

Regional Dialogue

Strengthening transport connectivity in the SPECA region and beyond in the era of COVID-19

Session II. Multi-stakeholder cooperation on regional connectivity, transport corridors and integrated multimodal transport systems

29th of September 2020

Ms. Ashita Mittal,

UNODC Regional Representative for Central Asia

Your Excellency Ms. Olga Algayerova, Your Excellency Mr. Rashid Meredov,

Dear Mr Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, panel members, Mr. Oleg Samukhin, Ms. Ekaterina Miroshnik, Mr. Gavin Dunnett, Mr. Omar Mehyar, Mr. Antonio Nunez,

Excellencies, dear participants, ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege for UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia to take part in this event on Strengthening transport connectivity in the SPECA region and welcome the participants of the regional dialogue. This meeting is taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which affects everyone and everywhere, highlighting the vulnerabilities and inequalities, destabilizing the global economy and world trade and exposing precisely the fragilities that are addressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. More than ever before there is a need to recognise the indivisibility and the inter connectedness of agenda for sustainable development, peace, rule of law, security and human rights. Under these circumstances enhancing regional cooperation and coordination becomes more important than ever as the pandemic has negative impact on the sustainable economic growth, development and security in the region.

Today SPECA region unites fast-growing economies with significant progress in regional cooperation, favourable environment for enhanced trade and economic relations, but also for strengthening peace and security in the region. We welcome the development of trade and transit corridors in the region, which for many centuries has served as crossroads, bringing together East and West, including the Belt and Road Initiative and International North-South Transport Corridor Lapis Lazuli to name a few.

As the global economy grows and becomes increasingly interconnected, transnational criminal groups also seek to exploit increasing integration, new infrastructure and networks, for their nefarious purposes. It is our duty, as part of our common and shared responsibility, to address these potential vulnerabilities.

Therefore, enhancing the regional cooperation and integrated border management is extremely important as never before. At the same time, we must foster cross-border communication and intelligence-sharing in order to detect and intercept smuggling, including narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, firearms and counterfeit goods, dual use commodities, while facilitating legitimate international trade.

I appreciate the engagement and openness of the Governments in the region in collaborating with UNODC and advancing its agenda on prevention of drugs, transnational organised crime, terrorism and corruption, including by strengthening regional cooperation, border security and container control measures, establishing border liaison offices (BLO), port control units (PCU) and interagency mobile teams.

For instance, UNODC supported the establishment of 15 BLOs in Central Asia at geographically remote and potentially vulnerable checkpoints. The offices are equipped with the necessary high-tech and specialized analytical software enabling the analysis of the database information, standardizing information sharing and reporting mechanisms for inter-agency and cross-border communication. To date, over 900 Border Law Enforcement Officers have undergone various Law Enforcement specialized courses. BLOs are also being established on selected railway stations of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz and Tajik-Uzbek borders, Turkmen-Afghan and Turkmen-Uzbek borders; support provided in enhancement of the analytical capacity of border law enforcement agencies of Central Asian countries and regional information and communication systems and setting up Situation Centres for stepping up security measures to prevent illicit trafficking, transnational organised crime and terrorist movement and yet facilitating greater licit movement.

For the first time in Central Asia, the Interagency Mobile Teams (IMT) were established in six locations of Uzbekistan, which created a new platform to cooperate and coordinate activities of law enforcement agencies for better interdiction from operative level to strategic planning and analysis. We are planning to increase the IMTs locations to 13 to cover all regions of Uzbekistan, but also incorporate elements of anti-money laundering, countering illicit financial flows, cash couriers and the financing of terrorism.

The global UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme (CCP) contributed to strengthening the international supply chain security by enhancing national border administrations' capacities to tackle threats related to sea, land and air cargo. Within CCP, 23 Port Control units at priority seaports, land border crossings, railway stations have been established in the SPECA region, with many more units anticipated to

become operational in the next few months, including on strategic airports and dry ports. Since the launch of implementation of CCP in Central Asia, over 1,500 officials were trained on relevant topics.

In May 2019, a historic meeting took place in Tashkent, where the Heads of Customs Administrations of nine countries from Central and South Asia and Black sea region signed an MoU on establishment of the Inter-Regional Network of Customs Authorities and Port Control Units. Today this Network represent Inter-regional Community of 170 Customs and other law enforcement official united towards identifying and suppressing high risk consignments whilst facilitating legitimate trade.

Interdiction and suppression of high-risk consignments based on exchange of pre-arrival information and risk profiling are critical, especially during the pandemic, which led the countries in the region to limit the cross-border movements. This has a particular importance in railroad connectivity, which accounts from 60 up to 90 percent of international cargo volumes in the region. UNODC assists SPECA countries with the development of pre-arrival information mechanisms. Several inter-regional meetings on pre-arrival information between customs services and the private sector were initiated and hosted by UNODC. As the first practical results of this cooperation I would like to highlight the established pre-arrival information sharing between port control units at Turkmenbashi seaport of Turkmenistan and Alyat Seaport in Azerbaijan using ContainerComm platform, and as well as pre-arrival information exchange at PCUs in Aktau seaport, Kazakhstan and Poti, Georgia with foreign shipping companies.

Similarly, UNODC is working on training countries on Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Recognition in line with UNSC resolution 2396.

Of concern is the risks of manipulation of legitimate business routes to divert chemical precursors for illicit use, traffic drugs including NPS, synthetics, dual use commodities and of corruption and increased opportunities for money laundering by criminal syndicates. Therefore, the development of codes of practice and training for information sharing between industry, law enforcement and relevant regulatory bodies to prevent and detect illicit precursor diversions and misuse of trade for the purpose of money laundering would be relevant.

The global economy becomes increasingly interconnected, opportunities for trade have spread around the world. However, this presents opportunities not only for governments and legitimate businesses but also for terrorists and transnational organized crime groups to transport anything from legal goods used for money laundering, to prohibited

drugs and even materials for weapons of mass destruction. These actors benefit from the sheer volume of global trade because this makes effective monitoring extremely difficult; less than two percent of containers are ever screened.

While we see the growing integration of regional economies in the global trade, it is extremely important that we protect the precious licit investments of the governments, private sector , including transport sector from being misused for illicit purposes that fuel illicit economies and increase security threat. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected transport connectivity not only in SPECA region, but worldwide. However, during this period of uncertainty we should reconsider our strategies and policies in addressing transport connectivity from the fragmented approach to a more wholistic and integrated actions. ***It is perhaps the time to develop a Regional Transport Sector Compact on these trade and transit corridors that brings the economic, transport, security, private sector , Governments and International Community together, bound by a common vision and a code to promote on one hand a strategy to facilitate trade and on the other to prevent illicit trafficking to ensure both development and security.***

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me once more reiterate, that UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia stands ready to facilitate the regional cooperation in the region to further strengthen transport connectivity and jointly address security challenges. We look forward to enhancing partnerships within UNODC's integrated frameworks aimed at ensuring safety and security of trade and transit corridors, including the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), Border Liaison Offices, Port Control Units, the IREN Network and IMTs. We are fully committed to work with all stakeholders in SPECA region as we "build back better" in the COVID-19 response and recovery and ensure sustainable development in line with rule of law and human rights principles, so no one is left behind.

I wish you a productive meeting. Thank you.