

ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX
BACKGROUND PAPER



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

MEASURING ORGANIZED CRIME

The beginnings of
the Global Organized
Crime Index

Nina Kaysser

April 2023

ABOUT THE SERIES

In the run-up to the launch of the second iteration of the Global Organized Crime Index in September 2023, we are publishing a series of 13 discussion papers. These cover each illicit market considered during the development of the Index. The papers, written by international experts, have been commissioned to help move forward the debate around definitions and measurements used in analyzing transnational organized crime markets, and thus support responses to organized crime.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nina Kaysser is a senior analyst at the GI-TOC, where one of her roles is to enhance the quantitative evidence base of organized crime. She has been involved in the development of the Organized Crime Index, as well as the IUU Fishing Index since 2017, and the Global Assassination Monitor since 2021. She holds a PhD in development studies and an MSc in development economics from SOAS, University of London.

© 2023 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.
All rights reserved.

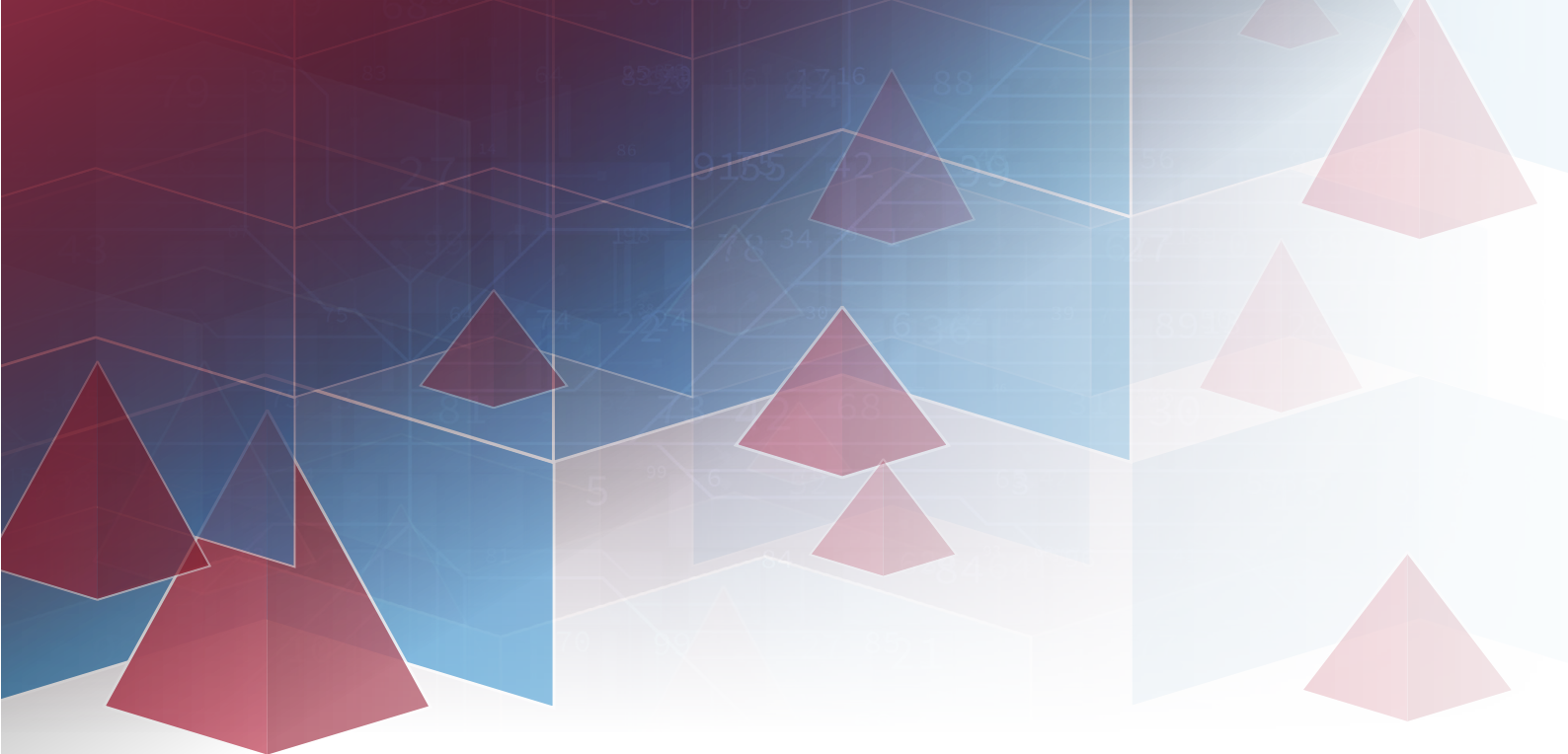
No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Global Initiative.

Please direct inquiries to:

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Avenue de France 23
Geneva, CH-1202
Switzerland
www.globalinitiative.net

CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Introduction	3
The first tool of its kind	4
Series of papers	5
Revisions and additional papers	6
Conclusion	7
Notes	8



FOREWORD

Defining and measuring organized crime

The mandate of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is to build a better evidence base with a view to improving responses to transnational organized crime. From years of work, we know that organized crime is a growing problem that needs an urgent response. The impact of organized crime is severe, and harms people's lives on a daily basis. Part of the challenge is to provide that credible evidence base.

In the global narrative on organized crime, a key sticking point has often been the question of definitions and measurement. How should we define organized crime? What components should be included in its definition? And what are the best ways of measuring it? In the analysis and programming on organized crime, these questions have been a source of some debate. To date, there is no consensus.

Nor is this discussion confined purely to academic or criminological circles: it is holding back important discussions on how best to formulate practicable responses, and therefore arguably stifling progress in the fight against organized crime more generally. To create a better foundation for informed policy responses, a sounder evidence base is needed, and for a better evidence base, decisions on definitions and measurement are required.

Admittedly, there is no perfect way of measuring organized crime. Every approach faces constraints, not just because of the inherently illusive nature of criminal activity, but also because of the complexity of the phenomenon. Organized crime markets are diverse and its harms manifest in different ways in each criminal market.

Foreword

But we can move the debate forward. What is important when developing a credible analytical evidence base is to be transparent about methodology, including definitions chosen, and the ways in which data and qualitative information – the measuring toolkit of the organized crime analyst – are gathered and presented.

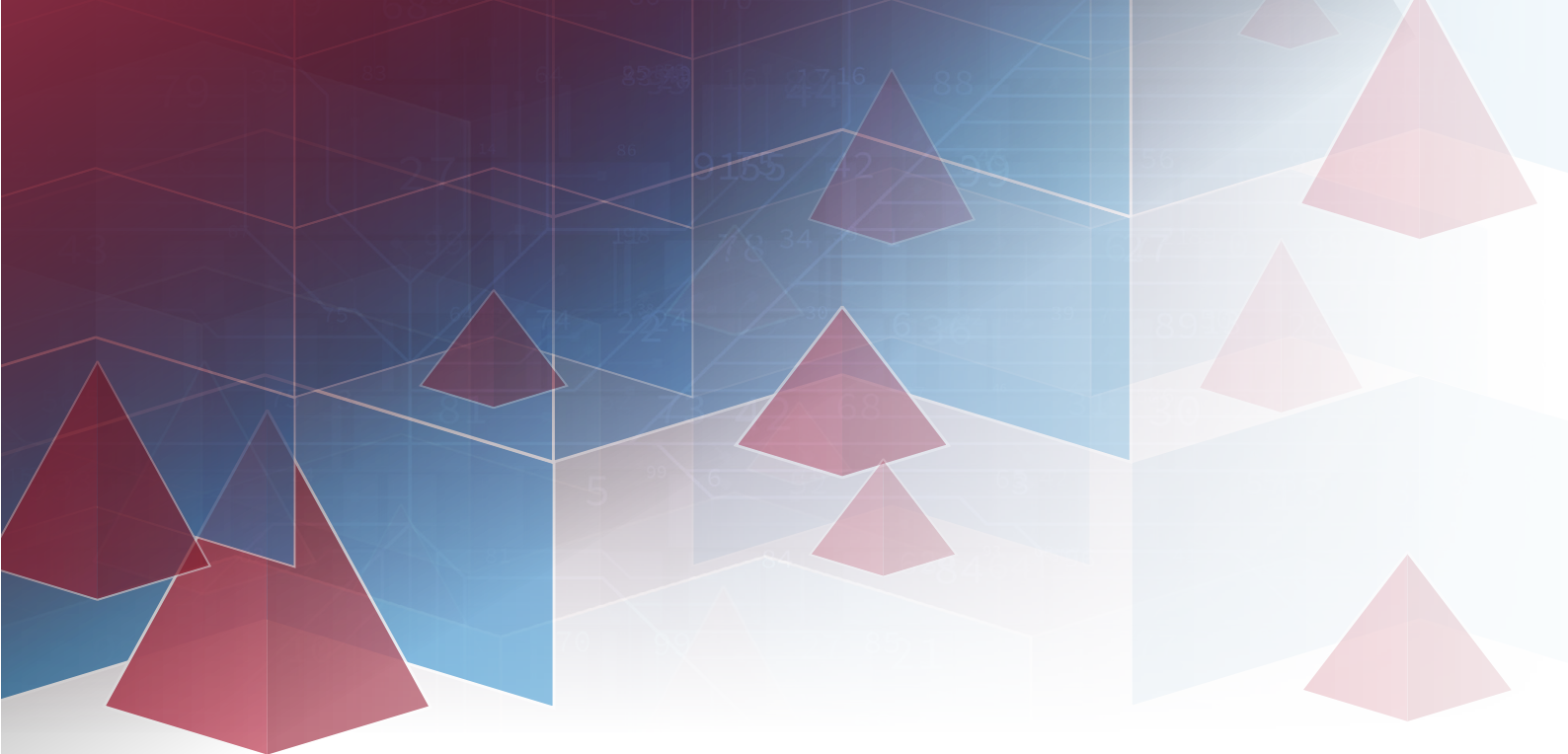
In 2021, we launched the Global Organized Crime Index, the first global analytical tool to provide an assessment of criminal markets, categories of criminal actors, and resilience capacity for 193 UN member states. The second iteration will be launched in September this year. The Index has been recognized for its uniqueness and importance across the world. Governments and other organizations have drawn from the wealth of longitudinal information it provides.

It has taken years of planning to produce this Index. Methodologies have been developed and redeveloped, definitions debated, technical expert groups convened, and a series of criminal market discussion papers were commissioned. For every step, methodological transparency has been the lodestar.

As a prelude to the launch of the second iteration of the Global Organized Crime Index, we are publishing these 13 discussion papers, one for each illicit market considered during the development of the tool. The papers, written by international experts, focus on defining and measuring criminal markets. We hope that the publication of these papers will be not only informative, but also help move forward the debate around the question of definitions and measurements in our endeavour to provide the analytical evidence base and support responses to organized crime.

Mark Shaw

Director, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime



INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) embarked on a venture to create an innovative tool that would be able to compare the scope and scale of criminal markets across countries and over time. Although international, regional and national organizations have published reports before in an attempt to measure, or better estimate, the reach, cost or impact of organized crime and related components, no coherent effort existed that would allow for comparisons across different markets, globally and over time. Global measures were too limited in scope, and this disables comparisons across different markets or activities.¹

Although organized crime is a transnational threat, much of the debate has remained in the Global North. To broaden the global debate on the phenomenon of organized crime, a systematic approach to building a comprehensive knowledge hub was required as a first step. The Global Organized Crime Index was meant to provide such a foundation.

However, the study of organized crime suffers from long-standing disagreements around its definition.² Yet developing an index requires a certain rigidity around concepts – to be measurable and comparable, concepts and boundaries need to be clearly defined. The conflict between the two raised a number of questions.

Which criminal markets could be measured on a country basis, despite their transnational nature? And how could this be done? Given the changing nature of criminal activities, how could we ensure consistency in measurement over time? Should criminal activities be measured by commodity or market? How should different commodities, or markets, be weighted in the Index? How could we ensure that criminal markets did not overlap with each other?

In an effort to answer these questions, eight expert papers were commissioned in 2016 and 2017 under the umbrella of the ENACT project, to discuss the feasibility of a country-based index that would measure a set of criminal markets. Each expert was asked to review existing definitions and critically discuss existing measurement approaches and data, and then propose a definition as well as a recommendation for how best to measure a specific market. Although each paper looked at a different criminal market, the findings of the papers had one thing in common: they all argued that, given existing data, it was not feasible to arrive at reasonable estimates for most countries. Instead, they argued, new and better data was needed to create a meaningful tool. The recommendations for how such data could be gathered varied from conducting interviews and surveys to ethnographic studies.

However, given the complexity and enormous effort of collecting such data for each criminal market and every country, the GI-TOC chose an expert-led approach instead of a quantitative approach. Accordingly, experts would assign scores considering the relevant evidence base, including quantitative data where available. Three years later, in 2019, the ENACT Africa Organised Crime Index was published, learning from previous efforts of measuring organized crime and drawing on existing literature on the subject. In 2021, the GI-TOC launched the first ever Global Organized Crime Index.³

Capturing the underworld is an inherently difficult task. Given the illicit nature of their activities, much remains hidden, and the true scale of organized crime and related activities may never be known. However, an expert-led assessment involving input from diverse geographies and markets may be as close as we can get.

The first tool of its kind

The ENACT Africa Organised Crime Index 2019 and the Global Organized Crime Index 2021 cover 10 criminal markets, four criminal actor types and 12 resilience blocks for 54 and 193 countries, respectively. Experts assigned scores on a scale of 1 to 10 to each component of the Index given the relevant evidence base, including datasets.

The second edition of the Global Organized Crime Index will be published in September 2023 and will include five additional criminal markets and one additional criminal actor type. In the lead-up to the launch, background papers on how to measure criminal markets will be published at regular intervals from April 2023.

The series of papers aims to contribute to the discussion on organized crime, and given the richness of the content and the international expertise of their authors, it was decided to put their findings into the public domain. The clandestine nature of illicit activities and disagreement about definitions hamper data collection and, as a result, measurement, and it is hoped that the series of expert papers on gauging the scope and scale of criminal markets will move the discussion forward, thereby enhancing current efforts of measuring organized crime.



SERIES OF PAPERS

To inform the choice of criminal markets included in the Index, two sets of papers were commissioned to:

- discuss issues around defining a specific criminal market or commodity;
- critically review existing measurement approaches and relevant data sources;
- provide a recommendation of the approach for including the market in the Index.

The first set of (eight) papers was commissioned in 2016 and 2017 under the ENACT Africa programme to investigate the feasibility of measuring criminal markets in African countries. The topics chosen for the papers were informed by the African context, where, for example, wildlife crimes have a more prominent role than in other parts of the world. Papers included a general review of using seizures data to measure the scope and scale of organized crime, together with seven papers applied specifically to measuring the scope and scale of:

- arms trafficking
- drug trafficking
- wildlife trafficking
- human trafficking
- illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing
- piracy
- illicit financial flows

The second set of (five) papers, commissioned in 2021, aimed to provide guidance and recommendations on how best to incorporate a new set of criminal markets into the current Global Organized Crime Index. Experts were asked to propose suitable definitions, review existing measurement approaches and data, and provide recommendations for whether the existing Index guidelines (such as score thresholds and guiding questions) were applicable to the new markets or whether any changes, such as additional questions, would be required. Experts were also asked to consider how future trends in the market may complicate an assessment of the market in the future. The commissioned papers focused on measuring the scope and scale of:

- illicit trade and counterfeit goods
- economic crimes
- cybercrimes
- mafia-style crimes
- waste management crimes

While the papers informed the development of criminal markets included in the Index, their recommendations were not always strictly followed. The papers published in the series therefore reflect the opinions of the authors, and not necessarily the views of the GI-TOC as an organization.

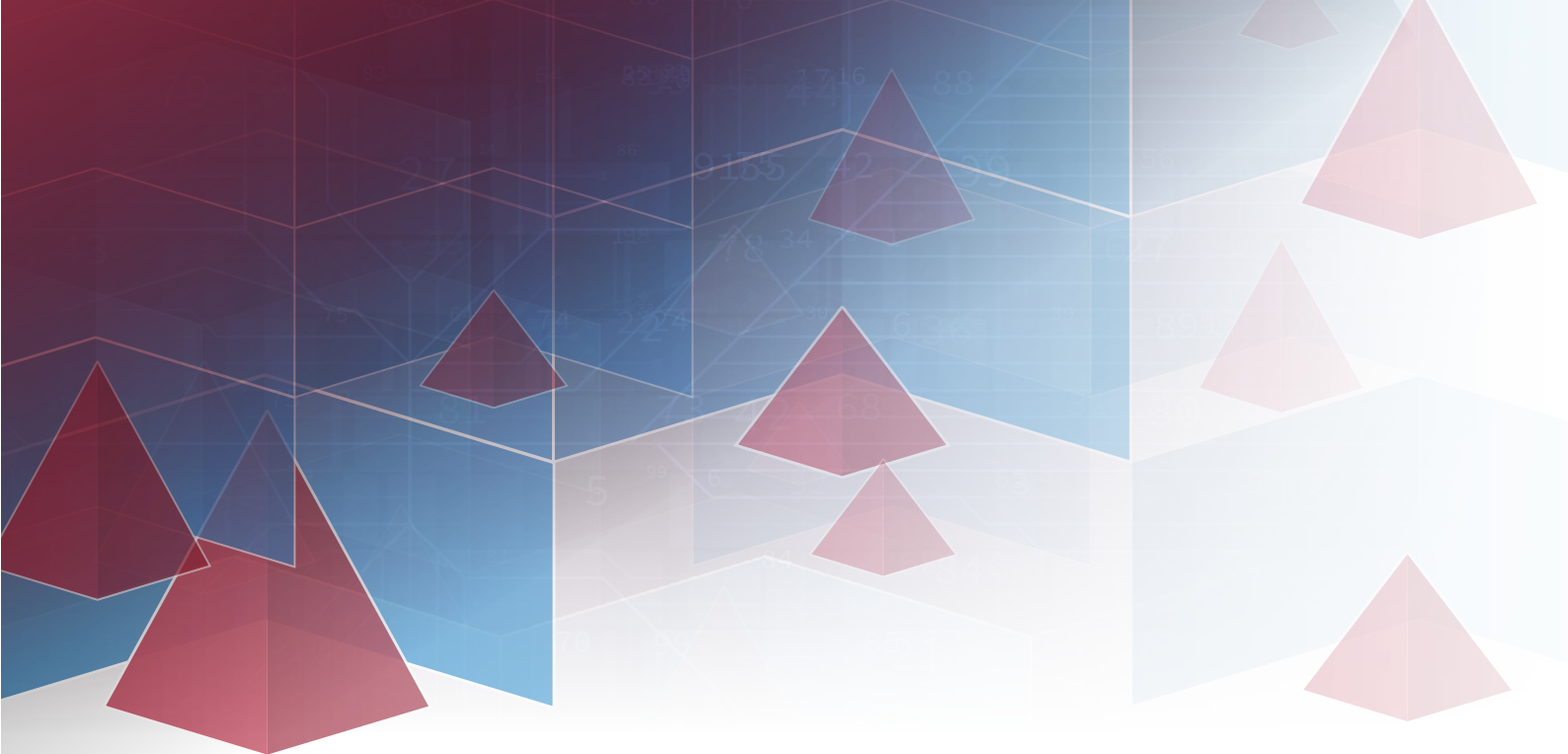
Some topics covered in the set of papers were not included as criminal markets in the Index, or at least not as separate criminal markets. For example, IUU fishing was subsumed under the fauna crimes market in the Index, and piracy was dropped entirely.⁴ In other cases, papers provided the foundation for more than one criminal market. For example, drug trafficking was divided into four separate markets, each devoted to one of the four most prominent drug types being trafficked globally: cocaine, heroin, marijuana and synthetic drugs. The decisions aimed to strike a balance of markets globally. For example, the relevance of handling flora and fauna crimes separately has been questioned in the European context; however, both markets have a crucial role in the African context.

Although the two sets of papers overlapped in their discussion of definitions and related issues, measurement approaches and data sources, they differed in their geographic focus and approach to recommendations. To streamline the paper into a more consistent series, the papers were revised before their publication.

Revisions and additional papers

The current series of papers moves beyond what was originally commissioned. To make the series more complete, some additional commissions were added, and existing papers were revised, updated, and streamlined. Some papers – such as the paper on wildlife crimes, for example – had to be rewritten completely, either because the original paper did not lend itself to publication or because the content was too outdated.

The original ENACT papers have been updated to include more recent discussions around definitions and measurement approaches, and the African focus of the papers was broadened to better reflect the global ambitions of the global Index. All papers were revised with regard to layout and structure to create a consistent approach and make them more accessible to the reader. Some papers were combined (for example, illicit financial flows and economic crimes) and additional ones were added (for example, human smuggling) to create a more coherent and complete series of topics.



CONCLUSION

The Global Organized Crime Index was originally envisaged as a quantitative tool. The GI-TOC subsequently commissioned a number of papers to experts to discuss the feasibility of a country-based index for measuring individual criminal markets. These papers laid the foundation for the eventual expert-led assessment. From those, together with several new papers, the initiative aims, firstly, to contribute to providing an entry point and resource for those interested in measuring criminal markets; and, secondly, to contribute and hopefully progress the discussion on measuring organized crime. Estimates of organized crime are only meaningful if the underlying data is of sufficient quality. Given the issues highlighted by the papers, especially around a lack of reliable and comparable data across different countries, together with disagreements on definitions, an expert-led approach, rather than taking data and databases at face value, seemed to be the most suitable method.⁵

Acknowledging the usefulness and necessity of quantitative data to improve our understanding of criminal markets, there is a need to:

- improve data collection;
- improve data availability;
- be cautious when using available data; and
- develop and utilize methods that potentially help improve the use of existing data.

While it is unlikely that certain manifestations of organized crime will ever have universally agreed upon definitions and, consequently, universal ways of being measured, clarifying definitions and investing in improvements of data collection accordingly could move the discussion forward and thus contribute to a better analysis and understanding of organized crime. We hope that by publishing these papers, we provide a useful contribution to the scholarship of organized crime.



NOTES

- 1 For example, the organized crime indicator by the Economist Intelligence Unit, used as part of the World Governance Indicators, captures only whether organized crime is likely to be a problem for government or business. Similarly, the organized crime indicator used by the World Economic Forum refers only to the question of the extent to which organized crime (mafia-oriented racketeering, extortion, etc.) imposes costs on businesses.
- 2 See <http://www.organized-crime.de/OCDefinitionsReview.htm> for a discussion and a list of definitions.
- 3 For example, see M Dugato, M de Simoni and E Savona, Measuring OC in Latin America, Transcrime, 2014, <https://www.transcrime.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Measuring-OC-June-2014-1.pdf>; M Dugato, F Calderoni and GM Campedelli, Measuring organised crime presence at the municipal level, *Social Indicators Research*, 147 (2020), 237–261.
- 4 The consultation involved in commissioning the paper highlighted that useful data around IUU fishing was needed, which led to the development of the IUU Fishing Index; see <https://iuufishingindex.net>.
- 5 Please refer to the paper on the methodology of the Index for a more detailed discussion: https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/ocindex_methodology.pdf.



GLOBAL INITIATIVE

AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 600 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

www.globalinitiative.net



This report was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.