

INTERNATIONAL DAY STATEMENT

Chair, Colleagues

I would like to thank all the organizers for hosting this meeting today.

Today I am speaking on behalf of the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the umbrella organization bringing together over 100 civil society organizations (CSOs) across the world to join efforts to engage at the multilateral level on the prevention and response to organized crimes, whom I serve as Chair of the Board, as a representative of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. Many of our members in the Alliance represent other global, national and regional networks.

For us, this first ever international day is an opportunity that we welcome, but also a reminder of how far we have to go to address the ongoing and worsening challenges of transnational organized crime.

Today – we welcome this day, but we have to recognise that one day is not enough.

And we have to recognize that what has been done so far, to prevent and counter organized crime, is not enough.

In the resolution adopted to inaugurate this international day, states recognized “*the negative impact of transnational organized crime on security, stability, the rule of law and sustainable development,*”

In my position I have the privilege of engaging with NGOs and activists around the world who are working in the most difficult circumstances, in communities affected by organized crime. I therefore hear and read reports of what is going on on a daily basis – rising violence, assassinations, gender-based violence, environmental and social harms, the fuelling of conflicts – and at the same time, a lack of access to justice and an environment of corruption and impunity in too many places.

So of course those of us in civil society couldn't agree more about the threat that organized crime poses. This recognition is welcome.

But this has been said before, indeed the international community came together in the 1990s around a similar recognition – a process that led – through the bodies based here – the CCPCJ and the Crime Congress – to the negotiation and adoption of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), in 2000.

This convention was negotiated quickly, and driven by a strong sense of purpose, including from a country that was directly threatened by organized criminal violence. In Italy – we have heard today, and we see in the exhibition – how society worked together – pulling in the same direction against organized crime – and the political power that was protecting it.

Lawyers, religious leaders, political parties, trades unions, businesses, ordinary people – all had a role to play and still do. Not just in Italy, but all over the world. There is no effective strategy against organized crime without a whole-of-society approach.

But here we are, 24 years later, and we are still seriously concerned about the same issues.

Judge Falcone, whose life was taken by organized crime, because he stood up to it, forged a vision of international cooperation, that was adopted through the UNTOC. He would be shocked to see that the states parties have so far only completed 1 country review of implementation in all those years.

And in the time that one country review has been completed, many more have died at the hands of organized crime. Any statistic you read on homicides related to organized crime, or violence related to firearms trafficking which the Alliance is working to raise awareness of, is always shocking. One major project of an Alliance member has documented more than 2700 victims of targeted killings by organized crime -journalists, lawyers, whistleblowers, environmental defenders, human rights and anti-corruption activists. The list is too long, and the violence is too often and too easy.

And this hostility to civil society is reflected in a different way in the modalities of the UNTOC COP. NGOs with the experience, data and analysis on human trafficking, of which there are many, human smuggling or firearms trafficking, cannot attend the working group meetings on those topics under the UNTOC, which are for states only.

The review mechanism, aside from being under-funded and suffering from massive delays, only has limited entry points for civil society, despite the fundamental role that they play, and the dangers that they are exposed to through their work.

We were therefore proud last month to achieve two major milestones at the 12th UNTOC Conference of Parties.

Firstly, the largest and most diverse civil society participation in the UNTOC Conference, with over 200 NGOs represented – including for the first time the presence of indigenous representatives. What this demonstrates is that there is expertise and resources available on the part of civil society.

Secondly – we were proud to deliver the first ever civil society Declaration on more effective implementation of the UNTOC, signed by more than 250 NGOs, which demonstrated, despite our diversity, a set of common values and recommendations around which we can engage with states.

I am honoured to be here with you today, and I know that many of our members around the world are marking the day in their own ways. I was happy to be speaking to a group of government and civil society representatives in Pakistan this morning, for example, and I know this day will attract attention in years to come.

But we need to do more than attract attention.

As we go forward into the future, let us remember the victims and honour them by making sure this international day is not just a day for talking, but for forging action across all sectors of society towards achieving the objectives of the UNTOC, which have not been fulfilled.

Thank you