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**MEETINGS COVERAGE**

Plenary  
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## **DEBATING GLOBAL COOPERATION, UN CONGRESS SPEAKERS CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY, AS ‘PAPER PROMISES’ FAIL TO COMBAT CROSS-BORDER CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES**

Paper promises, including global instruments and Security Council resolutions, were “not enough” to successfully combat corruption, terrorism and other cross-border criminal activities, delegates heard as the thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice held a plenary debate on international cooperation.

Accomplishing that required the prompt, effective implementation of those instruments and a spirit of collaboration, speakers said, discussing agenda item 4 on “International cooperation, including at the regional level, to combat transnational organized crime”. Further, the pace of the international community’s response must be “stepped up” to match the speed with which crime was spreading, Iraq’s representative said. While commending the roles of the United Nations and its Office on Drugs and Crime for fostering partnerships, he regretted to say that instruments and resolutions were “not enough” and that their slow implementation was an obstacle to justice.

Agreeing, Romania’s speaker said any ratification or adherence to an international instrument that was not followed by concrete measures was insufficient. “The functionality of a convention is measured not by the number of ratifications, but by the number of cases when it is actually used and, moreover, the number of cases when such operations show to be successful,” she said, adding that even though every State had a responsibility to promote various instruments, accountability was needed at national, regional and global levels.

In a similar vein, some speakers discouraged the creation of new crime-fighting instruments, with Germany’s speaker saying that drafting new instruments could actually hinder practical work. Underlining that the coexistence of different treaties was often “confusing” for the legal practice, he said his country was already dealing with a “real patchwork” of mutually overlapping legal instruments. The lengthy time required to draft a convention, he said, would be better spent on bolstering partnerships.

Shaping the debate were a discussion guide (document [A/CONF.222/PM.1](#)) and a working paper prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on “International cooperation, including at the regional level, to combat transnational organized crime” (document [A/CONF.222/7](#)), which outlined the role of the Organization’s multilateral instruments, such as its conventions against drug trafficking, transnational organized crime and corruption. The working paper also highlighted the regional perspective of international cooperation in criminal matters as such cooperation evolved to keep pace with the increasing challenges posed by transnational crime in its different manifestations.

At the outset, many delegates expressed concern over the rapid development of various crime and corruption activities and the futility of tackling those threats alone. Some offered suggestions for streamlining efforts and others highlighted concrete measures they had taken to broaden international cooperation. From China’s apprehension of 700 individuals through its multinational Operation Fox Hunt to Algeria’s cooperation with France and Mali on an investigation into the 2014 Air Algérie crash, many speakers agreed that international instruments, regional networks and bilateral extradition agreements were largely effective.

Indeed, the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime already contained an article covering the provision of mutual legal assistance, eliminating the need for bilateral agreements on that issue, the delegate of

the United States pointed out. Yet, in practice, some countries tended to turn to national legislation with regard to extraditions and failed to apply the principles of relevant international instruments, China's speaker said. That phenomenon only succeeded in erecting hurdles to legal investigations and hindering the apprehension and prosecution of perpetrators, he said.

National safeguards, however — such as the need for due process and respect for human rights — could lead to tensions over the expectation of “speedy” action, Switzerland's delegate said. With a view to assisting States with asset recovery efforts, his country had initiated the establishment of practical guidelines and further discussions should address how to improve mutual legal assistance proceedings. Barriers to mutual assistance could best be overcome by trust and a true spirit of cooperation, he added.

Some States had recently adopted measures to streamline that cooperation. Canada's representative said new reforms to her country's Criminal Code and mutual legal assistance in criminal matters act had given prosecutors and police significant powers to investigate domestic cases and assist other States with cybercrime and other illegal activities, such as terrorism, that exploited modern technology.

On fighting terrorism, many delegates, including those from Egypt and Tunisia, said close cooperation between States and regions was absolutely essential. “Capacity-building to investigate, prosecute and punish acts of terrorism is fundamental for effective international cooperation, particularly in order to address the unprecedented threats posed by foreign terrorist fighters,” Japan's speaker said. The representative of the League of Arab States said agreements, strategies, initiatives and a set of model laws were among the tools his region was using to combat a range of transnational crime, including terrorism.

Throughout the day-long debate, participants showcased a plethora of cooperation efforts. In Latin America, numerous legislative efforts on mutual assistance were being pursued, including establishing partnerships with European judicial networks and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), said a representative of the Red Iberoamericana de Cooperación Juridical Internacional and the Conferencia de Ministros de Justicia de los Países Latinoamericanos. Meanwhile, Australia's speaker said regional networks, such as the 45-member Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, were powerful tools for, among other things, bolstering mutual assistance and building policy and legislative capabilities.

Representatives, including those of Azerbaijan, India, Sudan and Venezuela, also provided similar national, regional and international examples.

International cooperation was the cornerstone of actions supported by the Doha Declaration (document [A/CONF.222/L.6](#)), which was unanimously adopted at the opening of the Congress. Member States, by the Declaration, supported a range of tools and approaches to fight crime, including efforts to promote and strengthen international and regional cooperation to further develop the capacity of national criminal justice systems, such as modernizing and strengthening legislation. (See Press Release [SOC/CP/359](#) of 12 April.)

Also participating in the debate were representatives of Thailand, Norway, Viet Nam, Indonesia, Argentina, Morocco, Kuwait, Oman, Spain, Peru, Cuba, Pakistan, France and Iran.

Prior to the discussion, delegates heard an overview of the work of Workshop 2 on “Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants: success and challenges in criminalization, in mutual legal assistance and in effective protection of witnesses and trafficking victims”.

The Congress will meet again at 10 a.m. on Friday, 17 April, to hold a plenary debate on agenda item 5: “Comprehensive and balanced approaches to prevent and adequately respond to new and emerging forms of transnational crime”.