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INTERPOL Contribution to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Problem



INTERPOL

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1. Introduction

Law enforcement are a central actor in addressing the world drug problem. Mixed success over the last decades have provided many lessons learned as the international community has progressively come to grips with the fact drugs are an indelible societal phenomenon, which has only become more cloudy and complex to address. The inclusive dialogue of the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem provides an opportunity to revisit holistically the law enforcement response to this problem, and prepare it for future decades. This response has to be smarter, and amidst a wider effort that endeavours to suppress transnational organized crime, improve institutions across the criminal justice spectrum, and help countries uphold the rule of law.

Since 1923, INTERPOL (“**the Organization**”) has been working to ensure and promote the widest possible mutual assistance between all law enforcement authorities within the limits of the law and in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Organization connects law enforcement which may not otherwise be able to do so, and allows them to work together irrespective of the differences their countries may otherwise have. INTERPOL provides a neutral platform and this neutrality is enshrined in its Constitution which strictly forbids the Organization from undertaking interventions or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character.

Today, 190 countries are members of INTERPOL. Law enforcement from these countries maintain their connection with each other through a network of National Central Bureaus (“**NCBs**”). A secure communication system helps them to interact in real-time to initiate, advance and conclude multi-jurisdictional criminal investigations, conduct transnational operations, and share actionable intelligence, which may lead to *inter alia* the identification, location and arrest of suspects, and wanted individuals. This is augmented by regional and international meetings and trainings of specialists, convened by INTERPOL. Finally, if assistance is required, INTERPOL provides 24/7 support through its Command and Coordination Centre, and deploys experts to member countries which request it.

Much of the information gathered or shared within these contexts helps to populate and is circulated through INTERPOL databases - such as nominals, fingerprints and DNA profiles. These databases are queried globally nearly 5 million times a day. Moreover, INTERPOL aggregates and enhances this information, providing added-value through operational analysis. Exchanges of information between law enforcement through INTERPOL are governed by its Rules on Data Processing, which are the only universally agreed upon set of procedures for such exchanges. A member country decides which other member countries they want to share information with and the classification level, and at no point loses control over what they share through the network.

2. Macro-Trends: The Pervasiveness of Drug Trafficking

Drug trafficking and the problems associated with it affect much of the world, with continued challenges in all regions. No INTERPOL member country is unaffected. A number of macro-trends have emerged which constitute the primary drivers behind the modern-day law enforcement response to drug trafficking.

Multiple Law Enforcement Priorities and Stretched Resources

Historically, drug trafficking was one of a handful of transnational crimes law enforcement dealt with among others such as fugitive investigations and currency counterfeiting. Identifying priorities was much easier back then, but this is no longer the case. The last two decades have seen the looming threat of terrorism, far-reaching nature of cybercrime, and illicit trade in wildlife and forest products emerge as key threats, turning the 21st century into a playground for transnational criminal activity. Trade-offs within the law enforcement community are now constantly being made with resources once committed to combatting drug trafficking stretched into other areas. As a result, what law enforcement did at the national level and what support they provide today at the international level is not what it once was. In spite of this resource shift, many countries still view drug trafficking as a major priority, however differently it is dealt with than in the past.

Lines Blurring Between Producer, Transit and Consumer Countries

The lines between producer, transit and consumer countries have become increasingly blurred. Producer countries have become consumer countries, like in Afghanistan, where the damaging health consequences of opium use now rival the economic consequences of the trade. Transit countries have become producer countries - such as in Nigeria, where organized drug trafficking organizations seek to control the entire supply chain through manufacturing crystal methamphetamine - as well as consumer countries in other African and Southeast Asian countries. Transit countries have become user countries, such as in Ecuador, which has historically been a gateway for cocaine trafficking to other regions now sees government and health officials grappling with record levels of domestic cocaine use. In brief, law enforcement in many countries are no longer dealing with just one facet of the illicit drug trade.

Cyberspace and Technology: A Vector Change for the Drug Trade

Cyberspace has helped to individualize the international drug trade. New methods have turned the web into a supermarket of illicit drugs, which are being bought using real and virtual currencies, and sold over mobile applications. A covert area of the web, known as the Darknet, not only acts as an online forum for illicit drug transactions, but generates widespread knowledge transfer among likeminded individuals to skirt law enforcement efforts. By providing shortcuts for production and tips on distribution, the Darknet helps budding entrepreneurs increase the chances of success and reduce the chances of getting caught.

Crimes can now be committed in motion using mobile technology. Devices, such as cell phones and tablets, store a worldwide contact network and enable instantaneous connection with anyone, anywhere as a means to facilitate drug transactions or transfer criminal proceeds. Along with the ability to obfuscate identity, challenges abound for law enforcement in the attribution of criminal activity and, locating and monitoring persons of interest or suspects. Of greater concern, security measures on

mobile devices have become so advanced that their contents remain inaccessible to law enforcement. If seized as evidence during an investigation, it is now virtually impossible on some devices to extract data and information that could be a significant source of intelligence or critical for prosecution. Consequently, they pose an intensely problematic barrier to law enforcement efforts against drug trafficking networks.

The Overwhelming Nature of Synthetics

Although not a new trend, synthetic drugs - from clandestine manufacturing to sales and use, present a different set of risks and challenges for law enforcement around the world. While organic drugs, like cocaine and heroin remain prevalent and dangerous, the concern with the manufacturing of synthetic drugs is its ability to be more widespread and mobile, and the production process is relatively easier. Drug trafficking organizations do not need the right agricultural conditions to grow synthetic drugs, manufacturing is quick, and it can be done in closed, remote locations - in some cases using diverted licit precursors. The combinations are endless, and the diversity of synthetics creates a challenge for both legislation and law enforcement to identify, recognize and suppress.

Conflict, Instability and Ungoverned Space – A Breeding Ground for Drugs

Where the rule of law is weak or non-existent, history has shown that the international drug trade follows. Conflict, instability, ungoverned space remain a magnet for production and transit of drugs, and as the prevalence and nature of these landscapes evolves, so too will the way in which the drug trade interacts with them. There appears to be no credible approach to currently address this challenge. On the one hand, international law enforcement have little visibility in these landscapes, and as a result remain constrained to act. On the other, those actors which are present, such as military, peacekeepers and development agencies do not have the mandate, expertise, and in some cases, resources to target the local drug trade despite potentially possessing potentially valuable information in relation to it.

3. INTERPOL Strategic Response to Drug Trafficking

Since 1960, member countries have adopted roughly 60 INTERPOL General Assembly Resolutions pertaining to drugs and drug trafficking. This has helped to guide the action of the General Secretariat in addressing this problem and has provided it with a broad mandate to do so.

Our Policing Capabilities

INTERPOL enlists a number transversal policing capabilities that form the basis of our contribution to helping member countries address the issue of drug trafficking:

- **Communication Tools and Databases** Connect law enforcement in 190 countries securely and in real-time to address crimes related to drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. This enables communication between member countries and with INTERPOL, and allows for the exchange, storage and cross-referencing of information and actionable intelligence. This infrastructure is deployed to NCBs, strategic border points (e.g., international airports) and specialized policing units (e.g., forensics unit) in each member country. Relevant databases are as follows:
 - **Automated Search Facility (ASF) Databases:** Nominal Records, Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD Database), and Stolen Motor Vehicles (SMV Database)
 - **Specialized and Forensic Databases:** Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), International DNA Gateway, and Facial Recognition, Firearms (I-ARMS Database) and ballistics (IBIN Database)
 - **INTERPOL Criminal Information System (ICIS) Databases:** Notices (e.g., Red) and Diffusions
- **Capacity Building and Training:** Provide training to law enforcement so they can use INTERPOL tools and services effectively in a philosophy of strong international cooperation. Classroom training often precedes exercises in the field to maximize the value, while a range of online training courses ensures a wide reach of participation.
- **Operational and Investigative Support:** Local, regional and global support by offering INTERPOL policing capabilities in the context of drug trafficking operations and investigations, and by deploying expertise in the field when requested.
- **Criminal Analysis:** Collection and analysis of post-seizure data, new trafficking techniques or emerging trends provided by member countries and national drug law enforcement agencies leading to the production of analytical studies that identify and highlight criminal links between reported cases.
- **Specialist Operational Networks and Forums:** Running regional or global operational meetings attended by drug specialists to assess the extent of a particular drug problem, share the latest law enforcement techniques and strengthen cooperation.

Our Objectives and Results

- 1. Facilitating Multi-Jurisdictional Investigations and Organized Crime Cases:** Starting in 2010 INTERPOL helped coordinate the investigative activities and flow of information between Belgium, Germany, Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the USA to successfully dismantle an organized crime group trafficking cocaine from South America to Europe via Sierra Leone. A number of involved member countries began coordinated, targeted operational activity against several members of this group, resulting in several arrests, house searches and seizure of numerous exhibits.
- 2. Coordinating Transnational Law Enforcement Operations:** In September 2015, INTERPOL successfully coordinated Operation FOLOSA, which targeted drug trafficking from Latin America to Europe via Africa. Involving law enforcement officials from 22 countries, this operation provided for heightened controls on departing, transiting and arriving passengers at international airports on known smuggling routes, including via the Middle East. This resulted in the seizure of nearly 170 kilograms of drugs worth an estimated EUR 10 million, as well as gold coins and stolen credit cards. The operation was led by INTERPOL and supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (“**UNODC**”), the World Customs Organization (“**WCO**”) and Europol as part of AIRCOP. Analysis of information generated a list of some 200 suspected drug traffickers who had travelled extensively throughout Latin America.

This followed on the coattails of Operation Lionfish II, conducted in December 2014 and targeting organized crime groups across Central America and the Caribbean. More than 27.5 tonnes of drugs were seized, including cocaine, cannabis and heroin, with just the cocaine seized valued at almost USD 1.3 billion. Drawing on extensive coordination, groundwork and resources provided by 39 countries and territories across the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe, the two-week operation further resulted in the arrest of 422 suspects. Some 7.6 tonnes of chemical precursors, 100 weapons and USD 2.2 million in cash were also seized.

- 3. Identifying, Locating and Arresting Suspects, and Wanted Individuals:** There are over 9,000 suspected or wanted individuals identified, located and arrested through INTERPOL each year. For example, Colombian anti-narcotics police reportedly arrested 66 criminals sought by INTERPOL for drug trafficking crimes in 2015. This work also targets high-value individuals. In December 2011, the Italian organized crime figure, subject of an INTERPOL Red Notice and wanted by Italy for association with a criminal organization, drug trafficking and possession of weapons, was arrested in Curacao. He was extradited to Italy on 30 December 2011.

Our Specialized Initiatives and Partnerships

Inter-Americas

- **FORTALEZA:** Dedicated initiative in the Americas with a focus on Mexican and Colombian cartels and other dangerous criminal groups, such as MARAS. Cocaine trafficking is the basic criminal activity under the scope of the project, which also aims to establish links between the routes used and the activities of these criminal groups with those operating in other parts of the world.

Inter-Africa

- **INTERFLOW:** Focused on the trafficking of cocaine, heroin and synthetic drugs especially methamphetamine to and from Africa. There is also a focus on the diversion of chemical precursors for illegal use. This initiative is run in collaboration with various partners, including UNODC, International Narcotics Control Board (“**INCB**”), WCO, EUROPOL, Maritime Analysis and Operations Center-Narcotics (“**MAOC-N**”). The target group is mid-to-upper level traffickers.
- **AIRCOP:** Led by UNODC, in partnership with WCO and INTERPOL, an initiative aiming to facilitate the exchange of information between international airports primarily in Africa, with West Africa as its primary focus through the creation of Joint Airport Interdiction Task Forces (JAITF).
- **WACI:** The West African Coast Initiative (WACI) is a multi-agency joint programme, working in synergy to support the ECOWAS Action Plan, especially by setting up Trans-national Crime Units (TCU) in five selected countries of West Africa. Led by UNODC, with the following partners: Department of Political Affairs (DPA)/United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and INTERPOL.

Inter-Asia

- **ICE TRAIL and BLACK TULIP:** In April 2013, CARICC¹ took over the management of Operation Ice Trail and hosted the first Operational Working Group Meeting on the illicit methamphetamine trade, co-organized with INTERPOL. As a concrete follow-up of the enhanced cooperation between the two organizations, INTERPOL is supporting the CARICC Operation Black Tulip, targeting syndicates linked to African drug trafficking organizations.

Europe

- **EUROPOL:** INTERPOL cooperates closely with EUROPOL within the context of combating drug trafficking. In the framework of the new ‘EU Policy Cycle for organized and serious international crime’, INTERPOL is involved in the EMPACT platform of Focal Points Heroin and Cocaine. Under these two Focal Points, INTERPOL is associated with several EUROPOL operational action plans.
- **COUNCIL OF EUROPE:** Organized by the Council of Europe Pompidou Group, INTERPOL is an active participant during the Annual Meeting of the Co-operation of Drug Control Services at European Airports and General Aviation, providing timely and precise intelligence assessments which enable the efficient identification and interdiction of illicit drug flows through European airports.

Global

- **INCB - NPS TASK FORCE:** INTERPOL is an active member of the New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) Task Force initiated by INCB, which proposes, directs and reviews time-bound special operations that generate and communicate strategic and operational intelligence regarding suspicious shipment, trafficking, and manufacturing of NPS.

¹ INTERPOL has a cooperation agreement with CARICC, which provides them with direct access to INTERPOL police information systems.

4. The Way Forward

The international law enforcement community still has a ways to go in countering drug trafficking, with the challenge evolving ever faster than the response. INTERPOL reiterates its commitment to the preparation process for UNGASS 2016 and prioritizes its input and participation. The way forward is as uncertain as past results against countering drug trafficking have been mixed. However, INTERPOL has a number of points for exploration and consideration to progress in addressing the world drug problem.

The Drug Trafficking Challenge

- **Gaining Perspective on the Drug Trafficking Challenge – A Means to An End:** Drug trafficking is part of a group of commodities used by transnational organized crime groups to generate profit, and who rely on similar routes to move these commodities from one point to the next. While the challenges can be unique when it comes to drugs, it cannot be totally divorced from this larger problem of transnational organized crime which requires a comprehensive and coordinated response. Greater awareness is needed among the law enforcement community relating to the interconnectedness between different types of commodities, drugs included, and the convergence of routes utilized by transnational organized crime groups.
- **Tracking Linkages to Terrorist Groups and Financing:** Research into the linkages between drug trafficking and terrorism has become more robust in recent years, but this has not yet been translated into operational outcomes.² Greater emphasis is needed on identifying and targeting drug trafficking organizations engaged in helping to finance terrorism and support terrorist groups from an intelligence exchange and evidentiary standpoint, not just a knowledge one. This should be given a priority within the law enforcement community as the risk profile for these groups is much higher.
- **Focusing on Transit Hubs and Bottlenecks:** Greater understanding is needed around the main hubs and points of entry being used move drugs. These must be catalogued and monitored overtime. As an example of intelligence-led policing, this information needs to be translated into outcomes on the ground, either via national police forces or support through INTERPOL, and should guide international law enforcement strategies in this respect.
- **Assessing the World of Drug Trafficking Online:** The rising entrepreneurial dimension of the drug trade online, particularly over the Darknet, has helped to cement its international nature, and places the need for international law enforcement cooperation in the spotlight. Of particular importance is how law enforcement can exploit what is going on in this world to progress towards results in the real world, and build meaningful cases and investigations. A grey area still exists from a law enforcement standpoint as to what is proscribed as lawful action under the limits of the law when trying to address this issue online. Mutual legal assistance also becomes a central issue for drug-related investigations in this context.

² See S/RES/2195; S/PRST/2013/22ASAL; Milward, V., Brinton, H., and E.W. Schoon, (2014), "When Terrorists Go Bad: Analyzing Terrorist Organizations' Involvement in Drug Smuggling", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 59, Issue 1, pp. 112-123.

The Law Enforcement Response

- **Instilling Good Practices Globally:** There are a number of approaches and tactics that are unknown or underutilized still by many law enforcement agencies that need to be shared and taught. Greater focus is needed on outlining what good practices are for addressing the challenge of drug trafficking (e.g., backtracking investigations, controlled deliveries, information sharing) and how they can be used to target mid-to-high level individuals and groups via intelligence-driven operations and inter-regional initiatives.
- **Building Sustainable, and Measurable Operational Capacity:** Learning from past experience, building up operational capacity and providing assistance to law enforcement on the ground needs to be done consciously and over the long-term. This requires sustained, smart training and mentorship presence for it to work, with the requisite monitor and evaluating mechanisms in place. Providing frontline enforcement with the ability to disrupt supply chains and simultaneously generate intelligence is one such end objective among many in this regard. The scope of this work needs to be done on a quality basis, which targets hot spots and strategically relevant countries, over quantity.
- **Exploiting Technology and Innovation:** Technology and innovation is the new frontier that is having a game-changing effect for law enforcement efforts against drug trafficking. A significant investment is needed in identifying limitations faced by law enforcement when it comes to technology, and what novel solutions exist or could exist to hurdle these limitations and grow capacity. In the context of drug trafficking, law enforcement need to have an understanding of social media (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp), engage this medium to gather intelligence (i.e., SOCMINT) and become attuned to how it can be used in the commission of a crime, and processed in the context of an investigation.
- **Enhancing “Green-Blue” Cooperation:** A significant amount of information and intelligence on drug trafficking could potential come from conflict zones or ungoverned spaces where military and peacekeeping operations have a presence, but law enforcement do not. Greater discussion is needed on how this information and intelligence can be extracted, shared, and operationalized. The law enforcement, military and peacekeeping communities need to better interact, make it easier to help each other, and understand their limitations in addressing drug trafficking. INTERPOL has deployed a model for this related to counter-terrorism intelligence gathering in Iraq and Afghanistan, which can be replicated.

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