-19 pandemic may have on the crime of trafficking in persons and its victims and related criminal justice responses. This publication has been welcomed and further disseminated by states with great interest.
- UNODC continues to develop reports on [Falsified Medical Products](#) and [COVID-19](#).
- Support is also provided to central authorities for **international cooperation** in criminal matters during the COVID-19 pandemic. A tool entitled "Communications from central authorities regarding working and emergency measures as a result of the health crisis caused by COVID-19" currently contains information from 74 central authorities and is updated and distributed every two weeks to over 155 central authorities.

