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The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Measures to Counter the Use of AI by non-state Actors for Border Evasion and drug Trafficking

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime was founded in 1997 and is headquartered in Vienna. As part of the United Nations, the UNODC plays a central role in combating transnational threats such as illegal drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism. The organization support member states by strengthening border security, promoting international cooperation, improving law enforcement capacities, and developing preventive measures against criminal activities.

To achieve these goals, the UNODC works closely with governments, police forces, customs authorities, and other international organizations worldwide. Due to the increasing globalization of crime and rapid technological developments, the work of the UNODC has become more important than ever. Modern criminal networks increasingly make use of cybercrime, the darknet, artificial intelligence, and digital smuggling methods to evade authorities and expand illegal operations.

This development is especially relevant in the context of non-state actors, which are increasingly using AI-driven technologies for smuggling, border evasion, and other illicit activities. In response, the UNODC is developing international strategies to address these emerging threats and strengthen global security. Therefore, international cooperation, information sharing, and coordinated action between states remain essential in effectively combating modern transnational crime.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) in recent years has significantly transformed global security and international crime. While AI technologies are widely used by governments and private companies for innovation and economic growth, they are increasingly being exploited by non-state actors such as drug cartels, organized crime groups, and smuggling networks for illegal activities. Criminal organizations are

adapting quickly to technological progress and using advanced digital tools to expand their operations across international borders.

AI is now being used to avoid border controls, analyze surveillance systems, plan safer smuggling routes, and encrypt communication between criminal networks. In addition, non-state actors increasingly rely on drones, automated systems, and digital technologies to transport illegal goods and evade law enforcement authorities. The rise of the darknet and other digital platforms has further facilitated international drug trafficking and illegal trade, making cross-border crime more difficult to detect and prevent.

As a result, international borders are becoming increasingly challenging to secure through traditional methods alone. These developments pose serious risks to national security, public health, and international stability. Countries with weak border control systems, transit states, and regions heavily affected by organized crime are particularly vulnerable to these threats.

One of the major challenges is that many states still lack sufficient AI regulations and modern technological capacities to respond effectively to these emerging threats. Furthermore, international cooperation on AI-related crime and border security often remains limited. Therefore, stronger global cooperation, improved information sharing, modern border security technologies, and common legal frameworks are essential in order to combat the growing misuse of artificial intelligence by criminal and non-state actors.

II. FACTS AND CURRENT SITUATION

1. FACTS

- Around 296 million people worldwide used drugs in 2021
- Global cocaine production reached a record high of 2,757 tons in 2023

- Estimated global cocaine production increased to over 3,700 tons in 2023
- Cocaine users worldwide increased from 17 million (2023) to 25 million (2023)
- Southeast Asia methamphetamine seizures reached 236 tons in 2024
- Drug traffickers increasingly use:
    - Artificial intelligence (AI)
    - Encrypted communication
    - Drones
    - Darknet marketplaces
    - Cryptocurrencies
- Major trafficking regions
    - Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand)
    - Latin America
    - West Africa
- Countries with weak border controls are most affected
- UNODC Passenger and Cargo Corol Programme (PCCP)
    - Helped seize thousands of kilograms of cocaine in 2024
    - Supports airports, ports, and customs authorities worldwide

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Drug trafficking and organized crime are becoming increasingly digitalized and technologically advanced. Criminal networks use artificial intelligence, encrypted communication systems, drones, and darknet platforms to transport illegal drugs and

evade border controls. These developments make international smuggling operations faster, more flexible, and more difficult for authorities to detect.

At the same time, global drug production and trafficking continue to rise. Cocaine production and synthetic drug trafficking have reached record levels in recent years, while criminal organizations continue expanding into new regions and markets. Particularly vulnerable are transit states and countries with limited technological resources and weak border infrastructures.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and its member states are currently working to strengthen international cooperation, improve information sharing, and modernize border security systems. However, many countries still lack sufficient AI regulations, cyber capacities, and legal frameworks to effectively respond to AI-supported criminal activities. As technology continues to develop rapidly, international cooperation remains one of the most important tools in combating transnational organized crime and drug trafficking.

III. MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

1. THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The United States is one of the leading actors in combating international drug trafficking, cybercrime, and the misuse of artificial intelligence by criminal organizations. Through cooperation with international organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United States supports stronger border security systems, intelligence sharing, and international law enforcement cooperation. The U.S. government has invested heavily in AI-based surveillance technologies,

cybersecurity programs, and anti-drug operations to prevent smuggling activities at its borders. However, the country also faces major challenges due to the increasing use of encrypted communication, darknet marketplaces, and drones by criminal cartels, particularly along the border with Mexico.

2. MEXICO

Mexico plays a central role in the debate because it is heavily affected by international drug trafficking and organized crime. Mexican drug cartels are among the most powerful criminal organizations in the world and increasingly use modern technologies such as AI-supported communication systems, drones, and digital financial methods to expand their operations and evade authorities. Due to its

geographic location as a transit country between Latin America and the United States, Mexico faces significant challenges regarding border security and transnational crime. At the same time, the Mexican government cooperates with international partners and the UNODC to strengthen law enforcement capacities, improve border management, and combat drug trafficking networks.

3. CHINA

China is an important actor in discussions about artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and international crime prevention due to its advanced technological sector and global political influence. China has increased efforts to regulate AI technologies and combat cybercrime domestically while also cooperating internationally on issues related to drug trafficking and organized crime. At the same time, concerns have been raised by several states regarding the export of surveillance technologies, digital infrastructure, and dual-use technologies that could potentially be misused by criminal organizations or non-state actors. As a permanent member

of the United Nations Security Council, China plays an influential role in shaping international cooperation and legal frameworks concerning AI, border security, and transnational organized crime.

IV. POSSIBLE SOLUTION

1. WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR?

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has already launched several international programs to combat drug trafficking, organized crime, and cybercrime. Through initiatives such as the Passenger and Cargo Control Programme (PCCP), the organization supports member states in improving border security, customs controls, and international law enforcement cooperation.

Many governments have also increased investments in AI-supported surveillance systems, facial recognition technologies, cargo scanning systems, and drone monitoring to detect illegal border crossings and drug smuggling activities more

effectively. International police organizations such as INTERPOL cooperate with states to track criminal networks operating through darknet platforms, encrypted communication systems, and cryptocurrencies.

Furthermore, several countries have introduced national AI regulations and cybersecurity strategies to prevent the misuse of artificial intelligence by criminal organizations and non-state actors. International discussions within the United Nations increasingly focus on the risks of AI-assisted crime and the need for stronger international legal frameworks.

2. WHAT ELSE COULD WE DO?

Despite these efforts, criminal organizations continue to adapt quickly to new technologies. Therefore, stronger international cooperation and more modern security measures are necessary. One possible solution would be the creation of an international AI monitoring framework under the supervision of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to track the misuse of artificial intelligence in drug trafficking and border evasion.

States could also invest more heavily in AI-based border security systems capable of detecting suspicious drone activity, smuggling routes, and unusual movement patterns at borders. In addition, governments should improve real-time intelligence sharing regarding darknet marketplaces, cryptocurrency transactions, and AI-assisted criminal operations.

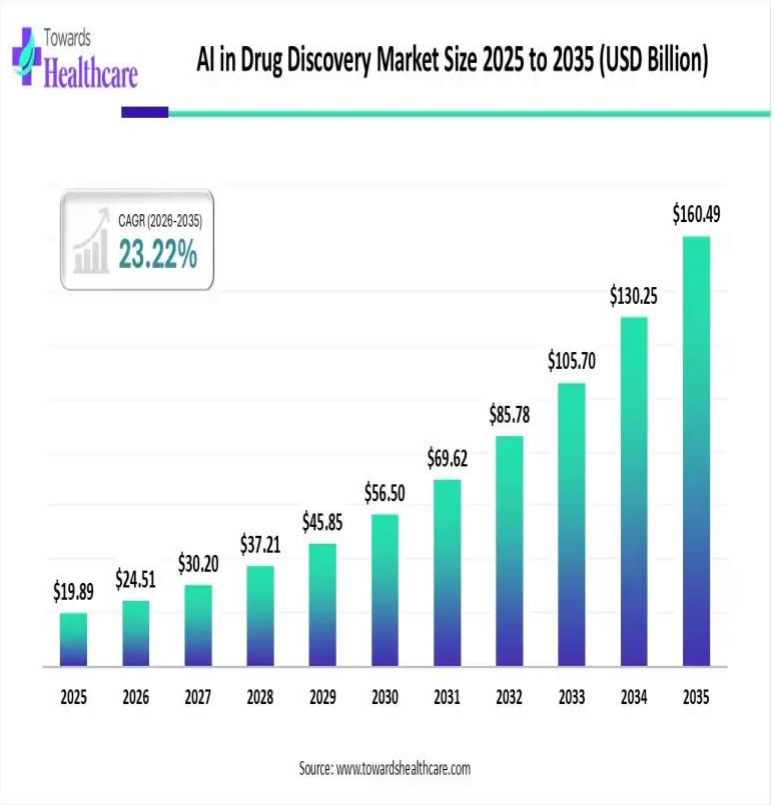
Another important measure would be establishing global legal standards regulating the use of AI technologies and preventing their misuse by non-state actors. Developing countries and transit states should receive financial and technological support to strengthen their cyber capacities and border infrastructures.

Finally, closer cooperation between governments, technology companies, cybersecurity experts, and international organizations could help identify emerging technological threats more quickly and improve the global response against AI-supported transnational organized crime.

V. USEFUL LINKS AND STATISTICS

- **https://www.unodc.org**
- **https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/world-drug-report-2024.html**
- **https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/pccp/index.html**
- **https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html**
- **https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/cybercrime/global-programme-cybercrime.html**
- **https://www.unodc.org/roseap/en/index.html**
- **https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2024/June/world-drug-report-2024–new-opioid-crisis-looms–synthetic-drugs-and-record-cocaine-supply-bring-new-threats.html**
- **https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/cybercrime/module-1/key-issues/what-is-cybercrime.html**
- **https://www.worldcustomsjournal.org/article/159458-modern-border-management-leveraging-ai-systems-for-strategic-advantage**
- **https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ai-risks-from-non-state-actors/**

Additional Statistics



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Trafficking in cocaine	174	219	303	423	526
TRAFFICKING IN CANNABIS	144	174	333	456	478
TRAFFICKING IN SYNTHETIC DRUGS	86	102	190	318	276
TRAFFICKING IN OTHER TYPES OF DRUGS	117	141	202	252	222
TRAFFICKING IN HEROIN	44	57	85	115	47

Drug trafficking cases by drug type (2019–2023)