Combatting Organized Crime

Topic Background

Organized crime involves the illegal activity of groups of people or organizations commonly for the purposes of obtaining money and influence. This illegal activity can consist of the illegal transportation of humans, money, and objects, commonly connected to violence and corruption. Transnational organized crime can be conducted between individuals and groups over national borders. Because of this, it directly or indirectly affects every member state of the United Nations. The problem has existed throughout human history, traced back to such activities as piracy and smuggling. Organized crime grew in the 20th Century, with aspects of the topic being discussed since the first session of the UN General Assembly in 1946.¹ With enormous amounts of monetary support, extralegal activities, and substantial influence, organized crime is unlikely to disappear from the international economy without major action on behalf of the United Nations and its consistent member states.

The United States is a strong example of a nation affected by organized crime within its borders. With this in mind, the United States has created several agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to prevent the importation of drugs such as cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, and other major drugs from countries including Mexico, Colombia, and other major hubs of drug activity. Today the DEA employs over 5,000 agents dedicating to stopping the drug trade.² Another example of organized crime can be seen in Russia, with one of the worst human trafficking rings in the world. Human trafficking can be defined as the movement of people for labor sexual exploitation; this can also include immigrants who are smuggled into the country illegally, which has been seen increasingly in recent years. Russia has had varying degrees of success through government coordination with groups such as the Red Cross to take preventative measures to combat human trafficking, but progress has been stunted. Even recently, reports have shown that the Russian mafia has been responsible for thousands of criminals becoming involved in sexual exploitation.

Another major issue involving weapons trafficking can be seen in West Africa.³ Although the volume of weapons being trafficked has decreased since the Cold War, there are thousands of assault rifles, machine guns, and explosives circulating through the region.

¹ “Human Trafficking in Russia.” UNICEF. http://uni.cf/1hbmzy5
³ “Firearm Trafficking in West Africa”. UNODC. http://bit.ly/1iM0Gqd
The continuation of organized crime will exacerbate existing problems and create new ones if the issue is not addressed. Some of the consequences could include limiting the possibility of economic growth in various countries, the destruction of communities in which organized crime occurs, the violation of basic human rights, and the perpetuation of violence within the international community. As national organized crime cannot be stopped it increasingly becomes transnational crime creating a vicious circle of illegal activity. The international community is in need of new cooperation to prevent organized crime and recover illicit assets.

**Past International Actions**

In 2000 The UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) was created. It was originally a treaty agreed upon by Member States until it was adopted by the General Assembly later that year, becoming a full convention. This historical development identified three main areas of significance within the issue of transnational organized crime: human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, and illicit firearm trafficking. Each area identified by the UNTOC has impacted the success of implementing the Millennium Development Goals. Specifically affected are Goal 1, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and Goal 3, producing gender equality. This is because of the socio-economic destabilizing effects that organized crime perpetuates. For example, activities such as drug rings, human trafficking, and weapons trafficking can impact a region’s peace and security, human rights violations, as well as social and economic opportunities for development. Women are disproportionally affected by this crime, as they represent the primary target of the sex slave trade occurring throughout the world.

Other than the UNTOC, the United Nations has dedicated committees and topics to discuss and solve the issue of organized crime. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) regularly develops strategies to combat organized crime, drug trafficking, money laundering, and more. Unfortunately, due to its extreme spread and illicit nature, organized crime will likely persist through this century. The United Nations has addressed this through its new list of Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the “Global Goals,” which were adopted during the end of September 2015. The 17 goals listed attempt to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and end climate change. Goal 16 looks to end organized crime by specifically attempting to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. It emphasizes that “sexual violence, crime, exploitation and torture are also prevalent where there is conflict or no rule of law, and countries must take measures to protect those who are most at risk.” The deadline for the Global Goals has been set to 2030.

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One of the most important Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) committed to eliminating organized crime is The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime. This is a group of specialists who are actively finding new ways to combat organized crime throughout the world. Some of the goals established in 2014 were to develop research, identify areas of top concern, and increase global collaboration to prevent cybercrime and environmental crime. At the core, the NGO is seeking to increase the dialogue occurring between nations to improve the global strategy for ending organized crime. As the world continues to be plagued by organized crime similar NGOs and conventions will attempt to find new means to combat the issue. Organized Crime continues to oppose every type of country regardless of development or wealth.

Possible Solutions

The world continues to evolve alongside organized crime, requiring the international community to take a new approach to tackling this phenomenon. There are numerous sub-issues relating to transnational organized crime. Some of the most notorious topics include: drug, human, and weapons trafficking. Each type of organized crime uniquely impacts every UN Member State and undermines the very goals for a sustainable development. In terms of the Post 2015 Development Agenda, organized crime undermines security that threatens every approach to development. Delegates should ask themselves: How can the UN help increase global dialogue to combat organized crime? How can the UN help defiance transnational organized crime and increase transparency? How can the UN help reduce the illicit flow of weapons especially through incorporating developing nations in new sustainable development?

Different regions of the world experience different aspects and varying degrees of organized crime. For example, the Middle East and West Africa are greatly impacted by weapons trafficking with sex slave trafficking impacting most areas outside of North America. Certain regional groups have been created to consolidate intelligence and the execution of solutions such as the Central American Network of Prosecutors against Organized Crime (REFCO) and the Network of West African Central Authorities and Prosecutors against Organized Crime (WACAP). However, there are regional differences for how to recognize and establish warrants for the arrest of criminals. For example, the European Union has its own set of guidelines that are different from the standards established in other areas of the world.

A few ideas to combat organized crime are universally agreed upon, however they have been challenging in execution. Most Member States support the idea of intelligence sharing between police organizations on organized crime to help take a more integrated stance against

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7 White House Transnational Crime Strategy https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/nsc/transnational-crime/strategy
transnational organized crime organizations. Some Member States have called for more proliferation of extradition treaties, to make it clear that there is no same place for crime in this world. Member States have also proposed more obvious solutions such as a redirection of funds, expertise, and intelligence capabilities to try to take down these organized groups, however organized crime rarely gets the attention it needs because of its by definition underground nature, compared to international terrorist groups that thrive and seek media attention. All of these components are potential avenues to address this issue.

The world continues to be plagued by organized crime. If countries continue to use old strategies to eliminate this issue then they will ultimately fail. Ending organized crime requires the entire international community to cooperate and coordinate on a solution. Every region faces different challenges related to organized crime and therefore, solutions must be flexible enough to fit each Member State’s specific needs.

Further Research

- UNODC Organized Crime
- United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime
- SDG 16- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
- UNICEF- Human Trafficking

Worksheet Questions

1. What is the main office of the United Nations that works to combat transnational organized crime?
2. How many agents are there in the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)?
3. What has been the most significant resolution of the United Nations on organized crime?
4. What Sustainable Development Goal includes Combatting Organized Crime as one of its aims?
5. When was organized crime first discussed at the United Nations?

Answer Key

1. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
2. 5000 DEA Agents
4. Sustainable Development Goal 16
5. In the first session, in 1946

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