



ODUMUNC 2026 Issue Brief
4th Committee, Special Political and Decolonization



The Fight Against All Forms of Transnational Organized Crime

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Introduction

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the international community celebrated what seemed to be a breakthrough in global governance. Twenty-six years before this ODUMUNC, in December 2000, delegates gathered in Palermo, Italy, to adopt the *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime* (UNTOC, or the Palermo Convention). This landmark treaty sought to enhance cooperation among states against mafias, drug cartels, and human trafficking syndicates.

The treaty acknowledged that criminal enterprises are no longer confined within borders. Its three protocols on human

trafficking, migrant smuggling, and firearms provided new tools for collaboration. At the time, it was hailed as a milestone in international law enforcement. For its time, the Palermo Convention was ambitious: it provided definitions, established protocols, and gave governments the tools to pursue criminals whose operations no longer respected national borders.

Today the threat landscape has transformed in ways the treaty architects could scarcely have imagined. The scale of organized crime overall is staggering, but impossible to quantify. In the last global efforts, in 2009 the UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that transnational organized crime generates was worth roughly USD 870 billion annually, about 1.5 percent of global GDP.¹ More recent analyses place illicit markets in the range of USD 1.6 to 2.2 trillion

¹ UNODC. 2009. Transnational organized crime: the globalized illegal economy. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009, <https://www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/organized-crime.html> ; and The Globalization of

Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/tocta-2010.html>

annually, depending on methodology, roughly equal to the economy of a country like Australia or Brazil.²



Source: The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/tocta-2010.html>

Not only is international organized crime much larger than in 2000 when the Palermo Convention was adopted, but it has changed in form, greatly complicating effort at law enforcement. Organized crime today is less about cartel bosses or drug barons in smoky backrooms and more about diffuse, globalized networks that thrive on new technologies, financial gaps, and governance weaknesses.³

In Southeast Asia, for example, on-line scam factories hold tens of thousands of people in forced labor, compelling them to run sophisticated online fraud schemes for criminal enterprises. A United Nations report estimates that at least 120,000 people in Myanmar and another 100,000 in Cambodia could be trapped in such operations, illustrating the scale of organized crime's digital transformation⁴. In such operations, many of them are migrants lured by false job offers and then coerced into online fraud. Criminal networks exploit cryptocurrencies, encrypted platforms, and even artificial intelligence to supercharge their operations.

Beyond the digital sphere, organized crime is now deeply enmeshed in environmental destruction. Environmental crime has become a significant revenue stream. Illegal logging, mining, waste trafficking, and wildlife crime are collectively estimated by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to generate between USD 110 billion and USD 281 billion in criminal gains annually, placing environmental crime among the world's most profitable illicit enterprises⁵. These crimes not only devastate ecosystems but also fuel corruption, armed groups, and instability in vulnerable regions. At the same time, illicit arms flow in the Sahel, Libya, and potentially Ukraine show how organized crime thrives in conflict zones, blurring the lines between crime, terrorism, and war economies.

² World Economic Forum. 2019. "Illicit trade endangers the environment, the law and the SDGs." 18 July 2019. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2019/07/illicit-trade-sdgs-environment-global-danger>

³ 'What is transnational organized crime?', Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/transnational-crime>

⁴ AP News. "UN warns that hundreds of thousands in Southeast Asia have been roped

into online scams." 20 September 2025. <https://apnews.com/article/cambodia-myanmar-migrants-online-scams-ebab962f236df69b1f9b7e136958e244>

⁵ Financial Action Task Force (FATF). *Money Laundering from Environmental Crime*. Paris: FATF, 2021. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Environmentalcrime/Environmental-crime.html>



Source: 'What is transnational organized crime?', Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/transnational-crime>

This is the reality the United Nations now faces. While the Palermo Convention remains widely ratified, its mechanisms are outdated, its compliance system weak, and its definitions ill-suited to the complexities of today's transnational crime. If the Palermo Convention represented the international community's turn-of-the-century solution, the Twenty-First Century now demands an update. Organized crime has become faster, more adaptive, and more global than the frameworks designed to contain it.

For governments, the frustration is palpable. When multilateral institutions stall, some turn to unilateral or regional measures to fill the gap, as can be seen from the European Union's controversial deals with Turkey and Libya to stem irregular migration, to the U.S. Navy's interdiction of cocaine shipments in the Caribbean. Such responses reflect both the

urgency of the threat and the limitations of international cooperation.

The challenge ODUMUNC is to rethink the fight against organized crime not as a narrow law-enforcement issue, but as a test of global governance in the digital age, where criminal networks adapt faster than international institutions.

Background and Trends

Organized crime has always been adaptive. During the Cold War, syndicates smuggled heroin, arms, and people across ideological boundaries. After 1990, with borders opening and economies liberalizing, networks diversified. The Palermo Convention emerged in this context as a milestone: a treaty with three key protocols addressing human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and firearms. But while it offered a baseline, it deliberately left room for states to interpret, creating definitions that were broad and compliance mechanisms that relied on voluntary reporting. Scholars have since pointed out that this flexibility has also been Palermo's weakness: implementation varies dramatically, and few enforcement mechanisms exist to pressure lagging states.

UNTOC was groundbreaking in 2000 because it established common definitions and obligations in areas where cooperation had been patchy. But as the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime noted in its 2024 review, the convention's implementation has been inconsistent. Many states ratified it, but few systematically apply its mechanisms for mutual legal assistance or monitoring⁶. Without robust enforcement, the convention risks being more symbolic than operational.

By the 2010s, organized crime had taken new forms. Dark web markets such as Silk Road

⁶ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. 2024. *Is the UNTOC Working?* Geneva: GI-TOC. [https://globalinitiative.net/wp-](https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Is-the-UNTOC-working--An-assessment-of-the-implementation-and-impact-of-the-Palermo-Convention-GI-TOC-October-2024.v3.pdf)

[content/uploads/2024/10/Is-the-UNTOC-working--An-assessment-of-the-implementation-and-impact-of-the-Palermo-Convention-GI-TOC-October-2024.v3.pdf](https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Is-the-UNTOC-working--An-assessment-of-the-implementation-and-impact-of-the-Palermo-Convention-GI-TOC-October-2024.v3.pdf)

enabled the anonymous sale of drugs and weapons, while ransomware gangs began extorting hospitals, local governments, and corporations. Europol reported as early as 2017 that online organized crime was becoming “borderless by design”⁷. The growth of cryptocurrencies made laundering faster and more opaque, while encrypted messaging allowed networks to operate without the physical hubs that once made them easier to track. What began as digital experimentation soon became the dominant infrastructure for transnational crime.

Meanwhile, environmental crime surged as a lucrative sector. A joint UNEP–INTERPOL report in 2016 highlighted the rising scale of illegal logging, fishing, and wildlife trafficking, calling it a “growing threat to natural resources, peace, development, and security”⁸. Unlike drugs, where demand is often concentrated in wealthy countries, environmental crime has both local and global drivers. Timber trafficked from the Congo Basin may end up in furniture in Europe, while pangolin scales seized in Asia feed demand in multiple markets. These flows both exploit and deepen governance gaps in fragile states.

Today, three overlapping dynamics define the current landscape.

First, the **digital transformation of crime**. Artificial intelligence now enables the creation of deepfake identities for fraud and disinformation, while cybercriminal “service providers” sell ransomware kits and laundering

services like legitimate businesses. A 2023 AP News investigation warned that AI is “supercharging organized crime,” allowing small groups to commit fraud on a global scale⁹.

Second, the **expansion of environmental crime**. FATF’s 2021 report confirmed that environmental crimes not only generate billions in illicit gains but also intersect with money laundering networks, fueling corruption and undermining the Sustainable Development Goals¹⁰. INTERPOL has shown how wildlife crime revenues are laundered through legal markets and sometimes linked to terrorist financing¹¹. Yet despite the scale, political and financial investment in addressing these crimes remains limited compared to drugs or terrorism. Unlike largely consumer-driven drug markets, environmental crime intersects with global supply chains from raw materials to luxury goods, making its effects diffuse yet systemic

Third, the **nexus between crime and conflict**. In the Sahel, armed groups profit from smuggling routes for arms, fuel, and people, while in Libya, the arms embargo has been repeatedly violated, allowing illicit flows that destabilize neighbors. UNODC’s *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* (2022) warns that conflict both creates vulnerabilities for trafficking and is sustained by illicit flows¹⁰. The fear that weapons from the war in Ukraine could leak into wider black markets illustrates how quickly conflict and crime overlap in ways that transcend regional boundaries. The UN Office

⁷ Europol. 2017. *Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA 2017)*. The Hague: Europol. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/internet-organised-crime-threat-assessment-iocta-2017>

⁸ Europol. 2017. *Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA 2017)*. The Hague: Europol. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/internet-organised-crime-threat-assessment-iocta-2017>

⁹ AP News. “AI is turbocharging organized crime, EU police agency warns.” 20 September

2025, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/846847536f6feb2bbb423943fd96e1f1>

¹⁰ Financial Action Task Force (FATF). *Money Laundering from Environmental Crime*. Paris: FATF, 2021. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Environmentalcrime/Environmental-crime.html>

¹¹ INTERPOL. *Environmental Crimes*. <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Environmental-crime>

on Drugs and Crime has warned of the risk of diversion and spill over into other conflict zones.

What ties these trends together is speed and scale. Organized crime thrives in spaces where states are slow, coordination is weak, and technology outpaces regulation. Thus, we see the recurring theme of organized crime adapting more quickly than states or international institutions can respond. Where governance lags, crime flourishes. The Palermo framework, though visionary in 2000, now looks increasingly like an analog tool in a digital fight.



Source: ‘What is transnational organized crime?’, Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/transnational-crime>

UN Role and Responses

The United Nations has developed a patchwork of responses to transnational organized crime, anchored in the Palermo Convention. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna serves as custodian, provides technical assistance, and issues flagship

reports such as the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Yet UNODC remains underfunded: more than 80 percent of its budget comes from voluntary contributions, leaving its priorities heavily shaped by donor states rather than collective mandates. Its 2022 *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* underscored both the persistence of trafficking flows and the weaknesses in states’ data collection and victim identification¹².

At the political level, the General Assembly has passed resolutions targeting specific dimensions of organized crime. Resolution 74/177 (2019) emphasized international cooperation against cybercrime, while Resolution 76/184 (2021) addressed the illicit trade in wildlife and its threat to sustainable development. In 2022, Resolution 77/211 focused on tackling illicit financial flows, highlighting the importance of financial transparency. These efforts illustrate an expanding agenda but also show a tendency to respond piecemeal to emerging threats. These resolutions remain non-binding and fragmented. They often respond to crises rather than laying down comprehensive, forward-looking frameworks.

The **Security Council** has intervened selectively, treating organized crime as relevant only when it intersects with international peace and security. Resolution 2199 (2015) condemned ISIS’s trafficking in oil and antiquities as terrorist financing, while piracy off Somalia received sustained Council attention earlier in the decade. Such interventions have been effective in narrow contexts but underscore the Council’s limited willingness to treat organized crime as a systemic threat and rarely appear on the Council’s agenda, reflecting its

¹² UNODC. 2022. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022*. Vienna:

UNODC. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html>

narrow interpretation of threats to peace and security¹³.

Other UN agencies contribute from the sidelines. The UN Development Program (UNDP) frames organized crime as a governance and development issue, while the UN Environment Program (UNEP) has highlighted environmental crime as a major barrier to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. INTERPOL, though not part of the UN system, is an important operational partner. Yet coordination across these institutions remains fragmented, reflecting the broader challenge of integrating security, development, and environmental agendas.



Source: 'What is transnational organized crime?', Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/transnational-crime>

Critiques focus on three recurring issues: fragmentation, outdated legal frameworks, and insufficient resources. As Murray notes, UNODC's organizational design often produces tension between its law-enforcement focus and broader human-rights mandates¹⁴. More fundamentally, the Palermo Convention has not been modernized to address digital finance or AI-enabled crime, leaving a gap that criminals exploit.

In short, the UN recognizes the scale of transnational organized crime but remains structurally limited in addressing it. Its tools are fragmented, its treaties outdated, and its resources constrained.

Unilateral and Regional Responses

The frustration of states with weak or slow international cooperation has led to unilateral and regional responses, where governments act independently or in coalitions to address organized crime.

The European Union has pioneered external migration management, offering financial support to transit countries to curb irregular flows. The 2016 EU–Turkey deal remains the most prominent example, providing billions in aid in exchange for cooperation in preventing migrant departures¹⁵. Similar arrangements with Libya and Tunisia have drawn criticism, with rights groups arguing that European funds

¹³ United Nations Security Council. 2015. Resolution 2199. S/RES/2199 (2015). <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/786381>

¹⁴ Murray, Jean-Pierre. 2022. "The UNODC and the Human Rights Approach to Human Trafficking: Explaining the Organizational (Mis)Fit." *Journal of International Organization Studies* 10, no. 1: 41-63. <https://journal->

iostudies.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/JIOS_Vol10-1_Murray.pdf

¹⁵ Reuters. 2016. "Key elements and question marks over EU-Turkey migration deal." March 18, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/uk/key-elements-and-question-marks-over-eu-turkey-migration-deal-idUSKCN0WK2Q1/>

enable detention practices that violate migrants' rights¹⁶. These deals reflect the EU's readiness to act regionally when multilateral tools fail to address migrant smuggling at scale.



Source: 'What is transnational organized crime?', Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/transnational-crime>

The United States has expanded naval and coast guard operations in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific to disrupt narcotics flows. Operation Martillo, coordinated by U.S. Southern Command since 2012, has involved U.S. Navy and Coast Guard assets intercepting shipments and collaborating with partner states¹⁷. In 2020, Washington launched "Enhanced Counter-Narcotics Operations," expanding interdictions in response to surging

drug flows from South America. Such measures demonstrate unilateral resolve to fill enforcement gaps.

Most spectacularly, under President Donald Trump, in 2025 the United States began to attack ships in international waters in the Caribbean, suspected of carrying illegal drugs from Venezuela. In essence, the attacks amount to assassination of suspected drug traffickers. The attacks, based only on intelligence, not on any decisions by maritime courts or formal prosecutions, violate International Law of the Sea.¹⁸ The attacks may indicate the Trump Administration will attack Venezuela itself.

Regional organizations also experiment with cooperation. ASEAN has worked on trafficking and cybercrime, while the EU links anti-money-laundering standards to trade partnerships. These efforts are piecemeal but show that states and blocs will not wait for multilateral consensus when domestic and regional security is at stake.

Such unilateral and regional actions have clear costs, from human rights concerns in migration deals to sovereignty sensitivities in maritime operations. Yet they capture an important truth: when international institutions underperform, states will move on their own.

Major Country and Bloc Positions

Despite a broad consensus that organized crime is harmful, member states approach the issue through distinct lenses shaped by sovereignty, security, and development.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch. 2019. *No Escape from Hell: EU Policies Contribute to Abuse of Migrants in Libya*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/01/21/no-escape-hell/eu-policies-contribute-abuse-migrants-libya>

¹⁷ Southcom (U.S. Southern Command). n.d. "Operation

Martillo." <https://www.southcom.mil/Media/Spenvironcial-Coverage/Operation-Martillo/>

¹⁸ Kwasi Gyamfi Asiedu, 'US forces strike third alleged drug vessel killing three, Trump says', BBC News, 20 September 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crme4pv224wo>



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These divergences explain why consensus on stronger collective action has proven elusive. All states denounce organized crime in principle, but sovereignty, geopolitics, and differing responsibilities continue to fragment the debate.

African Union (AU): The African Union (AU) promotes sovereign equality among its 55 Member States. The AU takes very general positions on major international issues like governance, peacebuilding and development. It occasionally gets involved in regional conflicts, but not consistently. Like the Arab League, the African Union leaves actual policy-making up to each of its Member States. On most issues, each state's parallel membership in the *Non-Aligned Movement* (below) can be a more reliable guide to their positions.

Arab League: Because of sharp differences among its 22 Member States, the Arab League tends to act cautiously, and typically permits its Members to pursue their own distinctive policies. On divisive and controversial issues gender issues the Arab League is especially likely to leave policy-making up to each of its Member States. The biggest exception is any issue relevant to Palestine, on which it is more unified. As a result, Arab League states are likely to see any debate on almost any issue in terms of aspects relevant to their support for Palestine. On most other issues, each state's parallel membership in the *Non-Aligned Movement* (below) can be a more reliable guide to their positions.

China: While some countries are reducing their reliance on the UN, China is increasing its investment in the organization, making it the center of much of its foreign policy. For China, the great appeal is the UN Charter's emphasis on national sovereign equality, which China sees as supporting its authority at home, and facilitating working with other countries as legal equals.¹⁹ China consistently supports goals established by the UN, and supports international institutions.²⁰ China also stresses the UN as a tool for increasing its influence over global values, a key element in its campaign to make the world more like China itself.

China's UN policy is not without concerns. It fears the UN will be used to create precedents for international action in the domestic affairs of Member States, precedents that could be used against China.

As Chinese UN diplomats at the UN said in another context, 'China's continuing and vehement insistence on respect for other nations' sovereignty is not only a cornerstone of its foreign policy but a foundational ethos for the government of a nation that has traditionally struggled to maintain control at its edges — from Xinjiang and Tibet in the far west to Hong Kong and Taiwan off its east coast.'²¹

China emphasizes state sovereignty and rejects external interference in cyberspace, preferring national control of digital infrastructure. It supports strong measures against drug trafficking and corruption but resists global cybercrime frameworks that could challenge its governance model.

¹⁹ 'Xi says China always a trustworthy partner of UN', *Xinhua*, 1 September 2025, http://en.cppcc.gov.cn/2025-09/01/c_1120831.htm

²⁰ Wen Sheng, 'China leads global efforts to realize UN sustainable development goals for 2030', *Global Times*, 27 June 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202306/1293251.shtml>

²¹ Ted Anthony, 'China, at UN, warns against 'expansion of the battlefield' in the Ukraine war', *Associated Press*, 28 September 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/china-united-nations-general-assembly-51ea58a6cd821656382f06ad0b3b93bc>



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European Union: for the 27 Member States of the EU, universal values always matter most. EU Member States can be expected to stress an approach that serves the entire international community, with all countries working toward agreed goals and standards. It often is the most visionary of actors within the UN system. The European Union also is the most generous funder of global development projects, offering grants or subsidized, low-interest loans for major initiatives.

The European Union positions itself as a leader in combating money laundering and trafficking. Its 2023 Anti-Money Laundering Directive created tighter rules for financial transparency, and the bloc has invested in partnerships with Africa and Southeast Asia to counter human trafficking and smuggling. The EU has also elevated environmental crime as a priority, framing it as integral to both security and sustainability.

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But even the European Union is not as generous as it used to be. Aid money is going down, as it switches funding to national security. And European aid is highly conditional, with careful oversight to ensure it is spent as planned, efficiently, without fraud. Many EU donor states also make their aid conditional on basic national goals, including strengthening democratic government, rule of law, respect for minorities and equal rights for women.

Non-Aligned Movement: The 120 Member States of the NAM, the UN's dominant voting bloc and primarily interested in approaches to any issue that serve their needs as developing economies, burdened with significant poverty and demands for faster economic development. The NAM generally support universal values, such as EU efforts to create global standards on this, like most other issues.

Where the NAM departs from the EU and other advocates of action, is on funding. Although many of its members are not poor—its membership includes many wealthy oil exporters—the NAM routinely demands that any proposal for action come with generous funding, increases in foreign aid from wealthier Western countries.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Group of 77 (G77) highlight the developmental context of organized crime. Many of their members argue that demand from wealthier states drives supply in the Global South, whether in drugs, trafficked labor, or illicit wildlife products. They criticize enforcement-heavy strategies that place the burden on weaker states while failing to address structural drivers in richer markets.

While the NAM, as post-colonial states, welcome foreign funding, they resist the oversight and control that normally comes with it. Donor countries may offer assistance, but will make it conditional. Such oversight—whether intended to ensure progress toward program goals, to prevent fraud, or the direct investment back to the countries volunteering the money—is seen by NAM members as a threat to their national sovereignty. They welcome the money, in other words, but not the oversight. This sets up a confrontation, a diplomatic challenge, as sides struggle to advance their rival goals.

Russian Federation: Outside the Security Council, Russia can be an unpredictable actor in UN bodies. It's primary goal in all UN fora is insulating Russian freedom of action in Ukraine, to ensure other issues cannot become a wedge allowing discussion of the war or its effects. Russia usually can rely on support from socialist countries like Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela and sometimes Vietnam. South Africa and African countries depend on Russian military help also can be very sympathetic. On particular issues the



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Russian Federation can work with China, Iran and North Korea.²²

Russia supports UNTOC but promotes a sovereignty-first approach, often clashing with Western states on cyber governance and other issues. Critics note that state-linked criminal networks and pervasive corruption complicate its credibility in international negotiations. Under the leadership of President Trump, the United States cooperates with Russia, albeit unpredictably.²³

United States: In general, the United States wants to minimize the role of UN agencies in all international issues. Cutting UN budgets is a prominent American goal that will be applied to this issue.²⁴ Expect American diplomats to work to reduce the cost and effect of any UN initiative. The ideal UN initiative, from their perspective, allows each Member States to do as it pleases.

The American approach is not without international support. Far-right governments in countries like Argentina, El Salvador, Hungary, Israel and sometimes the Russian Federation may be tempted to support the United States on specific issues.

The United States also has had new success working with authoritarian leaders in non-aligned countries, typically by making issues part of a larger deal, trade-off to other goals American leaders are more concerned with. A large real estate deal, for example, involving territory in a host country, might be facilitated by other commercial deals. In this case, deals with tobacco or medical companies might be

used to win development of tourist centers or city re-development plans.

Ways Forward

If the UN is to remain relevant in addressing organized crime, it must move beyond reaffirming existing commitments and toward innovative solutions that match twenty-first-century realities. Several avenues stand out.

Modernize the Palermo Convention.

Negotiating a new protocol on cybercrime and digital financial flows would directly address gaps around AI-enabled fraud, cryptocurrency laundering, and ransomware. While politically difficult, such an update would give UNTOC credibility in the digital age²⁵. The General Assembly could all for negotiation of amendments to modify the existing Convention, or it could call for negotiations for a completely new treaty.

The General Assembly does not have to negotiate actual terms of language for a new or amended treaty. Rather, it could call for a conference to negotiate a new or modified agreement, setting terms, such as the schedule, participation, and general goals for problems and challenges to be addressed.

Alternatively, the General Assembly could specific targets to be reached, specific action to be called for and taken by a new or modified treaty.

²² 'General Assembly Debates Russian Federation's Security Council Veto of European Amendments Seeking 'Just' Peace in Ukraine', *United Nations*, 6 March 2025, <https://press.un.org/en/2025/ga12677.doc.htm>

²³ James Landale and Patrick Jackson, 'US sides with Russia in UN resolutions on Ukraine', *BBC News*, 25 February 2025,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c7435pnle0g>

²⁴ Amy Mackinnon, 'Waltz vows to take Trump's chainsaw to the United Nations', *Politico*, 15 June 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/15/mike-waltz-un-ambassador-hearing-00454617>

²⁵ Europol, IOCTA 2017 and GI-TOC, *Is the UNTOC Working? 2024*.

Create a UN Tech-Crime Task Force. Modeled on the public-private partnerships that have worked in counterterrorism finance, this body could bring together states, tech companies, blockchain firms, and cybersecurity researchers. Sharing data and expertise across sectors would make it harder for criminal networks to hide behind technical anonymity, while also building trust between regulators and private actors²⁶.

This will be especially popular with countries like the Russian Federation, which strongly supports action by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which it traditionally runs. It also could utilize the talents and capabilities of INTERPOL, the international law enforcement agency in Lyon, France, which works for the Member States.

Elevate environmental crime to the same level as drugs and human trafficking. A General Assembly

resolution explicitly linking environmental crime to the Sustainable Development Goals could unlock more resources and attention. Delegates could propose that environmental crime be a standing agenda item in UNODC's Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.²⁷

There probably will be opposition from the United States, which rejects the idea of widespread environmental problems requiring international action. Other countries, led by China, will insist that leadership be left to each Member State, for fear of compromising economic development. But if a majority of European and Non-Aligned countries can agree, this may be a promising avenue for UN action.

Establish a Global Fund for Crime Prevention, modeled on the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Pooling

donor contributions would allow the UN to provide consistent funding for capacity-building, especially in states most exploited by organized crime but least able to respond effectively.²⁸

In the current environment for the United Nations, with the loss of almost all funding from the United States (previously 22 percent of the UN base budget) and UN agencies cutting their staff and programs, including peacekeeping, emergency and humanitarian relief programs, anything that costs additional funding will be difficult. New funding proposals need to be very clear where the money will come from, such as cutting other UN programs, or specified donations from donor governments.

Address demand-side accountability. A new resolution could emphasize the responsibility of wealthy states to curb their role in fueling organized crime from drug consumption to wildlife imports to permissive financial secrecy laws. By shifting some of the focus to demand, the UN could reduce the perception that enforcement disproportionately burdens developing countries.

These proposals are not without obstacles. States jealously guard sovereignty over law enforcement and cyberspace. Wealthy states may resist acknowledging demand-side responsibility. Donors may balk at funding new institutions. But without bolder steps, the UN risks irrelevance in a fight where criminals adapt daily.

Ultimately, transnational organized crime is not just about mafias or smugglers; it is about the resilience of global governance. Criminals thrive in the cracks between states, between analog institutions and digital realities, between lofty commitments and underfunded agencies. Closing those cracks requires ambition,

²⁶ Lin, L. S. F. 2025. "Organizational Challenges in US Law Enforcement's Response to AI-Driven Cybercrime and Deepfake Fraud." *Laws* 14, no. 4: 46. <https://www.mdpi.com/2075-471X/14/4/46>

²⁷ FATF 2021 and INTERPOL 2021

²⁸ UNODC. 2022. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022*. Vienna: UNODC. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html>



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innovation, and political will. For Model UN delegates and policymakers alike, the challenge is to ensure that the UN does not merely describe the problem but begins to solve it.

Conclusion

Organized crime is no longer just about the mafia or smugglers. It is entrepreneurial, global, and technologically agile. From forced labor in scam compounds to billion-dollar environmental crimes, it exploits weak governance, fragile institutions, and outdated treaties. The Palermo Convention remains the backbone of UN cooperation, but it is showing its age.

To stay credible, the UN must adapt: update frameworks for digital realities, elevate environmental crime, support capacity in vulnerable states, and demand accountability from consumer markets. Above all, it must treat organized crime not as a side issue of law enforcement but as a systemic challenge to global governance.

For policymakers, the challenge is clear: move beyond rhetoric and propose ways the UN can close the cracks that criminals exploit. The fight against organized crime is, ultimately, a fight to defend the integrity of multilateralism itself.

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