THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime Statement
to the UN Security Council
Delivered by Tuesday Reitano, Deputy Director,
for the Security Council Briefing
UN Peacekeeping Operations: Police Commissioners

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Police Commissioners, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure and an honour for the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime to address the Security Council today, during the briefing on policing in the UN's peacekeeping operations.

In this statement, we would like to highlight three conclusions from our research and from the experiences of our 350-person network of experts. We hope that these insights can potentially strengthen the strategic response of the Security Council to organized crime in conflict zones.

Our first conclusion, which we think is now broadly accepted, is that – organized crime is a global and accelerating phenomenon, and a threat to international peace and security.

In a collaborative project with INTERPOL and RHIPTO, the Norwegian Center for Global Analyses, we analysed over 1 000 major global smuggling and trafficking routes associated with environmental crimes, drugs and people; these routes and flows represent a confluence of global illicit trade. Not only do they map across contemporary conflicts in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Americas, but there is often a link between these illicit trafficking routes and international terrorism.

Based on our field research, we estimate that in the region of 31.5 billion dollars' worth of illicit profits are generated annually in conflict areas. While there is margin for error with this figure – as with any estimate of the illicit economy – all evidence suggests that the scale of illicit markets is staggering. And their intersection with contemporary conflict is incontrovertible.

The sources of revenue that fund non-state armed and terrorist groups are diversifying; they are increasingly based on criminal activities, and this phenomenon is sustaining conflicts worldwide. Illegal exploitation and taxation of gold, oil and other natural resources are sources of income that are overtaking traditional threat finance sectors, such as kidnapping for ransom and drug trafficking.

Our second conclusion, however, is that these non-state armed groups and combatants collectively receive only a small fraction of the sum total of all illicit finance flows generated by organized criminal activity in or near conflicts. By far the larger share of the 31.5 billion dollars goes to political actors at all levels, and associated transnational

criminal networks. These, therefore, are the main beneficiaries from instability, violence and lack of state capacity for enforcement, and who thus retain an interest in the perpetuation of conflict.

The nature of organized crime activity varies from conflict zone to conflict zone. And criminal groups themselves exist on a spectrum, from loose networks that can include government and external criminal actors, to hierarchically organised armed groups who engage in criminal activity to sustain themselves and project their influence. In some cases, such networks may seek to control key transport nodes (like ports and landing strips). For others, the control of territory itself is essential, as it allows them to tax licit and illicit activities in what could be termed 'criminal governance'.

Combating organized crime must be considered a significant factor in conflict prevention and resolution, reversing ecosystems that enable such criminal governance. Where crime thrives, there can be no sustainable peace.

Our third conclusion is that while the UN Security Council has recognized the growing convergence of criminal activity, illicit markets and conflict, the response across the peacebuilding cycle has not kept pace.

In an analytical exercise undertaken by the Global Initiative, we reviewed each of the 1 113 Security Council Resolutions that were passed between 2000 and 2017. From this analysis, we found that 35% of the resolutions made reference to some form of organized crime or illicit market. Significantly, we also found that the proportion of such resolutions has been increasing: each year, from 2012 to 2017, more than 60% of the resolutions have mentioned one or more forms of organized criminality.

Yet, we see a disconnect between a strong awareness of the problem on the one hand, and a more limited operational response on the other.

For example, a project by the University of Edinburgh shows that of 1 500 separate peace agreements covering more than 120 countries between 1990 and 2016, only 21 mentioned organized crime.

During mandate design, for the UN's 35 peacekeeping, special political missions and envoys currently in effect, only 8 have operational organized crime functions. That is just 23% of missions.

And the few peace operations that have mandates to respond to organized crime tend to address the problem exclusively within the mission's policing function.

What global experience in addressing organized crime has clearly shown is that while policing is important, it cannot alone successfully fight organized crime, address its drivers or mitigate its impact. The policing function needs to be part of an integrated response.

However, as the 2016 external review of UN Policing observed, in most contexts the police component has been insufficiently integrated with the political, and other functions of the peacekeeping missions. And significant under-resourcing hampers the division's ability to perform a more integrated function.

Furthermore, except in a few recent missions, the United Nations Police have been seen as the bedrock of a mission's exit strategy, rather than as a critical part of the central planning and peacekeeping functions.

Instead, the way in which criminal actors have become embedded in conflict zones suggests that policing must be a strategic consideration at all stages of a mission's planning and deployment.

Even if peace operations do not actively fight crime, they need to be crime-sensitive, and ensure that criminal groups do not threaten the security of the mission or become peace spoilers. More regional approaches, including stable neighbouring states, can provide a buffer to respond to the cross border, transnational threats posed by fragile and conflict-affected states.

In a peacekeeping setting, the UN System needs better situational awareness of criminal networks, organized crime and the illicit economy, in order to provide a basis for policymaking and programming.

 Expanding the analytical capabilities of peace operations, by providing information-gathering task forces with sufficient resources, is an essential first step towards accomplishing these aims.

Integrating a political-economy approach – one that extends into the political side of mission mandates and encompasses the illicit economy – is a second step. And a sustainable response must address the often documented challenge of political actors at all levels who profit from illicit flows – otherwise there is a risk of rewarding bad behaviour and allowing governance itself to become criminalised.

There is currently no written guidance for peacekeepers or UN mission staff that has been prepared or provided by the System with regard to addressing organized crime. Similarly, there is no guidance module on organized crime for the UN System DDR framework, though one is envisaged.

Peacekeeping missions should also be able to draw upon the benefits of the experience of the whole UN System in understanding and responding to criminality in a conflict zone. But, currently, there is no systematic linkage between peacekeeping missions and the specialised agency for organized crime (UNODC), or for others with expertise in specific forms of organized criminality.

This may mean that peace operations are working without the much needed understanding of the forms of criminal governance or the criminal ecosystem in which they operate. As a result, they attempt to use structures and strategies designed for dealing with non-state conflict or engaging legitimate political actors, without necessarily addressing the way in which organized crime underpins the theatres of the operations.

A poorly framed response to illicit markets can have highly detrimental impacts on human rights, the legitimacy of some local actors, the protection of civilians, and the size and strength of criminal groups themselves.

We therefore acknowledge and welcome those instances where senior, highly-experienced police officials are working alongside, or replacing, their military counterparts, who have traditionally take a lead role in designing and, thereafter, implementing peacekeeping operations.

In a context where peacekeeping is as much about introducing, reintroducing or reinforcing the rule of law, as it is about keeping warring factions apart, the role of policing in these missions is critical.

Tackling organized crime in conflict zones is an integral part of tackling organized crime at the global level – the two are closely connected.

From the Global Initiative's perspective, there is little doubt that the UN System needs a more coherent, streamlined and strategic approach to addressing organized crime, and bringing its tools to bear to counter its impacts.

Counter-crime initiatives need to be linked to and reinforced by interventions in the recovery and development space. These are required to address the socio-economic underpinnings of the illicit economy.

In conclusion, organized crime is a threat to the three pillars on which the UN System is based: human rights; peace and security; and good governance and development.

If we are to prevent conflict more effectively, and build sustainable peace, then we need a more comprehensive and effective response to organized crime.

We urge the Security Council, therefore, to move this issue from the margins to the mainstream of the UN's work – particularly its work in the field.

I thank you.