



10th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime

Australia National Statement

Delivered by Emil Stojanovski, Deputy Permanent Representative of Australia
to the United Nations in Vienna

Thank you, President.

This year, the Conference of the Parties finds itself in radically different circumstances than the one which last took place in 2018.

In 2018, we celebrated the adoption of the implementation review mechanism that was the culmination of almost ten years of negotiations.

This year, however, the COVID-19 pandemic which has dominated our professional and personal lives has seemed all-encompassing.

But, if anything, COVID-19 has underscored the importance of even closer international cooperation in the face of a common challenge.

Our challenge is to suppress – and hopefully eliminate – this virus.

We know there are already many trials at an advanced stage that represent months of intense work, cross-border partnerships and both government and private funding.

But there is also intense cooperation between countries on a broader range of matters. The ability to travel. Share data. Support businesses, jobs and livelihoods.

When faced with a common challenge, the international community has shown in response that it can act as one.

President

Just like a virus, organised crime knows no boundaries. It is a common challenge we must all face. And it is only together, acting with similar purpose, that we can suppress transnational organised crime.

This year we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

It is important to reflect on what an achievement this was. The Convention harmonised our understanding of key concepts and established common definitions. That might not seem like a big deal — but this was the foundation for states being able to cooperate with each other to investigate, prosecute and combat organised crime across borders.

Without this common basis, it would have been difficult for states to afford each other legal assistance and to extradite suspected criminals. It is an understated, but in our view, significant, achievement.

Today, Australia reaffirms the centrality and importance of international cooperation — including through mutual assistance, extradition and cooperation between law enforcement and judicial agencies — to combat transnational, serious and organised crime.

It is also important to reflect on our achievements since the adoption of the Convention. And in particular, our success in having finally established an implementation review mechanism. This is a good outcome — for transparency, for accountability and for learning best practices from each other.

Our challenge in the years ahead will be to ensure the review mechanism remains agile and fit for purpose; that it does not become overly bureaucratic or bogged down in process; and that key stakeholders such as civil society organisations are not excluded.

President

At home and within the Indo-Pacific region, Australia remains committed to building strong legal and policy frameworks to suppress human trafficking and modern-day forms of slavery.

We continue to work closely with Indonesia as co-chairs of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime.

Since the last Conference of Parties, Australia has implemented legislation that requires all large businesses to report publicly on what steps they are taking to combat human trafficking and other forms of modern slavery in their supply chains. This applies equally to government procurement.

Ensuring such transparency has never been more critical. As the economic downturn spurred by COVID-19 gathers pace across the Indo-Pacific region, the ranks of the unemployed, the sick and the vulnerable will continue to grow. Opportunities for exploitation will increase. So too will dependence on illicit drugs. Organised crime syndicates are already taking advantage of this unfortunately new reality to profit from the misery of others.

Australia and its regional partners will not be deterred in our collective efforts to put an end to this exploitation.

We are investing \$30 million in a new initiative to assist our partners in the Mekong region to tackle drug trafficking, child sexual exploitation and the ill-gotten financial gains of these crimes.

We are also building the capacity of our Pacific island neighbours to investigate and prosecute serious crimes through the Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network, a critical association of senior law enforcement officers committed to pursuing justice. We are proud that one of the network's working groups developed recently a mutual assistance handbook focused on combating cybercrime and using electronic evidence in investigating and prosecuting offences.

President

Combating child sexual exploitation and abuse online is one of Australia's top priorities. This is why we pursued, through the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the landmark 2019 General Assembly Resolution on 'Countering child exploitation and abuse online'.

We introduced new legislation increasing maximum penalties and establishing mandatory minimum sentences for the most serious child sex offences and repeat offenders.

We have cancelled — under a world-first scheme — the passports of 298 registered child sex offenders at the request of law enforcement agencies.

And in March, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States launched the 'Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse'. The principles were developed with six

leading technology companies, industry, civil society and academia — a truly collaborative venture.

We will share with you our experiences this Wednesday at a side event Australia is co-hosting with the UNODC on ‘The role of online intermediaries in preventing and combating illicit activity’.

In closing, President, I wish to emphasise once more that international partnerships have never been more important to combating serious and organised crime, a shared global challenge, as they are now. I can assure you of my delegation’s support for your efforts this week to drive our deliberations to success.

Thank you.