



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 February 2012

Original: English

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Twenty-first session

Vienna, 23-27 April 2012

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

**Integration and coordination of efforts by the United
Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Member States in
the field of crime prevention and criminal justice**

International cooperation in the forensic field

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice resolution 19/5, entitled “International cooperation in the forensic field”. It presents a summary of the work undertaken by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in areas covered by the resolution, particularly in supporting the development of sustainable forensic science services worldwide, encouraging and facilitating the establishment and sustainability of forensic science networks, promoting the work of national forensic science laboratories and strengthening their technical capabilities and competency. The report also demonstrates the importance of increased awareness and collaboration among forensic science service providers and scientists and suggests areas of synergy in forensic science more generally to ensure a more effective exchange of forensic science expertise and information worldwide.

* E/CN.15/2012/1.



I. Introduction

1. Transnational organized crime is of growing concern, particularly the broad impact of illicit trade on peace, security, development, governance, the rule of law, public health and human rights. Combating transnational organized crime requires international cooperation, which in the forensic field takes different forms, including technical assistance activities, cross-border operations, the exchange of forensic data and recognition of the complementary role of forensic science providers and regional organizations, as well as of bilateral efforts in promoting a comprehensive and cost-effective approach.

2. In the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem (A/64/92-E/2009/98, sect. II.A), adopted during the high-level segment of the fifty-second session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/182, it is emphasized that “continued and persistent national, regional and international efforts based on improved understanding of the problem through the examination of scientific evidence and the sharing of experiences, forensic data and information are essential to preventing the diversion of precursors and other substances under international control that are used in the illicit production and manufacturing of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, including amphetamine-type stimulants”. The Plan of Action calls on Member States to enhance frameworks for the exchange of high-quality and reliable forensic information among drug control agencies, customs authorities and police authorities, including, when appropriate, through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) forensic laboratory.

3. In its resolution 61/183, entitled “International cooperation against the world drug problem”, the General Assembly called on UNODC to provide assistance to Member States requesting support in establishing or strengthening scientific and forensic capabilities and to promote the integration of scientific support to national, regional and international drug control frameworks, legislation and practices.

4. In its resolution 2009/22, the Economic and Social Council recognized the role of UNODC in forensic areas other than drugs for the first time by requesting the Office to collect, develop and disseminate scientific, forensic or other reference material for law enforcement officials and prosecution authorities in order to enhance their expertise and capacity to prevent and combat economic fraud and identity-related crime.

5. In its resolution 2011/35, the Economic and Social Council invited UNODC to cooperate with other international organizations active in the field of forensics, including the International Telecommunication Union and its Lead Study Group on Identity Management, as well as the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the International Civil Aviation Organization, in areas such as the setting of technical standards for documents, the forensic examination of fraudulent documents and the compilation of data that could be used for pattern analysis and the prevention of identity-related crime.

6. Member States recognize that forensic science is an integral part of effective criminal justice systems worldwide and much more than just the specialized analyses and examinations that are carried out in a laboratory. In that context,

the Commission, in its resolution 19/5, entitled “International cooperation in the forensic field”, highlighted the importance of forensic data for law enforcement and criminal intelligence purposes and the role played by existing regional networks and associations of forensic science institutes and professionals in promoting the quality of forensic science at the regional level.

7. In its resolution 19/5, the Commission called for international cooperation in the forensic field through the:

(a) Encouragement and support for forensic science institutions to actively participate in regional networks as a means of developing sustainable forensic services worldwide;

(b) Exploration of innovative ways to ensure a more effective exchange of forensic expertise and information worldwide;

(c) Promotion of development and modernization of national forensic laboratories, including education and training.

8. Also in its resolution 19/5, the Commission requested UNODC to explore areas of synergy between its traditional support for the work of drug analysis laboratories and forensic science institutions more generally.

9. The present report provides a summary of the work undertaken by UNODC in the forensic field, particularly with regard to international cooperation. It outlines the synergies between the traditional forensic work of UNODC in the area of drug control and the new mandates in the forensic field more generally. It highlights the enhanced activities of UNODC with respect to the global availability of, access to and use of quality forensic science services in support of the efforts of Member States to counter drug trafficking, crime and terrorism. The report also provides an overview of the benefits and challenges of collaboration, particularly with regard to international harmonization, to facilitate the worldwide exchange of forensic data and other information. It examines the coordination of forensic expertise and suggests innovative ways of enhancing forensic science services worldwide.

II. Implementation of Commission resolution 19/5

10. Forensic science provides an objective evidence base for effective drug control and crime prevention and requires the collaboration of a number of institutions, services and professionals. These include national forensic laboratories and other institutions providing support to both the law enforcement and health-service response to illicit drug use, trafficking, crime and terrorism.

11. The strategic responses of UNODC in the forensic field with respect to drug and crime control are guided by its mandates and directed by the same principles of improving the scientific and forensic capacity of Member States to meet internationally accepted standards, together with fostering the use of scientific information and laboratory data for inter-agency cooperation activities and in strategic operations, policymaking and decision-making.

12. The comprehensive scientific support of UNODC is directly related to the implementation of the three international drug control conventions: the Single

Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol;¹ the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971;² and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.³ Strategic responses to the world crime situation currently support the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto,⁴ with a focus on crime-scene management and forensic document examination, along with the use of the latter in preventing identity-related crime.

13. The support of UNODC in the field of forensic science provides for the development of capacity and the enhancement of the performance of national forensic laboratories; the development of standards and working procedures to ensure that scientific findings are used effectively in support of the criminal justice, law enforcement, health and regulatory systems; and the generation and exchange of quality forensic data worldwide in support of accurate trend analysis for effective policy interventions.

14. In that regard, UNODC works towards sustainable international cooperation in the forensic field through promoting the transfer of specialized technical and forensic expertise from Member States with adequate resources to those in need of assistance, thus reducing the technological gap and promoting the worldwide availability of appropriate forensic expertise.

A. International cooperation in the forensic field

Partnership among regional networks

15. UNODC support to international cooperation in the field of forensic science includes collaboration with the International Forensic Strategic Alliance, a partnership among regional forensic science networks that currently consists of the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors, the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes, the Senior Managers of Australian and New Zealand Forensic Laboratories, the Ibero-American Academy of Forensic Science Institutes and the Asian Forensic Sciences Network.

16. Participating networks recognize the value of cooperation on strategic issues related to the management of forensic science laboratories and the promotion of forensic science worldwide. The first joint meeting of UNODC and the International Forensic Strategic Alliance, to be held in Vienna on 28 and 29 February 2012, will be dedicated to reviewing the priorities and direction of the Alliance in strengthening the worldwide role of forensic science in drug control and crime prevention. The leading role of the Alliance in advocating the implementation of internationally accepted quality standards in forensic science and advancing international cooperation in the forensic field by using innovative ways of collaboration will be defined.

¹ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 976, No. 14152.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 1019, No. 14956.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1582, No. 27627.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vols. 2225, 2237, 2241 and 2326, No. 39574.

Support to regional networks

17. UNODC, in close collaboration with the Alliance, continues to encourage and support the establishment and/or strengthening of regional forensic science networks. UNODC support includes contribution to the annual meetings of the networks, as appropriate.

18. UNODC promotes, through the regional forensic networks, the participation of national drug-testing laboratories in its international collaborative exercise programme. The programme, which currently involves over 110 laboratories in 57 Member States, allows participating laboratories to continuously monitor their performance with respect to drug analysis on a global basis. It also provides an evidence-based approach to tailoring technical support to laboratories.

19. Further to UNODC support for the establishment of the Asian Forensic Sciences Network in 2008, contributions have been made towards strengthening collaboration, promoting regional activities, facilitating the exchange of information and expertise, providing training opportunities and for the participation of scientists in relevant workshops and conferences and encouraging active participation of Network member laboratories in the UNODC international collaborative exercise programme.

20. Specifically, activities to strengthen the Alliance working group on illicit drugs include the provision of technical support with respect to drug analysis and of reference standards for controlled substances; the promotion of quality management in forensic science; the training of scientists, including through participation in meetings on the investigation of clandestine laboratories; and monitoring synthetic drugs through the UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) programme.

21. Following up on regional efforts undertaken by the Forensic Science Working Group of the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization, UNODC played an advisory role in 2008, leading to the formation of the Southern African Regional Forensic Science Network in close partnership with the South African Police Service. UNODC continued its support to the Network, including for its successful admission to membership of the International Forensic Strategic Alliance in 2011.

22. UNODC organized the first workshop on exchanging information and experiences among forensic service providers in West Africa, held in Dakar on 3 and 4 May 2011. The workshop, attended by 23 heads of forensic service providers from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, set the initial benchmark for regional cooperation in the field of forensic science. UNODC leveraged support from the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes and the Southern African Regional Forensic Science Network, through the International Forensic Strategic Alliance, in promoting the formation of a forensic science network for West Africa.

B. Innovative methods of collaboration

Collaboration on technical assistance in the field of forensic science

23. Technical assistance in the field of forensic science is essential for a more effective and evidence-based approach to dealing with issues related to drug control and crime prevention. The effectiveness and sustainability of technical assistance activities benefit from a strategic and synergistic approach. Coordination, for example, avoids duplication of efforts and ensures that technical assistance is delivered in a targeted, structured, efficient and strategic manner. It also ensures sustainability by optimizing the use of what would normally be limited resources.

24. In 2011, UNODC and the International Forensic Strategic Alliance implemented the first survey on forensic technical assistance activities, targeting governmental and non-governmental agencies and institutions belonging to the member networks of the Alliance. The survey highlighted technical assistance activities in progress, forensic disciplines being addressed and beneficiary countries, and identified forensic networks with particular technical assistance expertise. Regular reporting of such information would allow for the identification of specific expertise, avoidance and/or reduction of duplication of efforts and effective coordination of technical cooperation activities.

Implementation of “twinning” programmes

25. “Twinning”, a mechanism by which two entities (a technologically advanced body or individual and a recipient) partner to transfer expertise, can assist in the advancement of forensic science. The purpose of such partnerships depends on the knowledge, expertise, resources and strengths of the support groups and the particular needs of the beneficiaries. The mechanism promoted by the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes may be implemented at different levels, including network-to-network, network-to-laboratory or laboratory-to-laboratory, with enabling bodies playing a strategic and/or facilitative role.

26. A wealth of forensic science knowledge and expertise is available in the different member networks of the International Forensic Strategic Alliance. UNODC will continue to work with the Alliance and enabling bodies to categorize this knowledge and information, paying special attention to areas such as education and training courses, forensic science standards, conferences and workshops, laboratory quality assurance and accreditation and codes of conduct/ethics for forensic science. UNODC will promote knowledge transfer between forensic institutions through the “twinning” process.

C. Exploring areas of support to forensics more generally

27. UNODC has provided support to Member States in the forensic field, specifically in drug analysis, for over six decades, with the objective of ensuring that States have access to quality forensic science services in their efforts to counter drug trafficking. With the expansion of the mandates of UNODC to cover issues on crime, and with forensic science being the strategic nexus between science and the law, the request by the Commission to UNODC to explore areas of synergy between

its traditional support for the work of drug analysis laboratories and forensic science institutions more generally is timely.

28. Drug trafficking has a strong link to transnational organized crime. The primary tools available to the international community and multilateral systems to respond to drug trafficking are the three international drug control conventions. Traditional support for forensics with regard to drug control has included standard-setting and guidance, the development of standardized training programmes and reference materials, the development of tools for practical work and the provision of training.

29. The work of UNODC in the areas other than drug control is defined by the Organized Crime Convention and the Protocols thereto, including those on trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, and by the United Nations Convention against Corruption.⁵ Scientific support for implementing those conventions has included improving the role of forensics in preventing crime and ensuring fair trials, particularly in terms of crime-scene management and the use of forensic document examination in combating identity-related crime.

30. The success and fairness of criminal proceedings and trials depend to a large degree on the reliability and admissibility of physical evidence. The need for building capacity in crime-scene awareness and investigation is widely recognized, owing to the fact that criminal acts that involve crossing international borders require criminal justice systems that interface seamlessly. This requires that the underlying procedures, including crime-scene management, be standardized in order to deliver results that can be recognized across jurisdictions.

31. Fraudulent identity documents are prerequisites not only for trafficking in persons and smuggling migrants, but also for terrorist mobility. Prevention of identity fraud requires the ability to detect fraudulent documents and disseminate intelligence about such documents.

32. In addressing the issues of crime-scene management and fraudulent document examination, UNODC has developed standardized training programmes on crime-scene awareness⁶ and security document examination,⁷ with the expert contribution of partner organizations and networks including INTERPOL, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Association for Identification, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program, the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes and the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex).

33. The training programmes contribute to strengthening national forensic investigation capacity and combating identity-related crime, especially in countries with limited resources. Immediate beneficiaries have been front-line law

⁵ Ibid., vol. 2349, No. 42146.

⁶ *Crime Scene Awareness and Investigation Training Programme and Trainers' Guide* (ST/NAR/43).

⁷ *Introduction to Security Document Examination: Training Programme and Trainers' Guide* (ST/NAR/44).

enforcement officers, criminal justice officials (judges, lawyers and prosecutors), forensic laboratories, academia and technical assistance providers.

34. The related capacity-building activities of UNODC also include the development and dissemination of training materials, including computer-based training modules, tailored to the needs of beneficiary countries. UNODC crime-scene investigation kits have been developed and are available as part of a modular crime-scene awareness and investigation training programme. These kits have been made available to police officers in Pakistan and South Sudan.

35. Following up on the recognition by Member States of the need for the availability of quality forensic standards worldwide and their use as a basis for the enhancement of forensic science services and international collaboration in drug control and crime prevention, UNODC will continue to explore the provision of support for forensics more generally, within existing and future mandates, using the same approach, which includes standards-setting and the development of training programmes, reference materials and tools.

D. Challenges of ensuring access to quality forensic services

Awareness of the forensic process as a basis for the quality of services provided

36. Lack of awareness of the value of physical evidence at the crime scene, the importance of examining such evidence and the need to preserve its integrity, from the crime scene to the courtroom, might jeopardize the quality of the services provided. Thus, all personnel involved, from the first responders to the end-users of the information, need to acquire an adequate understanding of the entire forensic process, the forensic disciplines and the specialized services required. In addition, there is a need to raise awareness of the fact that scientific research data and laboratory results can also help identify new potential threats and health hazards and that such findings will support drug control and crime prevention efforts.

Appropriate infrastructure for a holistic approach in forensics

37. The needs of countries in relation to the generation and use of quality forensic data and information are unique. They require not only the appropriate capacity and skills but also the appropriate forensic science infrastructure. In that regard, the collaboration of a number of institutions, services and professionals that provide support to law enforcement, justice, health and regulatory authorities is essential. Although there is no single model for the provision of forensic science services, such services need to form an integral part of the national drug control and crime prevention structure and strategy.

Internationally accepted standards for quality and worldwide harmonization

38. The quality of forensic results has significant implications for the justice system, law enforcement, crime prevention and health policy, as well as for the worldwide exchange of forensic data and other information. Differences in the technical capacity of Member States in terms of forensic and laboratory services preclude the comparability of expert results. Harmonization of forensic practices worldwide will facilitate the comparability, acceptance and sharing of forensic data and other information between countries.

Expertise, resources and commitment to continuous improvement

39. Forensic service providers in many countries need assistance on multiple levels, including with respect to equipment, materials, scientific information, technical training and quality assurance support, in order to ensure accurate and precise results. Capacity-building in forensic science services, however, requires a long-term commitment to the implementation of forensic best practices, investment in staff development and follow-up initiatives to change current practice. Furthermore, it requires that Governments place the establishment or improvement and maintenance of forensic and scientific capacity high on their list of priorities.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

40. The provisions of Commission resolution 19/5 reflect the recognition by Member States of the importance of international cooperation in the field of forensic science and its positive impact on international harmonization.

41. The International Forensic Strategic Alliance, in collaboration with UNODC, will continue to foster international cooperation on strategic issues related to the management of forensic science laboratories. Its central role in advocating the implementation of internationally accepted quality forensic standards will greatly contribute to the promotion and advancement of forensic science worldwide. Member States should encourage and support efforts to establish regional forensic science networks where such networks do not yet exist.

42. The coordination of technical assistance activities in the forensic science field is important to prevent duplication of efforts and maximize the impact of capacity-building initiatives. The International Forensic Strategic Alliance and other networks in the forensic field are encouraged to promote and contribute to surveys designed to rationalize the use of the limited resources available for the development of national and regional forensic infrastructure. In addition, Member States should encourage the active participation of their forensic science service providers in such surveys.

43. The forensic science community recognizes that the development of “twinning” programmes can contribute to the improvement of forensic science delivery in a cost-effective way by “matching” the respective strengths and needs of the parties involved. “Twinning” also fosters international collaboration and supports efforts towards the implementation of internationally accepted standards worldwide. In that regard, Member States are encouraged to support the participation of their forensic institutions in such initiatives.