

Paper for Galle Dialogue

Heroin Trafficking in the Indian Ocean: Trends & Responses

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Ladies and Gentlemen

First I must thank the organisers of this event for giving me the opportunity to speak at such an important event and in front of so many influential decision makers. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has a mandate to support UN member states in tackling all forms of transnational crime and in respect of the maritime domain, we do that through the Global Maritime Crime Programme which I have the good fortune to run.

That programme grew out of UNODC's response to Somali piracy and now tackles a number of transnational organised crimes in the Indian Ocean region. The high seas of the Indian Ocean continue to be used for the pursuit of crime including migrant smuggling, trafficking in persons, trafficking in weapons and illegal fishing. But one crime above others has emerged in Indian Ocean in last two years: the trafficking of Afghan heroin to East Africa, South Asian and Australasia. Today I am going to talk about that crime in a little detail and explain how UNODC is working with member states to tackle it.

Heroin is being trafficked across the Indian Ocean in greater and greater quantities: all the evidence tells us that. UNODC terms this route 'The Southern Route' and it involves the movement of drugs by sea across the Indian Ocean from the Makran Coast to East Africa (especially Tanzania and Kenya) or South Asia (including Sri Lanka and Maldives). From there heroin is smuggled by air/sea and land from East Africa to Europe, West Africa, Seychelles and Mauritius, and from South Asia to Australia, China and South East Asia. The increase in the use of the Southern Route is the result of pressure on traditional Northern land routes through Iran and Central Asia, disrupted by regional law enforcement efforts and by the war in Syria. It is difficult to say accurately how substantial has been the increase of heroin trafficking but it has certainly been exponential.

As the coalition forces withdraw from Afghanistan opium cultivation is on the increase resulting in a corresponding increase in heroin production. As explained earlier, enhanced border controls due to heightened tensions and trade restrictions across Eastern and Western Europe has disrupted the Northern route. The protracted war in Syria is inhibiting the Balkan trafficking route. The constraints on the land routes is having a ballooning effect on the sea route.

Here I have set out some salient facts about heroin trafficking to give a sense of the scale of the problem and the urgency of a response.

SLIDE: 'SOME FACTS'

In the first six months of this year, 2.5 tonnes of heroin were seized in the Indian Ocean. One of those seizures alone accounted for the same amount of heroin seized by 11 governments in East Africa in the previous 20 years. Yet much work remains to be done to ensure there is a proper legal finish to this problem. Traffickers have ties to organised crime syndicates across the region who are also active in human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, cyber crime and the trafficking of weapons.

One indication that can be used to estimate the increase in heroin trafficking is the number of seizures by navies.

SLIDES: MAPS

This slide shows the location of the principle heroin seizures by Combined Maritime Forces, the multi-national naval forces based in Bahrain.

SLIDE: SEIZURES

The key attraction of the southern route for narcotics trafficking is the lack of enforcement capacity on the high seas. The fishing vessels (Dhows) depart from the Makran coast with heroin consignments for drop-offs to smaller vessels that take it ashore.

The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) a coalition of 30 states headquartered in Bahrain has been in the forefront of disrupting narcotics trafficking on the southern route. In the past 18 months CMF vessels have seized over 5000 kg of heroin with the most recent seizure of 388 kg in the last 14 days.

While the seizures have impacted on the supply chain, it has also highlighted the enormity of the volumes transported by sea. The drug seizures by CMF are an irritant to traffickers, but it has not become a deterrent. In most of the drug seizures conducted by CMF, the drugs have been thrown overboard and the crew and vessels permitted to proceed. The lack of a legal finish, the inability to prosecute the traffickers, has created a culture of impunity for criminality on the high seas.

SLIDE: '23 APRIL 2014'

As you can see from this slide, the heroin makes up a substantial proportion of the smuggling vessel's cargo.

UNODC estimates that demand from users within the region is around 2.5 tons p.a. (costing them some \$160m), while total flow through the region is some 22 tons indicating substantial transshipment beyond East Africa. A similar picture emerges in respect of the region that we are in today: some local use but much larger transshipment to the wealthiest users further South and East. The Sri Lanka authorities has reported increased heroin finds in Colombo Port this year.

The effects of the regional heroin use are appalling. Increased crime, increased HIV, increased hepatitis C and a desperate social situation. To illustrate the levels of desperation of users and the evil of those who supply them I can tell you that in one of the regional states where UNODC supports treatment programmes, drug users who have recently taken heroin are selling half pints of their blood to other users for the small hit that will result for the buyer. This is done without regard to blood grouping or HIV and hepatitis risks. In another state in the region, heroin dealers are dosing cannabis cigarettes with small amounts of heroin and passing them to young people who have no knowledge that they are developing an opiate addiction which those dealers will later service.

So how do we address this? Well we do have some cards to play. The first challenge for IO states is to end the culture of impunity. Without wanting to take anything away from the work of the navies it remains the case that the absence of legal powers and prosecution capacity in regional states, means that while the seized drugs are destroyed, vessels and individuals are almost always allowed to proceed. In 2008, the international community faced the

same situation with piracy and UNODC was called upon by the UN Security Council to work with states in the region that were prepared to accept Somali pirates for prosecution in order to develop the necessary laws, provide additional capacity in the criminal justice system and end the so-called 'catch and release' response. UNODC did exactly that, developing programming with Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles and Tanzania to allow them to accept suspected pirates for trial. I want to explain very briefly how this model worked because UNODC believe that it has relevance to the response to other forms of maritime crime in this region: in particular heroin trafficking.

SLIDE: 'SUPPORT TO PIRACY PROSECUTION CENTRES'

Since 2009 UNODC has been providing support to the four states that agreed to prosecute Somali piracy suspects since 2009 and continues to do so today. In fact prosecutions are underway in all four venues today. As you can see from the slide, UNODC has provided a wide range of support including the construction of courts and prisons, the training of police, prosecutors and judges, the provision of interpreters at trial and the procurement of equipment from boats to forensic equipment, cars and even explosive detection dogs.

SLIDE: 'PIRACY SUSPECT HANDOVER'

As you see in this example of a transfer from a Danish ship to Seychelles, the suspects are passed by international naval forces to local law enforcement authorities with UNODC providing the supporting training and infrastructure.

SLIDE: 'PRISONER TRANSFERS'

For those convicted outside Somalia, UNODC operates a prisoner transfer programme in which we charter aircraft to fly convicted pirates back to Somalia to serve their sentences in one of three prisons that we have built.

SLIDE: 'GAROWE, PUNTLAND'

We can report that today 1,300 Somali men are held in 20 states around the world, suspected of or convicted of piracy, most of them in Somalia where we continue to monitor the prisons to ensure that they operate correctly and that prisoners serve the sentence of the court in conditions which meet international standards.

SLIDE: 'SOUTH CENTRAL SOMALIA'

To prevent the resurgence of Somali piracy, we are also training and equipping the maritime law enforcement forces in Mogadishu, Puntland and Somaliland to give them the capability to enforce law and order in their coastal water.

SLIDE: 'SOMALILAND'

It is this model of prosecutions in regional states following arrests by international navies that we want to follow in our response to the rapid increase in narcotics trafficking. There are two prosecutions of suspected drugs traffickers arrested by international navies ongoing in East Africa, one in Kenya and one in Tanzania, but such prosecutions need to be the rule and not the exception. We have discussed this proposal with regional states, including Sri Lanka and with naval forces, including CMF and the response has been wholly positive. All have told us that it is time that there was an established and resourced solution to the problem of suspected narcotics traffickers being released at sea. It is also time that regional law enforcement and prosecution networks were created or improved to allow for the exchange of criminal intelligence and its exploitation in the courts.

SLIDE: 'INDIAN OCEAN FORUM ON MARITIME CRIME'

In order to establish these networks, UNODC has announced the formation of the Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime with the purpose....

SLIDE: 'PURPOSE'

TO ASSIST STATES OF THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION TO COORDINATE THEIR RESPONSES TO MARITIME CRIME.

SLIDE: 'AIMS'

The aims are set out here and have been formulated in discussion with navies and regional states to ensure that they do not duplicate the work of other agencies working on these issues. In particular, they have been shared with Combined Maritime Forces, Regional Fusion Centre in Seychelles and the Contact Group on Piracy.

SLIDE: 'TECHNICAL LEVEL MEETINGS'

The forum will consist of a series of technical level meetings which will work towards regional networks of prosecutors and law enforcement officials, including those who enforce the law at sea. The law enforcement authorities will work towards better intelligence sharing systems, as well as being given the opportunity to highlight training and equipment shortfalls which can be addressed from UNODC resources or from elsewhere.

For the prosecutors the emphasis will be on expanding the work UNODC is already undertaking in some areas, focussed on mutual legal assistance arrangements, prisoner transfer agreements and requests for extradition.

SLIDE: 'TECHNICAL LEVEL MEETING FORMAT'

Our member states and other collaborators have asked us to focus initially on three maritime crimes: heroin trafficking, wildlife crime and trafficking in persons. As this slide explains, invitations to those meetings will go out this month and the meetings will take place before April next year.

SLIDE: 'STRATEGIC LEVEL MEETING'

Those meetings will be followed by a strategic level meeting at which we will seek ministerial level commitment to the action plans developed by the technical meetings.

SLIDE: 'HEROIN TRAFFICKING PILLAR'

In respect of heroin, the objective of the technical level meeting is to generate proposals that can be developed either multilaterally or bilaterally in countering narcotics trafficking on the Southern Route. The members will explore the possibility of collaborative boarding arrangements and streamline such processes using existing international conventions and ways to improve situational awareness.

The pillar will seek agreement among drug enforcement agencies to establish a "Southern Route Focal Point" using the Transnational Organized Crime Convention Art 17 (9) as the primary contact as operational point of contact for information sharing and forum related operational activity. Also look at the possibility of a secure communication platform to disseminate regular updates and bilateral communication.

SLIDE: 'TiP/SoM PILLAR' (1)

Time prevents me from speaking in detail about the trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants in the Indian Ocean region, but suffice it to say that this crime, with its attendant human misery is to be found on a number of routes in the region, notably north from Ethiopia through Djibouti and Somalia into Yemen and the Gulf States and South from Somalia towards South Africa.

SLIDE: 'TiP/SoM PILLAR' (2)

The group will work not only to expand the existing cooperation arrangements to investigate those who organise this crime and operate quite openly, but also to improve the protection of victims of trafficking and vulnerable migrants.

SLIDE: 'WFC PILLAR'

Finally, the third technical group will address wildlife and forestry crime which, like heroin trafficking, has undergone a huge resurgence in the last five years causing damage to the wildlife and forestry sectors that is in danger of becoming irreversible.

In conclusion then, the increasing use of the Indian Ocean for criminal purposes presents a great challenge for the participants here at the Galle Dialogue, whether they come from states in the region or further away. The drugs, people, weapons, rosewood and elephant tusk more often than not finish their journeys outside this region in the Far East, America and Europe. Bringing together law enforcement, naval forces and the regional courts to ensure that those who make their living from these crimes risk prosecution and imprisonment is the right approach and the one that we will see developing in the coming months.

Thank you for listening to what I had to say and do please get in touch with UNODC by email or with me in person if you have your own thoughts to share.

Thank you.