



FIRAMUN '26

FIRA MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE 2026

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME

AGENDA ITEM: ADDRESSING
DRUG SMUGGLING
OPERATIONS IN REFUGEE
COMMUNITIES AND
CONFLICT ZONES

UNDER SECRETARY
GENERAL:

MERT SÜRÜCÜ

ACADEMIC ASSISTANT:

BEREN BILGIN

Table of Contents

1. Welcoming Letters.....	1
1.1. Letter from the Secretariat.....	1
1.2. Letter from the Under-Secretary General.....	1
1.3. Letter from the Academic Assistant.....	2
2. Introduction to the Committee.....	2
3. Introduction to the Agenda Item.....	3
4. The Evolution of Drug Smuggling Operations.....	4
4.1. Formation of Trafficking Routes.....	5
4.2. Cryptomarkets.....	6
4.3. Cannabis Legalization.....	7
5. Contributing Factors of Drug Smuggling Operations in Refugee communities and Conflict Zones.....	8
5.1. Armed Conflicts and State Instability.....	8
5.2. Weaknesses of Border Control Mechanisms.....	10
5.3. Socioeconomic and Security Vulnerabilities of Refugee Communities.....	12
6. Global Impacts of Drug Smuggling.....	13
6.1. Regional and International Security Threats.....	13
6.2. Economic and Public Health Impacts.....	17
6.3. Humanitarian Consequences.....	19
7. Questions to be Addressed (QTBA).....	22
8. Bibliography.....	23

1. Welcoming Letters

1.1. Letter from the Secretariat

Dear Participants,

As the Secretaries-General of FIRAMUN'26, we are very happy to welcome you to Antalya for the first edition of our conference, which will take place from September 1st to September 3rd, 2026.

When we first started planning FIRAMUN'26, we had a simple goal: to organize a conference that we would enjoy attending ourselves. Since then, our executive, academic, and organization teams have spent months working on every part of the event. There have been long meetings, difficult decisions, last-minute changes, and a great deal of excitement. Now, we are finally ready to share the result with you.

During these three days, you will discuss real problems, defend your country's position, disagree with one another, and hopefully find solutions together. Some moments may be challenging, especially for those attending their first MUN conference. That is completely normal. Nobody enters their first committee knowing exactly what to say or when to speak. What matters is having the courage to participate.

For experienced delegates, we hope FIRAMUN'26 gives you something different to remember. For first-time delegates, we hope it becomes the beginning of a much longer MUN journey. Either way, do not spend the whole conference worrying about awards. Take the floor, meet the people around you, make mistakes, and enjoy the experience.

A conference is shaped by the people in its committee rooms. We have done our best to prepare those rooms for you. What happens inside them is now in your hands.

We hope you leave FIRAMUN'26 with good memories, new friends, and at least one story you will still be telling months later.

Lastly, we want to finish our letter with Father of Turks, our visionary Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's delightful phrase:

"You, the young people of the new Türkiye! Even if you grow exhausted, you will follow me. Those who resolve to keep walking without resting will never, ever grow tired."

Welcome to FIRAMUN'26. Requiem Aeternam!

Sincerely,

Baran İNCE & Doruk ŞENTÜRK
Secretaries-General of FIRAMUN'26

1.2. Letter from the Under-Secretary General

Distinguished Delegates of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,

As the Under-Secretary-General of UNODC, it is my absolute pleasure to welcome you all to our committee.

I am Cihan Mert Sürücü. I graduated from Antalya Yusuf Ziya Öner Science High School in 2024, and I am currently a second-year student at Akdeniz University Faculty of Medicine. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to our Secretaries-General, Doruk Şentürk and Baran İnce, for their visionary leadership and for making this brilliant conference a reality. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to my Academic Assistant, Beren Bilgin, for their dedicated support and hard work in laying the academic foundation for this committee.

We have selected an agenda item that addresses some of the most pressing global challenges within the mandate of UNODC. In an era where transnational issues continue to shape world politics, it is imperative that we work together toward effective and comprehensive solutions. I kindly ask all delegates to thoroughly examine the study guide and arrive at the conference fully prepared for active debate and collaboration.

I truly look forward to meeting you all in committee. Until then, take care.
Warm regards,

Cihan Mert SÜRÜCÜ
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1.3. Letter from the Academic Assistant

Distinguished delegates of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) committee,

As the Academic Assistant of our committee, I would like to start my words by stating that it is an honor for me to welcome you all to the UNODC committee of the FIRAMUN'26 conference.

First of all, I would like to extend my gratitude to everyone who contributed to the realization of this conference, and extend my gratitude to the secretariat— Doruk Şentürk and Baran İnce —for making it possible for us to be here with this committee.

Before concluding, I would like to express my sincere thanks to our Under Secretary General Mert SÜRÜCÜ for his huge support in every sense.

In our committee, we have decided an agenda that deals with one of the most challenging topics in today's times. The study guide provided below is intended to give you a thorough insight into these topics. We recommend that you study it carefully and conduct further research in order to come up with innovative and practical solutions for your committee. I hope to see you all prepared and excited for the sessions.

If you do have any questions regarding the procedure, agenda or anything about our committee, do not hesitate to contact me through my personal number or email address below:

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berenbilgin009@gmail.com

Best Regards,
Beren BİLGİN
Academic Assistant of UNODC

2. Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a technical division of the United Nations (UN) that serves as a global line in the fray against lawless drugs, organized crime, putrefaction, and terrorism. With its headquarters in Vienna, Austria, the UNODC works nearly with governments and other mates to develop and apply operative strategies and programs to manipulate these pressing effects.

The UNODC has a rich history that dates from 1997 when the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division (CPCJ) intermingled to form a single reality. This merger was a significant step in strengthening the UN's response to the interconnected challenges of drugs and crime.

Over the times, the UNODC has expanded its accreditation and compass of work to encompass colorful aspects of crime forestallment and felonious justice, involving putrefaction and terrorism. The division has become a vital player in the global efforts to promote peace, screen, and sustainable evolution by diving into the root causes and consequences of lawless medicines and felonious conditioning.

The primary decree of the UNODC is to help member countries in their efforts to combat drugs, crime, putrefaction, and terrorism. The agency provides technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and policy guidance to governments, helping them develop comprehensive and evidence-based strategies to address these complex challenges.

One of the crucial objectives of the UNODC is to support member countries in enforcing transnational conventions and protocols related to medicine control, crime forestallment, and criminal justice. The agency facilitates cooperation among countries, fosters information sharing, and promotes best practices to enhance the effectiveness of national and international responses.

The UNODC covers a wide range of motifs in its work, reflecting the multifaceted nature of medicine and crime. Some of the crucial motifs that the division focuses on includes:

Drug Control: The UNODC plays a pivotal part in supporting member countries in their efforts to help drug scurrility, combat drug trafficking, and promote indispensable evolution programs. It assists nations in enforcing substantiation-grounded medicine forestallment and treatment strategies, strengthens law enforcement capacities to disrupt lawless drug networks, and promotes transnational cooperation to fight the global drug case.

Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice: UNODC's work in crime forestallment includes supporting nations in developing operative crime forestallment programs, promoting community-grounded approaches, and strengthening the criminal justice systems. The division also plays a vital part in combating systematized crime, mortal trafficking, smuggling of settlers, and cybercrime.

Corruption: The UNODC assists member countries in precluding and combating putrefaction through the perpetration of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). It supports countries in developing robust legal frameworks, enhancing transparency and accountability, and building capacities to investigate and prosecute corruption cases.

Terrorism Prevention: The UNODC works nearly with member countries to toughen their capacities in precluding and fighting terrorism. The division provides specialized backing to develop legit fabrics, ameliorate rim screen, enhance transnational cooperation, and promote the use of improved technology in detecting and combating terrorist conditioning.

In conclusion, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime(UNODC) is a vital reality in the global fray against lawless drugs, organized crime, putrefaction, and terrorism. Through its history, directive, and focus on key topics, the agency works to assist member states in developing effective strategies and implementing international conventions to address these complex challenges. The UNODC's efforts contribute significantly to promoting peace, security, and sustainable development worldwide.

3. Introduction to the Agenda Item

Drug smuggling is among the major issues that the international community faces due to its connection to organized crime and public health concerns. Even though the smuggling of drugs can happen in a wide variety of environments, refugee communities and regions of conflicts pose an especially complex challenge for prevention and control such activities. Presence of armed groups, instability, weak institutions and insufficient law enforcement capacity may be considered the factors that facilitate criminal activities.

Moreover, displacement and conflict may also create certain conditions that enable the expansion of the activities of drug smuggling networks. Weakness of state institutions due to an ongoing armed conflict leads to inefficient border control and other law enforcement activities. Criminal organizations have an opportunity to exploit the shortcomings in the systems and create new routes within the territories with insufficient control of the government. Additionally, mass migration may cause additional challenges for detection and prevention of illicit activities.

Displacement and creation of refugee communities may lead to their vulnerability in relation to activities of drug smuggling networks. As a consequence of the process of displacement, people face unemployment, economic insecurity, lack of essential services, and inability to obtain any kind of protection. Criminal organizations may try to exploit the weaknesses in order to involve certain people in drug smuggling. However, the fact that refugees cannot be regarded as the ones who are responsible for the actions of drug smuggling organizations must be taken into account.

As it was mentioned above, there are some other consequences of drug smuggling in addition to criminal ones. They include regional insecurity, growth of organized criminal networks, economic losses, public health dangers, and worsening humanitarian challenges in case of regions of conflict.

Thus, overcoming the activities of drug smuggling networks in refugee communities and regions of conflicts implies additional measures beyond the traditional law enforcement. Additional actions that member states should undertake include border management, information exchange, institution building, socioeconomic support, and international cooperation without violation of human rights and protection of refugees.

4. The Evolution of Drug Smuggling Operations

Drugs have been variously used, regulated, and prohibited for centuries. Illegally traded and socially unacceptable products include methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin. Products that, in a global context, fall somewhere between the realm of acceptability and unacceptability, and exist in both licit and illicit markets, include cannabis, new psychoactive substances, and performance-enhancing drugs. That human beings cultivate, produce, and consume drugs is not a new phenomenon; however, large-scale prohibition and regulation of such substances

are. Intoxicating substances have been used for millennia in a wide array of historical, cultural, and geographical contexts. Alcohol has been present since people were hunter-gatherers; it was one of the first traded commodities and influenced cultural norms of several early societies. Everyday people used alcohol as an intoxicant from ancient times in India, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Greece, Rome, and elsewhere in medieval Europe. In addition to the consumption of alcohol, there are long-standing histories of people using plant-based substances in socially acceptable contexts for their hallucinogenic, stimulant, depressant, and intoxicant effects. Notable examples include, inter alia, ayahuasca, betel nut, caffeine, cannabis, coca, khat, opium, and tobacco.

Moreover, several synthesized substances, now banned, have histories of socially acceptable medicinal use in the 19th and 20th centuries. Heroin, first developed in 1874, was sold under its eponymous brand name as a remedy for coughs and a treatment for morphine dependency. Preparations of coca (such as cocaine) were prominent in early American medicines. Methylenedioxymethamphetamine was first patented in 1912 but was not available to the public; it did not appear in medicinal treatments until the 1970s when it was used for psychotherapy applications. Amphetamine was developed in 1929; it was approved for medicinal use for depression and distributed by the U.S. military to its soldiers during the Vietnam War. The side effects of these products and/or moral disapproval of their intoxicating effects eventually led to all of them being removed from the licit marketplace only to be replaced by significant illicit supply chains that continue to bring these products to market.

The demand that drives the illicit marketplaces comes from a diverse range of consumers. Such a diverse range of consumers, who in 2018 numbered 275 million people worldwide, is an estimated 5.6% of the global adult population ages 15 to 64 years old, generate the demand that allows marketplaces that supply prohibited substances to persist despite prohibition and regulation.

4.1. Formation of Trafficking Routes

Several factors affect the formation and use of trafficking routes for illicit drugs. These factors include geography, social proximity, corruption, and law enforcement capacity. Where geography is concerned, close proximity to source countries or targeted consumer markets puts a country at higher risk of being used as a transit hub. This explains the strategic trafficking roles that Central American countries and the Balkan route play in the trafficking of, respectively, cocaine and heroin. Both areas are, in fact, geographically located between the main producer and consumer markets. Traffickers prefer working shorter distances to longer ones since longer distances increase costs as well as exposure to risk of arrest and interception or loss of product.

In addition to geographical location, trafficking flows take advantage of established social and economic connections that connect people internationally. As with licit commerce, shared social connections provide non-economic, sociocultural factors which allow traffickers to find trading partners and reduce uncertainties. Speaking the same language,

sharing the same sociocultural background, or coming from the same institutional setting increases trust in the partner and reduces transaction costs.

Furthermore, the presence or absence of corruption influences how trafficking routes unfold. Corruption reduces trafficking risks and grants traffickers impunity from law enforcement. Corrupted officials make borders porous and the smuggling of drugs into a country easier.

Importantly, international drug trafficking responds well to change. When interdiction programs impact the viability of a route or part of a route, or trafficking routes experience other impediments or shocks, traffickers adapt by changing their strategies. Notably, when preferred routes close, traffickers shift to alternative routes, a process known as the “balloon effect” so-called because if one squeezes a balloon, the air will redistribute itself to another part of the balloon or change their modes of transportation and hiding techniques. Likewise, when precursor substances or chemicals become limited, traffickers seek alternative sources and substitutions wherever available, thus demonstrating a tendency to reallocate their resources efficiently, in market terms.

Technological advancements allow the creation of new psychoactive substances (NPSs) on a rolling basis. These NPSs—also known as legal highs, synthetics, research chemicals, designer drugs, and party drugs—are a new group of drugs that are not regulated by international treaties. NPSs are specifically produced for recreational use and then sold on the illicit drug market or in online/traditional shops as legal highs, food integrators, or research chemicals. They can mimic the mind-altering effects of traditional drugs or have new and different effects.

NPSs are, and are likely to remain, of special concern to governments for at least three reasons. First, authorities, and in some cases the users, have little knowledge of the effects of these substances given their continuous production and new chemical compositions. In 1961, the UN Single Convention on Narcotics listed a total of 61 controlled drugs. Between 2009 and 2018, the UNODC identified 892 different substances across 119 countries. These include synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic opioids (in particular, fentanyl and its analogues), synthetic cathinones (colloquially known as bath salts), and piperazines (a class of compounds widely used in human and veterinary medicines and used as an MDMA substitute).

International organizations, such as the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and the UNODC, have responded to the rapid growth of NPSs by setting early warning systems, which identify and profile new substances entering the market, and then share this information with the rest of their partners.

Third, policymakers struggle to determine how to effectively regulate NPSs. Conventional drug laws prohibit substances by defining them with their specific chemical compositions.

Traditionally, before banning a newly formulated synthetic substance, many countries require an assessment of its specific effects, an extensive process that involves human testing. This process worked relatively well for many years given the limited production and supply of new substances, but it cannot keep up with the ongoing and frequent introduction of new synthetic substances to the market. As a result, authorities find themselves in a persistent competitive disadvantage trying to catch up with the continuous production of newly designed products.

4.2. Cryptomarkets

As in many other industries, online technologies provide different opportunities for drug traffickers. Cryptomarkets also known as anonymous online marketplaces and darknet markets (DNMs) give people the opportunity to buy illegal drugs (and other regulated or illegal products) anonymously via a global online platform that resembles licit online marketplaces, like eBay or Amazon.

Numerous cryptomarkets emerged immediately after the closure of Silk Road, including Silk Road 2, Hansa, AlphaBay, and many more in the following years. None of these has been able to reach Silk Road's monopolistic position, and just a few have remained active for more than a year. Seizure by law enforcement authorities, exit scams, and hacking are the most common reasons for their closures.

Cryptomarkets have two important implications for international drug trafficking. First, if adopted widely, cryptomarkets could reduce drug-related violence by further reducing violence associated with street-level, hand-to-hand sales, such as when mobile phones became commonly used and widely available. Buyer and seller anonymity preclude any possibility of direct physical harm; moreover, disputes are usually peacefully resolved by cryptomarket administrators.

Second, cryptomarkets have the potential to alter the structure of drug trafficking by excluding a large portion of the middlemen and connecting producers with users. Despite this potential, the evidence suggests that cryptomarkets are predominantly domestic or regional. Currently, cryptomarkets represent a small proportion of drug sales, and most illicit drug flows continue to rely on traditional offline trafficking routes. Consequently, whether, how, and the extent to which cryptomarkets are going to change illicit drug markets has yet to be determined.

In their brief history, cryptomarkets have been through several periods of popularity and shrinkage. Repeated police interventions, exit scams, and hacking attempts have undermined the reliability and reputation of the cryptomarket ecosystem. Regardless, whether cryptomarkets survive these attacks, new online technologies are still likely to play an important role in the future of international drug markets.

4.3. Cannabis Legalization

From 2012, there have been unprecedented legal reforms in the Americas, influencing the debate on cannabis policy. Voters in the U.S. states of Colorado and Washington passed reforms to legalize the production, distribution, and use of cannabis for adults for non-medical purposes. In 2013, Uruguay removed the prohibition on the cultivation of cannabis. In the following years, several other jurisdictions in the United States passed legislation to legalize the production and distribution of cannabis. In October 2018, Canada became the second country in the world (and the first G7 country) to legalize the cultivation, possession, acquisition, and consumption of cannabis. Other jurisdictions are likely to follow in the coming years.

This new legalization movement, which currently involves only cannabis, may have at least two important consequences for cross-border cannabis trafficking. The first consequence is that the legalization of cannabis will likely suppress the illicit flows supplying the jurisdictions. The possibility for cannabis users to legally buy cannabis will heavily affect criminal organizations trafficking cannabis in those locales and may even cut them out of business.

The second and most important consequence of cannabis legalization is its impact on cross-border trafficking flows in the rest of the region. Legalization is likely to suppress illicit trafficking flows by providing licit alternatives. Its impact, however, can also affect drug trafficking patterns in the rest of the region, so that jurisdictions where cannabis has been legalized may begin to export products at lower prices and higher qualities to other jurisdictions. The impact that legalization will have on regional cannabis flows depends on how and to what extent authorities decide to control and monitor the production and transportation of legal cannabis.

5. Contributing Factors of Drug Smuggling Operations in Refugee communities and Conflict Zones

5.1. Armed Conflicts and State Instability

Armed conflict can fuel gun violence in various ways. First of all, because armed conflict tends to increase the demand for weapons and, therefore, may also result in increased firearms trafficking. Drug trafficking can facilitate these flows not only by providing non-State armed groups with the financial resources to acquire weapons, but also by allowing the trafficking of firearms through the same smuggling routes used for drug trafficking. The relationship between firearms, drugs and armed conflict is, however, not one-directional. A recent report by UNIDIR and UNODC highlights the interconnected nature of armed conflict, firearms and organized crime. The conflict is not only a ‘destination’ in this complex scheme, but it can also be a ‘source’ since State fragility also provides opportunities for the diversion of firearms and other types of weapons into the illicit market, also allowing criminal groups to prosper.

Armed conflict may not only drive demand for weapons but can also provide a source for arms trafficking since, during conflict, it is often more difficult for authorities to maintain effective control over State stockpiles. It is important to stress that various types of diversion of weapons can occur during an armed conflict, with so-called 'battlefield capture' as a very important diversion method. A detailed assessment by Conflict Armament Research of the weapons of the Islamic State (Daesh, IS) in Iraq and Syria, for instance, concluded that at the very least 12 per cent of the weapons recovered from IS forces originate from Iraqi national stockpiles. This included weapons captured during a major offensive against Iraqi armed forces in the Mosul region in mid-2014, which significantly increased the war fighting capacity of IS. The findings from the same assessment further suggest that some of the ammunition used by IS was captured from Syrian armed forces.

Even after the end of an armed conflict, firearms can still be sourced from the affected country or region and end up in the hands of criminals or non-State armed groups in other countries. Armed conflicts can result in a pool of weapons that remain accessible outside of the legal control mechanisms in post-conflict settings. The proliferation of conflict legacy weapons may facilitate their use in criminal activities and enable a quick return to armed violence in the post-conflict setting itself, but it also facilitates international trafficking of these weapons.

Recent developments in Afghanistan show that conflict legacy weapons can also have an immediate impact on criminal activities, including drug trafficking, and the use of violence. Taliban fighters were able to acquire large amounts of weapons and military equipment in the immediate aftermath of the withdrawal of the US armed forces from Afghanistan in the summer of 2022. This included various types of small arms and light weapons, such as handguns, assault rifles and machine guns, which were left behind by the US or seized from Afghan government soldiers. This immediately sparked security concerns since these newly acquired weapons could be used to undertake violent activities, but also to generate income for the Taliban.

An analysis by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) indicates these weapons were not only instrumental for the Taliban in controlling territory and improving their combat capabilities, but also provided the Taliban with increased financial opportunities. In the weeks after the Taliban took control over Afghanistan, Taliban fighters acquired weapons both when they overran military bases and by seizing weapons from civilians. International media reports indicate that a large amount of these weapons have ended up in the hands of Afghan arms dealers and were sold to the local population or were smuggled to Pakistan, where demand for US weapons is strong. According to these reports, the Taliban allowed its fighters to sell some of the weapons they had acquired, while the rest of the weapons were handed over to Taliban commanders.

The availability of conflict legacy weapons may not only increase opportunities for undertaking lucrative criminal activities, but also intensify violence between competing criminal groups and even fuel political and intercommunal armed violence. This is the case in northern Mali, where traffickers have to protect their cargoes from interception. To this end,

they rely on heavily armed private security firms who use pickup trucks equipped with machine guns. They further rely on the military expertise of rebel fighters and make use of the weapons that continue to circulate in the aftermath of previous rebellions. The Malian State's weakness in the north, the circulation of weapons from previous rebellions, and the high competition marking the illicit drug market have led to an unprecedented militarization of drug trafficking. Drug trafficking also influences the local power balance and many drug traffickers have acquired local and even national influence, as they heavily invest in their communities to build a clientèle. However, this has intensified the process of tribal splitting and led to rivalries between traffickers who organize their networks partly along the lines of family and tribes. In Tilemsi valley, in particular, this had led to open tribal conflicts.

There is ample evidence from across the globe to support the claim that terrorist groups sometimes turn to drug and firearms trafficking to finance their activities. Taking part in lucrative drug trafficking also enables them to procure enough funds to buy firearms. In March 2023, for example, the United Nations expressed concerns about the gains terrorist groups are making in the Sahel, amongst other means by engaging in criminal activities such as the trafficking of arms and drugs. In Mali, a transit country for drug trafficking, local terrorist groups are heavily involved in such activities. The competition within the drug market often leads to violent conflicts between armed groups, which get a part of their weapons and munitions trafficked from Libya.

In Southeast Asia, similar developments have also been observed. In the Philippines, for example, the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf started from an ideological base but quickly turned to criminal activities to sustain itself. The group is reported to be involved in several types of crime which include weapons and drug trafficking. Most of the group's earnings are used for purchases of weapons.

In South America, terrorist groups and organized crime groups have been known to cooperate closely to control the illicit drugs business and engage in firearms trafficking in Colombia.

5.2. Weaknesses of Border Control Mechanisms

Rapid technological innovation, combined with the agility and adaptability of those using new platforms to sell drugs and other substances, may usher in a globalized market where more drugs become available in more locations, especially since traffickers can quickly adapt their distribution networks. This in turn will trigger accelerated changes in patterns of drug use. Increasing the capacity of law enforcement agencies to address drug trafficking over the darknet remains a priority, but the increased use of the clear web requires innovative solutions and international cooperation. Public-private partnerships have become crucial in addressing drug trafficking on the Internet. The drug supply chain now involves Internet service providers, technology companies and shipping and mailing companies. Government

responses can be effective only if they involve those actors. Joint responses by Governments and the private sector can involve controlling and removing advertisements and listings of illegal drugs on the Internet. Such initiatives should facilitate the sharing of proportionate, lawful and necessary information with law enforcement agencies, while respecting the highest ethical standards to ensure freedom of information and respect for privacy.

The globalized drug market that is likely to develop on the Internet will require a global response, with innovative, human rights-compliant tools for law enforcement agencies to investigate the borderless virtual space. To respond to this threat, all States will need to be equipped with expert access to the dark web and the investigative capability to proactively take down online markets and platforms. The transnational nature of online drug markets requires a law enforcement capacity that is agile and can have an impact across borders, with joint investigation teams from different countries. Addressing the needs of prosecutors and judges to obtain and authorize requests for data beyond national borders is key in this context.

Nevertheless, the pandemic has triggered or accelerated some preexisting trafficking dynamics. These include larger shipment sizes and increased use of land and waterway routes, private planes, air cargo and postal parcels and contactless methods for delivering drugs to consumers, such as mail delivery.

Fostering international cooperation remains a key objective for fighting the enduring problem of drug trafficking. It is essential that law enforcement agencies operating at key border points exchange information and transfer knowledge at the regional and international levels on effective interdiction approaches and best practices. Together, they can define new strategies to improve targeted control of containers and cargo shipped along air and maritime routes.

Surveillance and targeting capacity with regard to maritime, land, rail and air cargo must be improved substantially, but this can only be achieved if intelligence is effectively shared between national authorities and the private sector, such as shipping companies and commercial airlines. The development of international accountability mechanisms and best practices for shipping companies, postal services and railway operators with regard to tracking suspicious shipments would greatly increase interception capacity. This should go together with strategies aimed at addressing changes in trafficking dynamics through reinforced screening and the identification of suspicious air cargo on private and commercial aircraft.

Continual changes in the routes and tactics employed by traffickers require real-time data monitoring systems that can reinforce border management mechanisms and the knowledge of border control officials. Such systems can guide the priorities of law enforcement agencies and help to shape the training and mentoring of officers operating at major border points.

The methamphetamine market is still expanding in South-East Asia and North America, with manufacturing moving to geographical areas in Myanmar where there is instability and to areas in Mexico where there is a strong presence of organized criminal groups. In the period 2015–2019, more than 90 per cent of the methamphetamine seized globally was seized in South-East Asia and North America. In North America, seizures increased eightfold, to 153 tons, between 2009 and 2019. In the same period, there was an elevenfold increase in seizures in South-East Asia, to 141 tons. The growth of methamphetamine trafficking in North America has come at the same time as so-called product innovations that have seen the drug take a variety of forms: powder, crystals, solutions and tablets that resemble MDMA or falsified pharmaceuticals. Manufacturers in North America are also increasingly mixing fentanyl with other drugs, contributing to a sharp rise in methamphetamine-related deaths in recent years. In South-East Asia, falling prices of methamphetamine products combined with rising seizures suggests that supply may have outstripped demand in the subregion. Organized criminal groups are taking advantage of loose controls over precursor chemicals and sometimes slow cooperation across borders. This has brought profound changes to the illicit drug markets in South-East Asia and the Pacific. Manufacture of the drug has been consolidated in the Golden Triangle region of Myanmar, where a decrease in the opium market has been observed together with increased manufacture of and trafficking in methamphetamine. Security problems and limited access to these areas are posing significant challenges. In South-East Asia and Mexico, methamphetamine manufacture is connected with violence and insecurity. However, many aspects of the institutional and financial mechanisms of this connection remain largely unexplored. In South-East Asia, providing support to countries surrounding Myanmar is crucial given the current volatile situation. It is also important to strengthen capacity in neighbouring countries to stop flows of chemicals into areas where drugs are produced and manufactured.

5.3. Socioeconomic and Security Vulnerabilities of Refugee Communities

Refugees are exposed to an excessive burden of disease caused by the consequences of trauma, conflict, violence, occupation, displacement, poverty and environmental determinants of health (congested living space, poor sanitation) which jeopardize their health outcomes and wellbeing. Reported multi-morbidities experienced by Palestinian refugees include high rates of chronic illness such as hypertension, cancer and diabetes, mental health (including substance use) and respiratory disorders, malnutrition and blood borne viruses (HIV/Hepatitis C).

UNRWA is a temporary UN body working on improving health and education, and supporting reconstruction and social services. It is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions from the UN Member States, and has been severely affected recently by

funding cuts. Amidst such political complexities and challenges, refugees are in danger of being left behind.

Nevertheless, despite making up (at times) a relatively significant proportion of the domestic host population, externally displaced Palestinians are generally denied full rights to political, economic and societal integration (employment, property ownership), are restricted access to public education, public health care and social services, and consequently experience acute socio-economic deprivation.

Further to the political insecurity, complicated by the impending angst around the 'right to return', Palestinian refugee communities in the drug transit and drug production countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, West Bank and Gaza are reported to increasingly experience camp insecurity and drug related health threats and vulnerabilities. These conditions inside camps, along with tensions with the outside or host communities collectively increase their risk of substance use and high-risk drug use. Limited access to safety and justice, lack of governance and infiltration by radical Islamist groups and criminal networks in some camps has played a vital role in the targeting of youth by drug dealers, the spread of drug abuse, trafficking and violence.

Young disenfranchised Palestinian refugees, particularly males, and those living with the trauma of displacement and conflict, are extremely vulnerable to drug related risk behaviours including exploitation in drug trafficking by cross border criminal networks. Refugee numbers have, however, stretched domestic responses to substance use and related harms in the region.

Community groups continue to report concern around the hidden nature of drug use, the stigmatising treatment of drug users as criminals by law enforcement, and lack of harm reduction and drug treatment provision accessible near to the camps. The lack of policy driven by evidence is underpinned by camp security and governance aspects which hamper efforts to collect routine surveillance data, resulting in lack of informed policy.

Research in humanitarian and conflict affected settings elsewhere (for example Thailand, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kenya) underscores that whilst displacement and conflict affected populations are uniquely vulnerable to harmful patterns of substance use and related harms (for example HIV, Hepatitis C), the epidemiology of refugee substance use is limited and challenged by poor measurement and inconsistent reporting, with their health outcomes worsened by displacement experiences, and limited access to or exclusion from relevant host population prevention and treatment services.

Such responses should focus on preventive measures including promoting parental and family skills, youth social and emotional skills, enforcing environmental policies including the loose regulations around pharmacy dispensing of habit forming drugs in the camps; and preventing the exploitation of youth by criminal networks and for radicalisation.

Furthermore, the impact of COVID-19 carries a disproportionate effect on this vulnerable population. This effect is either direct due to the stress caused by the pandemic or indirect due to policies applied to deal with it (including lockdown), or its economic consequences. The health vulnerabilities of Palestinian communities living in congested poorly sanitised camps, notwithstanding the heightened risks of those engaging in harmful drug use during this time of even more difficult access to health services begs more than ever for concerted public health responses to counter the drug related health threats and vulnerabilities in such settings.

6. Global Impacts of Drug Smuggling

6.1. Regional and International Security Threats

Opium production in Afghanistan and cocaine production in Colombia are at record levels. This increase in production has the added effect of a high level of drug purity at street level as the criminals have less need to use cutting agents, and this brings its own dangers. The chemicals necessary for amphetamine production continue to enter the country in volume, while street prices drop, again indicating rising availability. Evidence suggests crack cocaine use - a particular driver of violence - is rising in England and Wales, while demand for all common drug types remains high.

There is significant, and often deadly, competition between rival organised crime groups at all stages of class A drugs production and supply. There is also corruption at every stage of the drug supply chain, including through the use of corrupt port and airport officials.

Organised crime groups involved in drug trafficking are typically also involved in a range of criminal activity, and the profits from illegal drugs are used to fund other forms of criminal operations, including buying illegal firearms and financing terrorism.

Crime associated with drug trafficking is very often violent, with direct links to the criminal use of firearms and gang feud knife attacks, and traffickers frequently exploit young and vulnerable people. Cannabis gangs in particular are notorious for the trafficking and exploitation of Vietnamese children and other vulnerable people to carry out live-in work in dangerous cannabis factories.

Urban street gangs play a key – and rising - role in the distribution of class A drugs, particularly heroin and crack cocaine. By their nature, County Line drug networks tend to operate across police and local authority boundaries, although not exclusively.

County Lines are not defined by the distance between the point of control and the point of distribution, but rather the mechanism by which that method of supply is supported; namely the use of a mobile telephone line and the use of vulnerable adults and children to facilitate

the distribution. Importing areas are reporting increased levels of violence and weapons-related crimes as a result of this trend.

Report No. 1: Drug Trafficking as a Threat to International Security

This report views drug trafficking as a threat to international security and highlights its links to organized crime, terrorism, conflict, corruption and instability. It also examines the destabilizing impact of drug-trafficking on fragile and weak states and the need for international and regional co-operation to tackle the problem.

A key emerging issue is the destabilisation of fragile or weak states as a result of corruption and use of force by the criminal drug industry. This has a highly destabilising impact on already fragile nations, threatens neighbours and poses risks of relapse into conflict and of a spread of instability beyond the former conflict areas.

An ongoing issue for the Council is the use of drug money in some areas to finance ongoing conflict as well as international terrorism.

A key issue for the Council is whether to now formally recognise the problem of drug trafficking as a global international security threat.

A related issue for the Council is to promote strategic and coordinated approaches to address the issue in areas of production, transit and consumption which may each be situated on a different continent.

The 8 December debate will be the first thematic debate in the Council specifically focusing on drug trafficking as a global security threat. However, concerns about the impact of drugs on various country-specific security situations have arisen on several occasions in Council debates and decisions in the past. The impact of drug trafficking and/or use has come up in more than 200 debates and drugs have been mentioned in 22 resolutions and 18 presidential statements. Yet most of these instances were simply brief references to this problem and were overshadowed by other more direct security issues facing the Council.

From around 1996, the situation in Afghanistan accounted for the bulk of the Council's drug-related issues. It was mentioned in more than ten resolutions and a similar number of presidential statements bringing up the issue. One presidential statement (S/PRST/2003/7) and resolution 1817 specifically focused on the connection between Afghan drug production and security, terrorism and organised crime. In these decisions, the Council recognised the need for the international community to come up with an integrated and balanced approach and to treat addressing the drug-related problems as a shared responsibility.

Over the last two years, the Council has shown increasing concern about the advance of international organised crime and drug trafficking in some fragile states in West Africa which had been used as safe havens and transit points (mainly on the way to Europe) for drugs produced in other parts of the world, Latin America in particular.

In October 2007, in a presidential statement the Council expressed deep concern about drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, recognised the importance of undertaking efforts to reverse the threat posed to peace consolidation in the country by organised crime and drug trafficking, and welcomed the initiative of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to hold a conference aimed at coming up with regional solutions to the problem.

In 2008, when setting up the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone through resolution 1829, the Council mandated it to promote and monitor “efforts to counter transnational organized crime and drug trafficking.”

In June 2009, while extending the mandate of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau through the end of the year in resolution 1876, it noted the growing prominence of organised crime and drug trafficking in the country, stressed the need to strengthen the capacity of the government to counter these phenomena and reaffirmed the need to combat impunity for illicit drug trafficking.

In September, in a resolution extending the mandate of the UN Mission in Liberia, the Council noted with concern “the threats to subregional stability, including to Liberia” by drug trafficking and organised crime.

Even though it has only been in the last few years that the Council as a whole focused attention on drug trafficking problems affecting Africa, individual Council members have been warning of the problem over a much longer period, in particular in various ministerial-level Council debates on Africa held in the late 1990s. There have also been mentions of the drug problem by some delegates in discussions of specific situations in Africa on the agenda, including Somalia, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Concern about the impact of drugs on wider security issues has also come up sporadically in some other situation-specific debates, including on Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Myanmar, Lebanon and Iraq.

In addition, the problem has been mentioned in some thematic debates, most notably on small arms, security sector reform, terrorism, and children and armed conflict.

The most likely option is for the Council to adopt a presidential statement that could address some of the following matters:

- recognising drug trafficking and related transnational organised crime activities as a serious threat to international peace and security;
- requesting the Secretary-General to include drug trafficking as a factor when conducting conflict analysis, undertaking mission assessments, elaborating conflict

prevention strategies and planning peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding support;

- recognising the importance of the actions undertaken by the General Assembly, the UN Economic and Social Council, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and other relevant UN organs and agencies and encouraging them to take further actions in this regard;
- stressing the need to reinforce the coordination of UN actions in order to enhance the effectiveness of international efforts in the fight against drug trafficking; and
- stressing the importance of strengthening transregional and international cooperation to counter the world drug problem and criminal activities, and the need for support of relevant national, subregional and regional organisations and mechanisms.

A further option for the Council would be a commitment to regularly include analysis of drug trafficking issues when renewing existing mandates and setting up new ones and requesting that they are routinely covered in the relevant reports by the Secretary-General.

Another option would be to ask the Peacebuilding Commission to, where appropriate, actively pursue the issue of economic alternatives to drug cultivation to discourage local population's participation in the drug economy.

Council members appear to be in agreement that it is timely for them to formally address the problem of drug trafficking as an international security threat as a thematic issue. Initially, Burkina Faso proposed having a debate focused on the problem in West Africa. However, several members, in particular from Asia and Latin America, suggested that the scope should be broader and that the debate should address drug trafficking as a global problem. Thus, even though the agenda item under which the debate is scheduled is Peace and Security in Africa, participants are expected to address the issue more broadly and the presidential statement is likely to also reach beyond Africa.

6.2. Economic and Public Health Impacts

The health consequences of drug use can include a range of negative outcomes such as drug use disorders, mental health disorders, HIV infection, hepatitis-related liver cancer and cirrhosis, overdose and premature death. The greatest harms to health are those associated with the use of opioids and with injecting drug use, owing to the risk of acquiring HIV or hepatitis C through unsafe injecting practices.

An estimated 11.3 million people worldwide inject drugs. PWID are often subject to marginalization and stigmatization, which create social and economic barriers to accessing public health services especially services for the prevention of the adverse health consequences of injecting drug use. Injecting drug use is a significant public health concern and causes morbidity and mortality owing to the risk of overdose and blood-borne infections (mainly HIV and hepatitis B and C), transmitted through the sharing of contaminated needles

and syringes and other drug paraphernalia or risky sexual behaviour in some groups and subsequent severe immunosuppression, cirrhosis, neoplastic disease and inflammation sequelae. Social and physical effects can further aggravate potential underlying mental health conditions.

The Global Burden of Disease Study provides an indication as to which substances and causes of injury and disease are responsible for the greatest negative health consequences of drug use in terms of deaths and years of “healthy” life lost, also called “disability-adjusted life years” or DALYs. DALYs measure the burden of disease from the combination of both the number of years of life lost as a result of premature death and the number of years of life lived with disability (any form of impairment). The Study estimated that globally, in 2017, there were 42 million years of “healthy” life lost as a result of disability and premature death and 585,000 deaths attributed to the use of drugs. Half of the DALYs were due to premature death and the other half to disability. Most of the burden of disease is among males, who account for 72 per cent of drug-related deaths and 70 per cent of DALYs. Opioid use disorders result in the highest burden of disease in terms of DALYs and account for half of the “healthy” years of life lost as a result of disability and premature death attributed to the use of drugs.

Globally, over the past decade (2008–2017) the number of DALYs attributed to the use of drugs has increased by 17 per cent, with a major increase seen in DALYs attributed to liver cancer resulting from hepatitis C (40 per cent increase), followed by opioid use disorders (28 per cent) and cirrhosis and other chronic diseases related to hepatitis C (19 per cent increase). The increase in DALYs attributed to liver cancer and cirrhosis is mainly the result of untreated hepatitis C among PWID, as observed in most subregions.

Of the estimated 585,000 deaths attributed to drug use in 2017, half are attributed to liver cancer, cirrhosis and other chronic liver diseases related to hepatitis C, which remains mostly untreated among PWID. Deaths attributed to drug use disorders (167,000) account for 28 per cent of all deaths resulting from drug use; 110,000 or 66 per cent of those deaths are attributable to opioids.

Over the past decade, the total number of deaths attributed to drug use has increased by a quarter, with a major increase in deaths caused by opioid use disorders (71 per cent increase), followed by cirrhosis and other chronic liver diseases (55 per cent increase) and liver cancer (46 per cent) resulting from hepatitis C. The comparison of deaths attributed to drug use among men and women over the past decade shows that the number of deaths attributed to drug use disorders, in particular opioid use disorders, has increased disproportionately among women, with a 92 per cent increase in deaths attributed to opioid use disorders among women compared with a 63 per cent increase among men.

Owing to the criminalization of drug use, punitive laws, stigma and discrimination against people who use or inject drugs in many parts of the world, conventional survey methods have been found to underestimate the actual population size because of the hidden nature of

PWID; therefore, only indirect methods have been shown to reflect the situation of PWID with greater accuracy.

Previous attempts to estimate the cost of addressing the problem of drug use include estimates published in the World Drug Report 2016, in which, on the basis of 22 economic studies with different levels of coverage, it was estimated that the costs arising, both directly and indirectly, from the drug problem ranged between 0.07 and 1.7 per cent of GDP of the 14 countries studied.

Cyprus 2016: 60.58 million euros, corresponding to 0.33 per cent of national GDP. Of this total, 76.3 per cent consisted of direct costs of law enforcement efforts, 12.5 per cent of indirect costs of loss of income and productivity, 7.4 per cent of direct costs of medical treatment, 2.1 per cent of direct costs of coordination (NAAC), and 1.7 per cent of direct costs of prevention and research.

Sweden 2020: 3.7 billion euros, corresponding to 0.78 per cent of national GDP. Of this total, 38.2 per cent consisted of direct costs – among these, 47 per cent for addressing drug-related offences, 31 per cent for social care and welfare services, including the care of children and adults by social services, including in rehabilitation centres, 17 per cent healthcare costs (including opioid agonist treatment, NSP, treatment of infectious diseases, overdose management and psychiatric comorbidities), 3 per cent cost of employers related to drug use and 2 per cent preventive work and research.

40.3 per cent consisted of intangible costs – among these, 60 per cent due to quality adjusted life years (QALYs) lost due to drug-related deaths and 40 per cent due to reduced quality of life of family members and others around people who use drugs.

21.5 per cent consisted of indirect costs – among these, 70 per cent due to loss of productivity from premature death and 30 per cent due to loss of productivity from unemployment and absence from work due to imprisonment.

United States of America 2019: Tangible costs (measured directly) amounted to \$500 billion, including 23.6 per cent direct costs of healthcare for substance use disorder treatment (including for alcohol) and other health conditions, 41.2 per cent indirect costs of loss of productivity due to premature mortality or absenteeism due to substance use including alcohol, 19.5 per cent indirect and direct costs of efforts against crime, including for law enforcement and criminal justice authorities, 11.3 per cent direct tangible costs of traffic collisions, 3.0 per cent costs of public assistance and social services, 0.9 per cent costs due to fires (fire protection and property damage), and 0.4 per cent costs of research and prevention.

United States 2019: Intangible costs amounted to \$3.2 trillion, 80 per cent owing to pain and deaths due to substance use (including alcohol), 12 per cent owing to the loss of quality of life of those with substance use disorders (including alcohol) who did not receive treatment, and 8.0 per cent owing to pain and deaths due to traffic accidents or violent crimes related to substance use.

6.3. Humanitarian Consequences

Inequality and social and economic disparities continue to drive and be driven by the drug phenomenon, threatening public health and human rights. Disparities between the global North and South, urban and rural settings, and across subpopulations all contribute to the harms from drugs.

Different patterns of drug use and unequal access to services exacerbate inequality in treatment provision. Although innovations in service provision that started during the pandemic appear to have resulted in early benefits, challenges remain due to the digital divide, especially in certain geographical areas and in certain marginalized populations that are hard to reach, including the homeless and injecting drug users. Other marginalized groups, such as those with a history of incarceration, people displaced by humanitarian emergencies and sex workers, face other barriers in accessing services. Moreover, use of drugs by marginalized populations may be more intense, putting them at greater risk to continued harms, relapse and other related health outcomes. For example, injecting drug use in 2020 was associated with a risk of contracting HIV that was 35 times higher than that associated with non-injecting drug use. Women who inject drugs are 1.2 times more likely than men to be living with HIV.

Different patterns can also be witnessed between urban and rural settings. For example, in some rural areas illicit drug cultivation and trafficking create opportunities for other crimes, including crimes that affect the environment, and impoverished and vulnerable populations are trapped in a vicious cycle with uncertain access to resources and the rule of law. For example, in the tri-border area between Brazil, Colombia and Peru in the Amazon Basin, drug trafficking organizations increasingly violate the human rights, safety and well-being of rural populations.

The record high number of displaced persons requires far greater investment in providing drug-use prevention initiatives and drug-related treatment and services to minimize the adverse public health and social consequences in a continuum of care in humanitarian settings.

Drug trafficking is compounding criminal threats that harm vulnerable communities by degrading their rights to security and livelihood, as well as the right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as recognized by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/300 of 2022:

In the Amazon Basin, drug trafficking and production intersect with, and in some cases even finance, illegal or unregulated activities that are environmentally and socially damaging. These include, in some areas of the Amazon, illegal land occupation and cattle grazing, illegal logging, illegal mining, trafficking in wildlife and other crimes that affect the environment.

Indigenous Peoples and other local communities are caught in the criminal nexus in the Amazon Basin, suffering displacement, mercury poisoning and other severe health impacts, as well as increased exposure to violence and victimization.

Drug challenges are posing greater threats in the context of conflict and displacement, coupled with economic slowdown, inflation and other intersecting crises. A record number of more than 100 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide in the first six months of 2022:

Preventing and treating drug use disorders among displaced persons have become more challenging. Moreover, forcibly displaced populations are among the marginalized groups that suffer physical and psychological trauma and elevated levels of socioeconomic vulnerability, increasing the risk of developing mental health and substance use disorders;

On the supply side, the potential for drug production and trafficking facilitates cycles of instability in conflict-affected areas. The armed conflict in Ukraine has displaced heroin and cocaine routes, but there is an emerging threat of increased manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs. In the Sahel, the illicit drug trade finances non-State armed and insurgency groups through “taxes” in exchange for protection. In Haiti, cocaine and cannabis traffickers take advantage of porous borders, with heavily armed criminal gangs targeting ports, highways and critical infrastructures.

Additional resources and strategies are needed to disrupt the cycle of instability and limited rule of law that enable drug traffickers and other criminals to prey on vulnerable populations and regions.

Fragile and in conflict countries, such as Ukraine and Haiti, require continued monitoring and support to prevent developing or expanding illicit drug economies from contributing to conflict and instability or hampering recovery.

7. Questions to be Addressed (QTBA)

- What actions can be taken in order to prevent the abuse of refugee communities and conflict zones by drug smuggling operations?
- What measures can be implemented to strengthen the border control mechanisms without limiting the fundamental rights of refugees?
- How do armed conflicts and state instability contribute to the establishment and expansion of drug smuggling operations?
- How can international cooperation be implemented to prevent drug smuggling operations from becoming extensive security threats?
- What socioeconomic measures can be taken to lessen the vulnerability of refugee communities to recruitment and exploitation by drug smuggling networks?
- What strategies can be developed to reduce the economic, public health and humanitarian consequences of drug smuggling operations in conflict zones?

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