



**European Union**

**EU Statement on  
Agenda item 3: “The application of the Convention for preventing and combating  
transnational organized crimes that affect the environment”**

**Working Group on International Cooperation**

**Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational  
Organized Crime**

**Vienna, 24 May 2022**

Distinguished Chair,

Dear colleagues,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

This is a meeting of the Working Group on International Cooperation. International cooperation requires a minimum of trust and shared values, such as the principles of the UN Charter. Chief among them is the prohibition of aggression. By waging an unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, Russia has grossly violated international law and the UN Charter. Inevitably, this has and will continue to have devastating consequences for international cooperation. The EU is strongly committed to effectively cooperate with all partners which are not threatening international security and stability, nor violating international law.

Turning to the topic of this session, let me recall that environmental crimes cause irreversible and long-term damage to people's health and the environment, cost taxpayers' money and undercut law-abiding businesses through unfair competition. They are also among the most profitable illegal businesses for transnational criminal organisations. Profits help finance other organised crime activities such as trafficking in drugs and human beings.

At the same time, environmental crimes are hard to investigate and bring before a court of law. Sanctions imposed in practice also tend to be low and not sufficiently deterrent. That is why we need to strengthen environmental criminal laws and their enforcement. A high level of environmental protection is not only important for present but also future generations as we increase our efforts to fight environmental degradation. Moreover, tackling environmental crimes has a broad global relevance, being necessary among other things for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We must use all available means to protect the environment. Criminal law is one of them. That is why last December, the European Commission adopted a legislative proposal on the protection of the environment through criminal law that will update and replace the existing Directive from 2008 (2008/99/EC). That Directive was a milestone, as it recognised that “criminal penalties, ... demonstrate a social disapproval of a qualitatively different nature compared to administrative penalties or a compensation mechanism under civil law”. The new proposal aims at giving law enforcement authorities and the judiciary the tools to act more effectively against environmental crimes across the Union.

In particular, the proposal aims at :

- Updating and refining the list of criminal offences to reflect the current status of EU environmental law;
- Strengthening the provisions on criminal sanctions by approximation of types and levels of sanctions which may be imposed on natural and legal persons to ensure their deterrent effect;
- Recognising and strengthening enforcement by ensuring the availability of appropriate specialist training, effective investigation tools and mechanism for cooperation among enforcers in Member States; and
- Recognising and strengthening the role of citizens and civil society in criminal proceedings.

A lasting change will be achieved only by acting together. Hence, the EU and its Member States will continue to promote the fight against environmental crime at international level, including as regards the recourse to international law to protect the environment. In this regard, we refer to resolution 76/185 adopted by the General Assembly on 16 December 2021, highlighting the crucial importance to further enhancing inter-agency effective partnerships and cooperation on the matter.

We will continue to engage in global multilateral fora and with relevant international and regional organisations and offices (such as UNEP, Interpol, UNODC) to increase international cooperation against environmental crimes such as wildlife trafficking and illegal logging, deforestation and illegal trade in timber, and harness the transnational dimension of the problem. At this moment, the European Commission is exploring a cooperation with UNEP and UNODC on disrupting illicit waste flows from the EU to sub-Saharan Africa. Disrupting organized criminal groups involved in environmental crime, more particularly wildlife and illicit waste trafficking, is also a priority for the EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime (EMPACT cycle 2022-2025).

The Convention, with its dedicated and comprehensive provisions on extradition and mutual legal assistance, provides an excellent legal basis for international cooperation also in the field of crimes that affect the environment and even in the absence of bilateral treaties, and we encourage all parties to make use of this common legal framework.

Thank you, Mr Chair.