

MEF SCHOOLS MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

*“Achieving SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) in line
with the 2030 United Nations agenda.”*



Committee: UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)

Agenda Item: Proposing strategies to combat worldwide human trafficking linked to drug trade.

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Positions: President Chair, Deputy Chairs

Introduction

Human trafficking is closely linked to the **global drug trade**, often forming two sides of the same criminal network and using the same trade routes. Together, they are among the most profitable and dangerous forms of transnational organized crime.

In recent years, human trafficking and drug trade have grown increasingly interconnected. Trafficked individuals are forced into sex work as well as drug production, transportation, and distribution. International criminal organizations exploit human vulnerability, targeting those living in poverty or conflict-affected regions. Migrants, women and children are the most severely affected by this violence. The current global situation is a result of weak border controls, corruption, and limited law enforcement capacity. This has allowed cartels to thrive, while globalization and digital communication make it easier than ever for these networks to operate across borders and expand their reach.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (**UNODC**) works to combat drugs, organized crime, and trafficking, while protecting victims and promoting international cooperation. Yet the challenge is immense: traffickers constantly adapt, exploit the most vulnerable, and operate across borders with alarming sophistication.

Definition of Significant Terms

Human Trafficking: the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people in order to benefit from their work or service, typically in the form of forced labour or sexual exploitation.

Drug Trafficking: A global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws. UNODC is continuously monitoring and researching global illicit drug markets in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their dynamics.

Transnational: involving several nations

Drug Mule: A person who is forced into transporting illegal drugs across borders

Forced Labor: all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily

Detailed Background of the Issue

Human trafficking and drug trafficking have existed for decades, but globalization has made them both more widespread and complex. By the late 20th century, criminal organizations began expanding across borders, taking advantage of faster transportation, advanced communication, and global trade routes. These changes allowed drug trafficking networks to operate on an international scale, while simultaneously exploiting human trafficking to cut costs and maximize profits. Initially, human trafficking and drug trafficking were treated as separate crimes, but law

enforcement later saw how closely they were connected. By the early 2000s, reports showed how human trafficking supports drug trade.

How Human Trafficking Supports Drug Trade:

Forced Labor in Drug Production:

In areas where illegal crops like coca, opium poppy, or cannabis are grown, trafficked people are often forced to work in dangerous and unhealthy conditions. They may be controlled through violence, threats, or debt, and usually have little or no access to help or legal protection.

Using Trafficked People as Drug Couriers:

Trafficked individuals are often forced to carry drugs, commonly referred to as “**drug mules**.” Victims may be tricked, threatened, or pressured into transporting narcotics across borders, airports, or by sea. In many cases, these individuals face serious legal consequences despite being victims of exploitation.

Traffickers usually use their victims' emotions in a way to force them into working. One method that the traffickers use is taking away the victim's passport or form of identification. This way, the victim cannot leave the country, prove who they are, or seek help. This ensures that they are completely dependent on their traffickers. Another method that they might use is threatening the victim's family. If the victim refuses to work or tries to escape, traffickers will threaten them by harming or kidnapping their families.

Illegal human trafficking and drug trade happens all around the world. In **South America**, working on coca farms or transporting cocaine. In **Southeast Asia**, growing opium poppy or working in synthetic drug labs. In **North Africa and the Middle East**, forced labor or being used to carry drugs. In **Eastern Europe**, forcing into sex work or transporting narcotics are ways used commonly in different parts of the world. These methods used by traffickers make it extremely hard and almost impossible for victims to escape. This is why human trafficking linked to drug trade is a huge problem.

Current Global Situation

Today, human trafficking linked to the drug trade remains a global concern affecting source, transit, and destination countries. Conflict zones, migration routes, and regions with high drug production are particularly vulnerable. Criminal organizations continue to adapt their methods, using digital communication, falsified documents, and complex financial systems to evade authorities.

Despite international legal frameworks such as the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocol, enforcement remains inconsistent. Many countries struggle with victim identification, cross-border cooperation, and balancing security measures with human rights obligations.

Impact on Victims and Society

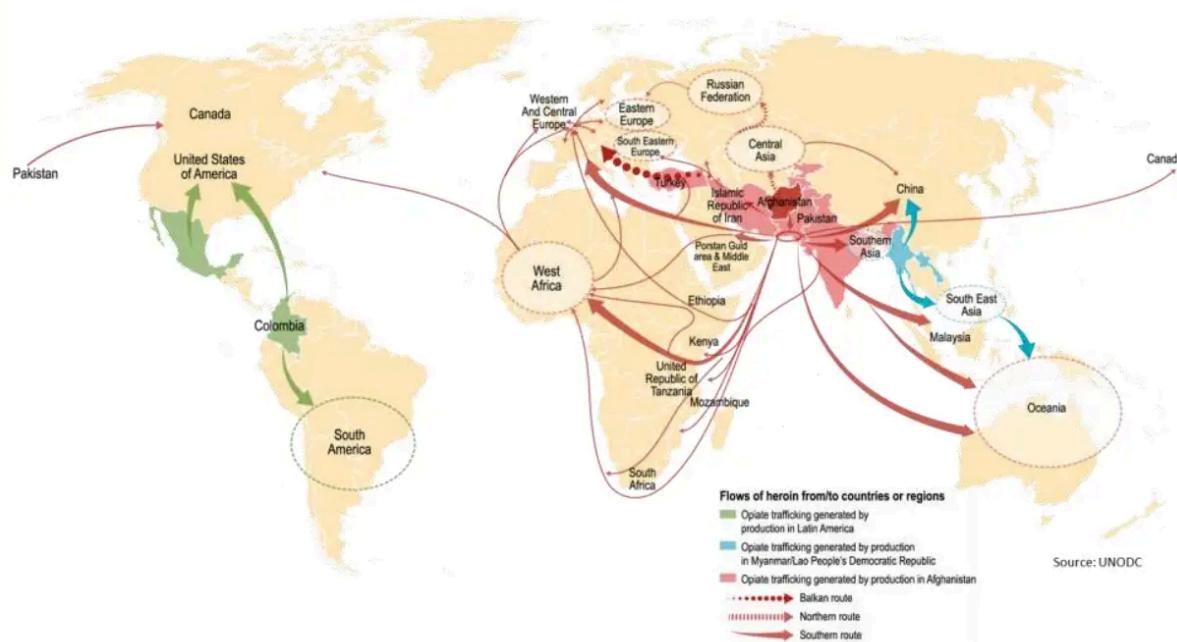
The consequences of this issue extend beyond individual victims. Human trafficking linked to drug trade:

- Violates fundamental human rights
- Fuels corruption and weakens state institutions

- Undermines public health and safety
- Strengthens transnational criminal organizations

Addressing this issue therefore requires a coordinated, long-term, and victim-centered approach led by international cooperation and supported by UNODC.

Exhibit 42: The War on Drugs



- The flow of illegal opiates around the world also has geopolitical consequences.
- The production and trade of illegal drugs has links with failed states, black economies and regional instability.
- Afghanistan remains the center of illicit opiate production.

Timeline of Key Events

1988	Adoption of the UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances , strengthening international drug control cooperation.
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2000	Adoption of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) , recognizing organized crime as a global threat.
2000	Adoption of the Palermo Protocol , establishing the first internationally agreed definition of human trafficking.
2003	UNODC begins large-scale technical assistance programs to combat trafficking and drug-related crime.
2010	UN General Assembly adopts the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons .
2015	Adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development , with SDG 16 addressing organized crime and trafficking.
2021-present	UNODC reports increasing links between trafficking in persons, drug trade, and forced criminality in multiple regions.
3rd of January 2026	U.S.–Venezuela operation resulting in the detention of President Nicolás Maduro amid allegations of links to transnational drug trafficking.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

[United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)](#)

UNODC leads global efforts against drug trafficking, human trafficking, and organized crime. It supports Member States through legal assistance, capacity-building, research, and international cooperation, while promoting a victim-centered, human-rights-based approach.

[United States](#)

The United States considers trafficking linked to drug trade a major security threat. It supports international operations, sanctions, and intelligence-sharing to dismantle criminal networks.

[Mexico](#)

Mexico is heavily affected by drug cartels that exploit trafficked individuals as drug couriers and forced labor. The government focuses on cartel disruption and international cooperation.

[Colombia](#)

Colombia faces challenges related to coca cultivation and forced labor. It cooperates with UNODC on alternative development and anti-trafficking strategies.

Nigeria

Nigeria is a key source and transit country where trafficked individuals are often used as drug mules. The government works with UNODC but faces enforcement challenges.

[Venezuela](#)

Venezuela rejects accusations linking its government to drug trafficking and associated human trafficking networks, describing them as politically motivated. Following the January 3, 2026 U.S. military operation, which resulted in airstrikes across Venezuelan territory and the detention of President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores, Venezuela condemns this as an illegal violation of sovereignty and international law. The Venezuelan government maintains its commitment to combating organized crime and asserts that unilateral foreign intervention undermines regional stability and lawful international cooperation efforts.

[European Union \(EU\)](#)

The EU addresses trafficking through joint investigations, intelligence-sharing, and strong victim protection frameworks, while funding UNODC initiatives.

[International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#)

IOM assists victims of trafficking, especially migrants, through protection, return, and reintegration programs.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

UNODC leads global efforts to combat drug trafficking, human trafficking, and organized crime through legal assistance, capacity-building, data collection, and international cooperation. It advocates a victim-centered and human-rights-based approach.

[Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue](#)

Name of Resolution, Treaty, or Agreement	Description
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UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000)	Established a global framework to combat organized crime, including drug trafficking and human trafficking.
Palermo Protocol (2000)	Created a legal definition of trafficking in persons and emphasized prevention, protection, and prosecution.
Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2010)	Encouraged states to strengthen cooperation, victim protection, and data collection.
UNODC Global Programme against Trafficking in Persons	Provides technical assistance, training, and legislative support to member states.
Regional Task Forces and Bilateral Agreements	Enabled intelligence-sharing and joint operations, though effectiveness varies by region.

Despite these efforts, implementation gaps, limited enforcement capacity, and insufficient victim-centered approaches continue to hinder progress.

Alternative Solutions

Delegates may consider the following alternative or complementary approaches:

- **Integrated Crime Strategies**
Address human trafficking and drug trafficking simultaneously rather than as separate crimes.
- **Strengthening Victim Protection Mechanisms**
Expand legal protections to ensure trafficked individuals involved in drug-related crimes are treated as victims, not criminals.
- **Enhanced Data Collection and Intelligence Sharing**
Use shared databases and coordinated investigations under UNODC guidance.
- **Prevention through Socioeconomic Development**
Invest in education, employment, and alternative livelihoods in high-risk regions.
- **Public-Private Partnerships**
Involve transport companies, financial institutions, and technology firms to identify trafficking patterns and money laundering.
- **Drug Demand Reduction**
Address the demand side of the drug trade to reduce incentives for exploitation.

Useful Links

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L-1sJptwxs>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLNGOvPUzSY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUEx8XnVii4>

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