Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime

https://globalinitiative.net

Primary Focal Point: Ian Tennant, Head of Vienna Multilateral Representation & Resilience Fund

Secondary Focal Point: Walter Kemp, Director: Global Strategy against Transnational Organized Crime

Chapeau

Organized crime is one of the gravest threats to humanity and shakes all three pillars of the United Nations by undermining development, jeopardizing peace and security, and threatening human rights. Indeed, organized crime stands in the way of reaching each of the goals pledged by heads of state and government in their declaration on commemorating the 75th anniversary of the United Nations in 2020. Therefore, any "Pact for the Future", Declaration on Future Generations, or future-oriented UN strategy needs to address the harms posed by organized crime.

Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

Organized crime is an impediment to the achievement of most of the SDGs for example as a result of corruption and money laundering (and the inequalities they create within societies), extortion, brain drain, and governments investing heavily in law enforcement and security rather than allocating public finances to other public services. Furthermore, money that is badly needed for financing development is being siphoned off-shore thanks to opaque banking systems that let corrupt officials, businesses and criminals hide vast amounts of wealth.

To counter-act this trend, it is recommended to reform the international financial system, **adopt comprehensive, transparent, and publicly accessible beneficial ownership registries**, supported by robust technology such as blockchain and stronger anti-corruption measures, and take steps to **minimize secrecy jurisdictions** – for example, through greater compliance with the OECD's Common Reporting Standard and its Common Mandatory Disclosure Rules, and adoption of a UN tax convention. Furthermore, it is recommended to **strengthen legal obligations to detect, freeze and confiscate illegal proceeds of crime** and make more frequent and effective **social reuse of confiscated assets**, particularly to support victims and survivors of organized crime.

Greater vigilance is also required to defend the global commons. Many resources on our planet are finite and dwindling. So-called 'resource mafias' controlling environmental commodities such as sand, land, water, critical minerals and coal pose an ever-growing threat to societal stability and contribute to environmental degradation. A priority for the future should be to anticipate potential scarcity markets, **pay greater attention to environmental crime**, protect green mineral supply chains from criminality and corruption, and ensure that the green transition is based on respect for human rights, as well as the environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards.

Chapter II. International peace and security

Illicit economies flourish in conflict zones and organized crime can threaten the security of countries. Therefore, organized crime should be considered a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Moving forward, it is recommended to **mainstream anti-organized crime mandates and measures into peace operations and peace building**, including by looking at how civilians can be protected from predatory criminal groups and state-embedded criminal actors. **It is important to ensure that peace operations and monitoring missions** – both mandated by the UN and regional organizations – **have sufficient tools, analysis capacity and experts to assesses and address illicit economies and organized** crime and their impact. G**uidelines on the crime–armed conflict nexus for peacemakers and peacebuilders** should be developed to navigate the potential pitfalls in dealing with actors (state-embedded and as part of criminal groups) involved in illicit economies and use these in briefing and training procedures. **There should exist a network of law enforcement, financial intelligence and criminal justice experts with experience in dealing with organized crime**, who can be rapidly deployed to peace operations (both for the UN and its agencies, and regional organizations) to carry out serious organized crime threat assessments, and support mediation processes (both UN-led and regional) and UN panels of experts dealing with illicit economies. These experts should be trained according to common standards, including intelligence gathering and carrying out serious organized crime threat assessments. At the same time, it is vital to **build the capacity of local police to counter organized crime**. To factor organized crime into conflict-sensitive approaches, priority should be given to initiatives designed to **strengthen resilience in conflict-affected communities** to reduce the likelihood of relapses into violence and armed conflict, particularly ones that work with women, youth and the business community.

Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

Technology is a significant enabler of organized crime. **Futureproofing inventions** is therefore crucial, ensuring that criminals do not gain an advantage over law enforcement due to delayed preventative responses. To that end, it is imperative to **include a crime-proofing safety check** into the process of issuing international quality management standards (ISO 9001), information security, cybersecurity and privacy protection (ISO/IEC 27001), as well as environmental management systems (ISO 14001) and patents. Regulation should require developers, manufacturers and suppliers or providers of new technologies to assess the future crime risks of such technologies and adopt adequate measures to mitigate them. A useful concept here is the 'security by design', which means the inclusion of security and safety features in the design of new technologies. Institutional mechanisms and platforms should be established to **enable close collaboration and knowledge exchanges** with researchers, particularly lead scientists (for example, those engaged in synthetic biology, biotechnology or artificial intelligence) and tech companies, to think more closely about the security implications of their work and its potential misuse by criminal actors.

It is also vital to **future-proof legislation** so that it is sufficiently flexible and capable of remaining relevant in light of future technological advancements. This regulatory architecture should consider different categories of tech, from foundational technologies such as encryption and blockchain, proprietary tech like social media platforms, particular algorithms, or operating systems, and more importantly, prospective technologies capable of severely affecting the status quo, such as artificial general intelligence, quantum computing, nanotechnology and advanced synthetic biology.

Police and criminal justice from countries with greater law enforcement capacities and more access to digital technologies should **provide greater technical assistance** to police in developing countries to prevent a digital divide, both between police in different parts of the world but also between police and criminals. In an interconnected world, this is in the interests of all.

Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

Young people are disproportionately affected by organized crime, either as victims or perpetrators. Therefore, giving them a safer future requires reducing the harm posed by organized crime.

To that end it is recommended to put a **greater focus on youth in crime prevention strategies**, and a **greater focus on strengthening resilience to organized crime in initiatives concerning youth** including for rural development, urban renewal, and building safer communities. A priority should be to **develop and support sustainable programmatic activities to assist at-risk youth**, including: creating opportunities for training, employment, sports and cultural activities; counselling and mentoring on life skills; providing mental health support; educating young people about the risks and harms of organized crime and corruption; creating and using alternatives to imprisonment for minor drug offences; ensuring that post-

penal processes promote resocialization and reduce the recidivism; preventing gang recruitment and providing safe pathways for young people who want to exit gangs or criminal groups.

Without more effective multilateral responses to transnational organized crime the problem will have an even more serious impact on future generations. This will cost lives, deepen misery, fuel violent conflict and migration, and undermine development, peace and security and human rights. Therefore, it is important to develop more strategic responses to organized crime at the national, regional and global levels. A key recommendation is to **develop a global strategy against organized crime** as called for by the High-Level Advisory Board. Furthermore, **strategic anticipation of organized crime should be factored into futures and foresight work of regional organizations and the United Nations**, particularly by looking at the relationship of organized crime to global trends.

Chapter V. Transforming global governance

At the moment, too many senior officials engaged in organized crime or grand corruption are able to operate with impunity.

Moving forward, it is recommended to **reduce impunity by creating a new international sanctions regime** targeting individuals and entities who have perpetrated serious organized crime. Furthermore, it is vital to **more clearly define the human rights obligations of criminal actors** under international humanitarian law or human rights law and holding offenders accountable. It could also be expedient to **explore the establishment of a supra-national mechanism to deal with transnational organized crime** cases.

At the same time, steps should be taken to align the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime with the UN Convention against Corruption, particularly in considering the ways in which corruption enables organized crime. The UN and its member states should also revisit the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (1985) and give it a higher priority and greater application.

Formulating and adopting a **global strategy against organized crime** would enable a more coordinated and forward-looking approach and enable regional organizations and law enforcement agencies to improve planning and joint action. As recommended by the High-Level Advisory Borad in its report *Breakthrough for People and Planet*, such a strategy could lay out the key areas for collaboration, strategic priorities, and common benchmarks for the multilateral system, and provide inspiration and direction for collaborative responses across a wide range of sectors and regions. As Interpol declared in a statement on 27 November 2023 marking its centenary, "tackling transnational organized crime must become a global national security priority".