



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

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THE ROLE OF IOM IN COMBATING TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISED CRIME

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished representatives of governments and international organisations, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the International Organization for Migration and Director General Brunson McKinley, I would like to thank the organizers for the excellent arrangements and for the opportunity to join in these discussions, and to join such distinguished company in this panel.

Most of the governments represented here are IOM Members or Observers, and others are good friends of IOM with whom we have increasingly significant cooperation. Additionally, I note the senior participation of key institutions and other international organizations including the Council of Europe, the European Commission, Interpol and the UN Terrorism Prevention Branch - all of which have lead roles in various ways in the response to transnational organised crime, and with which IOM collaborates closely.

Many of the presenters we have had the pleasure of hearing over the past two days have referenced the link between transnational organised crime and migration. I would like to expand briefly on that particular point and through it to touch on issues of political will, national capacities and international cooperation.

Some of the linkages between the migration sector and transnational organised crime are obvious; others are more subtle. The obvious links are in the trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants, as defined and differentiated in the Palermo Protocols. The more subtle linkages concern the general effect of corruption fueled through the influence of transnational organised crime on quality of life and quality of governance in some countries, and resultantly on the inclination of persons to migrate, at times by most any means available, and the susceptibility of these persons to smugglers and traffickers. I will expand on that thought shortly, but first a few figures might be helpful.

Smuggling and trafficking are widespread and profitable for the criminal sector. By most accounts, many billions of dollars change hands each year in these enterprises.¹ Trafficking alone is thought to be the third largest criminal enterprise, accounting for between seven and nine billion dollars revenue per year. No one knows for certain how many migrants are caught up in these phenomena, but the numbers are significant - certainly in the range of several million persons. In Western Europe, investigations have revealed that facilitators have assisted well over half of the irregular migrants discovered, and that percentage exceeds 75 percent for some EU countries. Those figures reference predominantly the smuggling phenomenon.

The effects are numerous and significant, and I will mention four that I see as most relevant to our discussions.

First, at the level of the individual or migrant, there is significant danger in both smuggling and trafficking, categorically so in trafficking, and the instances of death or great bodily or emotional harm are numerous and well-documented. Let us first

¹ World Migration Report : 2003. International Organization for Migration.

ground our thinking in that very human dimension to this issue: transnational crime in the migration sector often harms migrants in dramatic ways. There is a significant human toll, and many of the victims are among the least fortunate.

The second major effect, if more subtle, is on quality of governance and faith in government itself, and even faith in democratic institutions. Criminal networks involved in smuggling and trafficking can become so powerful, so well resourced, that they undermine democratic governance itself. We have heard that point reinforced several times by presenters in this summit, including the very articulate presentation by Italy's national anti-mafia prosecutor.

Next, and third, the dangers or threats posed by strong transnational criminal networks in the migration sector extend beyond issues of migration *per se*. Criminal networks involved in even more serious crime, such as terrorism, might gain strength from involvement in smuggling and trafficking, gaining funds and logistical support and experience that could be applied to terrorist ventures. There have been several reports of probable or substantiated links over the past few years, and the excellent presentation here by INTERPOL also touched on that point. This link is not made, and would not be merited, with migration generally, but at the level of the transnational criminal groups involved in these various criminal enterprises.

Fourth, and the last effect I want to note, is the plausible link between these criminal networks and underdevelopment in some countries. The Chair and presenters for the plenary session on the role of the African Union were very articulate on that issue and in noting the role of AU in shaping and supporting solutions. I will extend that point briefly here. Particularly in the less-resourced countries, funds that might be devoted to development and social services may be



re-prioritised toward national security and expanded efforts to combat criminal networks in order to keep pace with the threats they pose. When we combine the effect of less national investment in development with the corrupting effect of the criminal networks on government, creating conditions of poor governance, the ingredients are there for ever-greater outward migration and increased business for smuggling and trafficking rings. As a result, a vicious cycle can ensue.

I have suggested some of the prominent effects of transnational crime in the migration sector. Allow me now to suggest, in broad terms, ways in which we can address them. I base these suggestions on IOM's experience around the world working on these matters with our Member States and with various international partners.

First, let us not mistake lack of capacity to respond for lack of political will. The better-resourced countries, particularly in Western Europe, North America and Oceania, are able to invest substantially in systems and staff development to address these issues, and still they are considerably challenged to keep pace. Many other countries similarly affected cannot invest to this extent. As a result, there is a meaningful disparity of capacities. One of our first goals should be to level this field by redoubling our efforts to capacitate less-resourced countries to manage migration dependably, in an organised manner, encouraging safe and legal movement and diminishing unsafe and irregular movement. This includes building the capacity to investigate and prosecute those running the smuggling and trafficking networks. We have among us here today several countries with obvious will, but which may be lacking capacities to respond fully to these challenges. IOM is committed to continuing and expanding our assistance to such countries, and we would welcome stronger partnership with similarly-concerned agencies.

Second, let us address this problem simultaneously at many levels: 1) at the level of direct assistance to the most vulnerable migrants caught up in the smuggling and trafficking networks - the human dimension I earlier highlighted; 2) at the level of strengthening enforcement - improving travel documents (including making new technologies, such as biometrics, available and affordable to less-resourced countries), improving border systems and criminal investigation units in migration departments, and upgrading the policies and laws that give these systems and functions direction and legitimacy; and 3) at the level of prevention, addressing root causes through targeted development in areas of high migration pressure and expanded opportunities for legal labor migration, and by providing consistent and accurate information to potential migrants about the hazards of smuggling and trafficking, and options available.

Third, and my last suggestion, let us do this in an increasingly coordinated manner among concerned governments and agencies. In this regard, let us make good use of regional processes for planning and coordination in the migration sector to help guide our responses. IOM serves as secretariat, facilitator or technical support agency for several such processes in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Oceania, and Africa. These regional processes can be of great value in shaping common agendas and supporting joint practical action in the migration sector, including actions to reduce smuggling and trafficking.

I hope this brief discussion of the nature and impact of transnational organised crime on the migration sector, and suggestions for shaping our responses, has been useful. If time permits, Mr. Chairman, I would welcome questions or comments.