

UNODC inputs to the SG report on Oceans and the law of the sea, pursuant to

[A/RES/77/248](#)

The present contribution showcases the work carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) between June 2022 and June 2023 to support Member States in the implementation of the General Assembly resolution 78/248, on Oceans and the law of the sea.

II. Capacity-building

*Pursuant to **OP 35**, which “[..] welcomes ongoing activities for capacity-building so as to address maritime security and protection of the marine environment of developing States, and encourages States and international financial institutions to provide additional funding for capacity-building programmes, including for transfer of technology, including through the International Maritime Organization and other competent international organizations”*

- In April 2023, UNODC delivered and installed a new radar for the Maritime Police Unit in Mogadishu, **Somalia**. The radar will enhance the Unit’s Maritime Domain Awareness capability by providing a current operating picture of vessel movement patterns in each maritime space to help detect maritime crime. The radar donation was recognized as a major developmental achievement for the Unit.
- UNODC has delivered a training programme on basic and advanced monitoring and data retrieval with the use of the Skylight platform. The two-day training was conducted online in April 2023, with the participation of 35 officers from the **Maldives** Police Service. The training has been delivered as part of UNODC’s activities dedicated to strengthening the state’s capacities to enhance maritime security in the region.
- In November 2022, UNODC delivered a Table Top Exercise (TTX) on maritime law for Cyprus Marine Police, Cyprus prosecutors, Lebanon Armed Forces Navy.

*Pursuant to **OP 36**, which “Recognizes the considerable need to provide sustained capacity-building assistance, including on financial and technical aspects, by relevant international organizations and donors to developing States, with a view to further strengthening their capacity to take effective measures against the multiple facets of international criminal activities at sea, in line with the relevant international instruments, including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto”*

- Through its regional teams in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Latin America and the Caribbean, UNODC operates in 88 countries, delivering technical assistance on the ground for capacity building in maritime law enforcement, including training to enhance the capacity of women in the maritime domain.
- Within the framework of its Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP), UNODC provides theoretical and practical training on the UN Convention on Law of the Sea

(UNCLOS) and case scenarios as part of the Visit, Board Search, Seizure (VBSS) training programmes to Maritime Law Enforcement (MLE) officers to apply the knowledge of what has been taught to real case situations in maritime interdictions in several maritime training centres in May, June and November 2022. UNODC has mapped academic and law enforcement institutions from **Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka** for the potential establishment of the law of the sea and maritime crime curricula in the academic institutions of these three countries. The work related to curriculum development commenced in June 2022 and was completed in January 2023.

Though Law of the Sea remains a discipline in most universities, it is rarely connected with law enforcement and prosecution offices and judicial authorities. This initiative aims at reinforcing sustainable capacities to enforce the law on the maritime domain in critical academic institutions to develop curricula that could remain in the long and medium terms as national means to sustain capacities of the criminal justice practitioners, and on the other side to connect criminal justice and academic institutions providing students selected by governmental agencies as much as regular academic students.

- During the reporting period, UNODC provided various practical and tactical training for MLE officers from eleven countries in the **Western Indian Ocean region** and **Pakistan**. Through its maritime training centres in Seychelles and South Africa, UNODC delivered a series of VBSS training, including courses on the smuggling of migrants and the safety of life at sea, as well as on Pier-side Vessel Search Techniques. UNODC also provided Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) courses for Member States as well as the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre and the Regional Coordination Operations Centre in the region to enhance the ability to detect illicit activity at sea. In support of the regional MLE Exercise Cutlass Express 2023, UNODC provided training on UNCLOS to MLE or MDA personnel from around the Indian Ocean region prior to their participation in the exercise's VBSS and Maritime Operations Centre events.
- In the **Indian Ocean East region**, UNODC conducted several VBSS courses in **Maldives, Bangladesh** and **Sri Lanka** for Marine Police, Coast Guard, Customs and Navy to build capacities of maritime law enforcement officers including Pier-side Vessel Search, VBSS, Seamanship and Coxswain courses.
- In cooperation with the US Department of State's programme on Nuclear Smuggling Detection and Deterrence (NSDD), UNODC facilitated a VBSS course focused on countering smuggling of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) components for law enforcement officers from **Mozambique, Kenya, and Tanzania** in Seychelles from 29 March to 18 April 2023. Complementing UNODC standard curriculum, NSDD experts also integrated training on search methods using various nuclear and radiological detection equipment, including personal radiation detectors and radioisotope identification devices.
- In the Mediterranean, UNODC has conducted an inter-agency workshop on strengthening criminal justice response in countering illegal maritime pollution at sea in **Tunisia** in February 2023 and is preparing for the next one in **Morocco** in July 2023.

- In **Lebanon**, UNODC has strengthened the capacities of VBSS teams through the provision of IT equipment, diving equipment, drones in January 2023 . Maritime domain awareness, search and rescue, VBSS and anti-corruption trainings were delivered to the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy in November 2022. The Office has also developed awareness, technical knowledge and inter-agency cooperation to respond to the trafficking and movement of hazardous materials through maritime routes in Lebanon in February 2023.
- Specialized training of VBSS with underwater drones was conducted to Lebanese Armed Forces from September to October 2022. In **Algeria**, UNODC will deliver training on all types of smuggling including the trafficking of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons (CBRN) at sea in June 2023. In **Libya**, the inception phase of the project to support maritime safety and security management to address all forms of transnational organized crime in line with human rights standards has started, with the Project Coordinator based in Tripoli since April 2023.

IX. Maritime Safety and Security and Flag State Implementation

*Pursuant to **OP 135**, which “Recognizes the crucial role of international cooperation at the global, regional, subregional and bilateral levels in combating, in accordance with international law, threats to maritime security, including piracy, armed robbery against ships at sea and terrorist acts against shipping, offshore installations and other maritime interests, through bilateral and multilateral instruments and mechanisms aimed at monitoring, preventing and responding to such threats, the enhanced sharing of information among States relevant to the detection, prevention and suppression of such threats, and the prosecution of offenders with due regard to national legislation, and the need for sustained capacity-building to support such objectives [..]”*

- UNODC has proposed to support the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to contextualize the needs of IORA Member States to ultimately strengthen regional cooperation. To address the challenges of lengthy processes of the verification of nationality and obtaining explicit consent of the flag State, as well as the challenges on suspect vessels fleeing to the territorial seas prior to any law enforcement operation, a legal instrument would enhance expeditious sharing of information of the suspect vessels.

Such instrument would be in line with other existing maritime security frameworks, including the Djibouti Code of Conduct, the Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime (IOFMC), Colombo Security Conclave, and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and would serve the purpose of expediting the procedure of boarding requests of suspect vessels beyond territorial waters and facilitate the granting of the necessary consent to board. Finally, the development of a legal instrument could also facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive shiprider mechanism in the waters of IORA Member States and beyond, with the view to exercising their authority to suppress illicit maritime activities under the authority of the shiprider’s State.

*Pursuant to **OP 141**, which “Encourages States to ensure effective implementation of international law applicable to combating piracy, as reflected in the Convention, calls upon States to take appropriate steps under their national law to facilitate, in accordance with international law, the apprehension and prosecution of those who are alleged to have*

committed acts of piracy, including the financing or facilitation of such acts, also taking into account other relevant instruments that are consistent with the Convention, and encourages States to cooperate, as appropriate, with a view to developing their national legislation in this regard”

- In the **Western Indian Ocean region**, during the reporting period UNODC provided continued support to regional countries’ detention and repatriation of convicted pirates, while leading on efforts to improve arrests and prosecutions of those who smuggle heroin and migrants across the Indian Ocean into East Africa. This included simulated trials and in-country mentorship in multiple coastal States in the region.

In the region, the Office continued to assist national stakeholders on the endorsement of previously completed legal reviews on implementation of UNCLOS and other international conventions into national law to address drug trafficking at sea and port security. Further, between August 2022 and February 2023, UNODC supported the digitalization of court administration and prosecutor offices through electronic case management systems and the provision of IT equipment in **Comoros, Mozambique, , Mauritius and Seychelles**.

*Pursuant to **OP 156**, which “Urges States to ensure the full implementation of resolution A.1159(32) of 15 December 2021 of the Assembly of the International Maritime Organization on prevention and suppression of piracy, armed robbery against ships and illicit maritime activity in the Gulf of Guinea;”*

With the significant drop in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea region and the positive development of the Economic Community of West African States’ (ECOWAS) Supplementary Act that applies only to counter piracy, the need to support another legal framework to suppress other illicit maritime including drug trafficking by sea, maritime terrorism, and other transnational organized crime in the maritime domain of the Member States in the region, is deemed expedient. In this regard, since November 2022, UNODC has been working with ECOWAS for the development and adoption of the legal framework as a Supplementary Act within the ECOWAS mechanism.

In November 2022, Ms. Ghada Waly, UNODC’s Executive Director delivered to the UN Security Council the [Briefing on Peace and Security in Africa - Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea](#). While acknowledging progress in addressing the threat of piracy in the region, the briefing highlighted the need to dedicate more attention, resources and action in support of maritime security and rule of law in the **Gulf of Guinea**. In particular it was stressed the importance of: 1) developing capacities and legal frameworks of States in the region; 2) being agile and adaptable in responding to shifting trends and emerging threats related to piracy; and 3) addressing the root causes of piracy, by working with communities and creating better living conditions.

*Pursuant to **OP 162**, which “Notes that transnational organized criminal activities are diverse and may be interrelated in some cases and that criminal organizations are adaptive and take advantage of the vulnerabilities of States, in particular coastal and small island developing States in transit areas, and calls upon States and relevant intergovernmental organizations to increase cooperation and coordination at all levels to detect and suppress the smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons and illicit trafficking in firearms, in accordance with international law”*

- UNODC continued to implement the [‘Strengthening Transregional Action and Responses Against the Smuggling of Migrants’ \(STARSOM\) initiative](#). STARSOM aims to counter migrant smuggling and protect the lives and rights of migrants across routes leading to North America, especially Canada, and crossing multiple countries in **South Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean**, including along major migration routes in the Caribbean Sea and the Indian Ocean. Funded by Canada, this initiative is a two-year project ending in 2023.
- Through its [Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants](#) (GLO.ACT) initiative, UNODC continued to support **Bangladesh** to prevent and address trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, including in the Andaman Sea. GLO.ACT in Bangladesh is a joint initiative by UNODC and the European Union, implemented in partnership with IOM.
- UNODC is also a member of the UNHCR-led Inter-Agency Group on Protection of Refugees and Migrants Moving by Sea. The Group met in 2023 to advance protection of life at sea in line with international obligations, with a focus on multi-purpose aerial surveillance and the role of Frontex in the **Mediterranean**.

*Pursuant to **OP 163**, which “Recognizes the importance of enhancing international cooperation at all levels to fight transnational organized criminal activities, including illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, within the scope of the United Nations instruments against illicit drug trafficking, as well as the smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons and illicit trafficking in firearms and criminal activities at sea falling within the scope of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto”*

- Through its Passenger and Cargo Border Team (PCBT) UNODC has developed a global network across 86 countries to facilitate information exchange between operational officers from customs and law enforcement on the frontlines of illicit goods trafficking. Such system has resulted in tangible success, for example in cooperation between **Chile** and **Bolivia** in November 2022 which led to the seizure of 690 tons of precursor chemicals intended for cocaine production.
- In the reporting period, UNODC conducted several regional maritime law enforcement trainings at the newly opened Cyprus Centre for Land, Open-seas, and Port Security (CYCLOPS) for maritime law enforcement agencies from **Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt** and **Lebanon**. Given the increasing volume of incidents at sea in the region, the inter-agency nature of the courses added special value by strengthening cooperation between different maritime law enforcement agencies, through information exchanges and coordinated operations.
- In April 2023, UNODC held the regional bi-annual Prosecutors’ Network Forum (PNF) under the aegis of the Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crimes (IOFMC) in Madagascar for 37 prosecutors from the **Indian Ocean West, Indian Ocean East** and **Atlantic Ocean regions**. The aim of the forum was to enhance the skills of prosecutors thereby reinforcing the criminal justice chain in the fight against transnational organized crimes at sea. During

the five-day forum, the prosecutors conducted a Joint Intelligence exercise in collaboration with the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center (RMIFC) and the Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC) which provided an opportunity to discuss legal hindrances they must overcome both at the national and regional levels to increase the likelihood of successful prosecutions.

- During the reporting period, UNODC released a series of publications related to the latest research findings on manufacture, trafficking and consumption of drugs. These include the [World Drug Report 2022](#), the [Global Report on Cocaine 2023 – Local dynamics, global challenges](#), and the [2022 Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia: Latest Developments and Challenges](#) report. Data on drug seizures at seaports, reveal that worldwide maritime routes remain common routes to smuggle drugs across countries and regions. For example:
 - Individual drug seizures suggest growing cocaine trafficking at sea. The share of cocaine quantities seized associated with maritime trafficking has increased from 84 per cent in 2015-2018 to 89 per cent in 2021 with a drop in 2020 when trafficking of cocaine by private aircrafts increased notably in **Latin America** to overcome COVID-19 restriction measures.¹

Important departure points for shipping cocaine out of **South America** by sea include the Pacific seaports of Buenaventura, Colombia, and Guayaquil, Ecuador, and the Atlantic seaports of Cartagena, Colombia, and the Port of Santos in the State of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Some smaller ports in northern Brazil have also assumed growing importance for cocaine shipments to Europe in recent years, as traffickers attempt to avoid improved controls and surveillance capacity implemented at the Port of Santos. According to seizure data, the main seaports used for the import of cocaine into Europe in the period 2020–2021 were those of Antwerp, Belgium, and Rotterdam, the Netherlands, as well as various seaports in Spain. However, almost all major European seaports serve as gateways to the region’s consumer markets.²

- In the **Middle East and North Africa**, trends show an increase in trafficking of amphetamine, sold in tablets under the street name “captagon”. Data on seizures in the region reveal that “captagon” is smuggled mainly by sea from the seaports of the Levant across the Mediterranean to Europe and North Africa, as well as through the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, to reach the coasts of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.³
- In **East and Southeast Asia**, the trafficking routes for methamphetamine did not change dramatically from 2020 to 2021, remaining characterized by trafficking by land. However, following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, different methods gained traction, such as online trafficking and trafficking by sea, with maritime

¹ UNODC (2022) World Drug Report 2022

² UNODC (2023) Global Report on Cocaine

³ UNODC (2022) World Drug Report 2022

trafficking routes along the Andaman Sea and through the Malacca Strait towards Malaysia, Indonesia, and beyond being still used in 2021.⁴

Pursuant to OP 165, which “Notes with grave concern the recent proliferation of, and endangerment of lives through, the smuggling of migrants by sea, underscores the necessity to address such situations in accordance with applicable international law, and encourages States, acting nationally or through relevant global or regional organizations, as appropriate, to provide technical assistance and capacity-building to flag, port and coastal States, upon request, to enhance their capabilities to prevent smuggling of migrants and human trafficking by sea”

The UNODC [Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants](#) conducts policy-relevant research on migrant smuggling along sea and land routes, providing up-to-date research and analysis on migrant smugglers profiles and modus operandi, routes and modes of transport used, and abuses of the human rights of smuggled migrants and refugees, including deaths at sea. Migrant smuggling analyses available on the Observatory website cover the **Central Mediterranean, Western Mediterranean and Northwest African (Atlantic) seas** smuggling routes. Currently, data collection and research on migrant smuggling along sea and land routes in Southeast Asia is being conducted, covering **Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand**.

Pursuant to OP 189, which “Encourages greater dialogue and cooperation among States and the relevant regional and global organizations through workshops and seminars on the protection and maintenance of fibre-optic submarine cables to promote the security of such critical communications infrastructure”

- UNODC attended the inter-ministerial committee meeting on the Submarine Cables Protection Framework in **Bangladesh** in January 2023, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the objective of creating an inter-ministerial committee to gather inputs from different government stakeholders for the National Submarine Cables Protection and Resilience Framework. UNODC also conducted a multi-agency workshop and a second stakeholder engagement meeting to develop a National Submarine Cable Protection and Resilience Plan for **Maldives** in October 2022.

X. Marine Environment and Marine Resources

Pursuant to OP 205, which “Notes the need for actions to support sustainable fisheries and sustainable aquaculture for sufficient, safe and nutritious food, recognizing the central role of healthy oceans in resilient food systems and for achieving the 2030 Agenda”

- UNODC, in collaboration with FAO, has been developing a legislative guide on combating crimes in the fisheries sector, as part of efforts to strengthen legal and policy frameworks. The guide seeks to support States in enacting or strengthening domestic legislation against these forms of crime, focusing on the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and provides national lawmakers with concrete

⁴ UNODC (2022) Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia

model provisions, national examples and legislative guidance. It will be published in mid-2023.

- In addition, UNODC and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) have launched a new partnership to advance innovative knowledge-sharing with the aim of leveraging fisheries science and targeted sector information to enable more capacity to counteract illegal fishing activities and to demonstrate how the conservation and maritime security communities can build on each other's core competencies for greater impact.
- Since 2017, [the UNODC FishNET project](#) has targeted crimes in the fisheries sector (CFS) in Eastern and Southern Africa, West Africa and South and Southeast Asia. Phase II of this project begins implementation in 2023, raising awareness of CFS, building upon initial training, increasing interdiction capacity of regional customs and law enforcement authorities, and improving inter-agency cooperation. Project success is evident through multiple CFS seizures. For example, in August 2022, there was a seizure in Hai Phong, **Viet Nam** of 284,90 kg of dried CITES Appendix II listed seahorse species hidden in 9,510 kg of frozen fish.
- In 2022, through cooperation with UNODC-WCO Blue Justice Initiative and its [vessel tracking centre in Vardø, Norway](#), beneficiary countries gained access to satellite images which provided important data to determine patterns of suspicious fishing vessel movements. These countries were also introduced to the wide Blue Justice context, an initiative aimed at improving inter-agency cooperation and access to digital tools to address crimes in the fisheries sector.
- [The Blue Enforcement Project](#), under the Blue Justice Initiative, brings together customs, national police, navies, coast guards and fisheries authorities to target capacity building and cooperation to address crimes in the fisheries sector in **Maldives** and **Sri Lanka**. This project also prioritizes the role of women in deterring crimes in the fisheries sector in the region and includes a separate project outcome dedicated to the empowerment of women in maritime law enforcement and the strengthening of networks for women working in this sector. Under the reporting period, this included the development of an interregional network of women officers during a [gender equality and women's leadership workshop in Bangkok](#) for customs and law enforcement officers of the **Maldives, Sri Lanka** and **Thailand**.

Pursuant to OP 232, which “Recognizes the need for better understanding of the sources, amounts, pathways, distribution, trends, nature and impacts of marine debris, especially plastics and microplastics, and to examine possible measures and best available techniques and environmental practices to prevent its accumulation and minimize its levels in the marine environment, [..]”

Under its [Southeast Asia Waste Project](#), UNODC aims at deterring the trafficking of plastic and hazardous waste in **Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand** and **Viet Nam**. All implementing countries in Southeast Asia are now connected via UNODC's communication platform, ContainerCOMM, encouraging inter-agency, inter-regional, and international communication and collaboration. In 2022, over 50,000 tons of plastic scrap was identified in

abandoned containers during mentorships under this project and 15,596 kg of used batteries were seized.

Pursuant to OP 258, which “Encourages States, in accordance with international law, including the Convention and other relevant instruments, either bilaterally or regionally, to jointly develop and promote contingency plans for responding to pollution incidents, as well as other incidents that are likely to have significant adverse effects on the marine environment and biodiversity”

- In December 2022 UNODC has delivered a tabletop exercise on Maritime Disaster Management in Maldives and Bangladesh, with the aim of reinforcing preparedness and inter-agency response to disaster related incidents that take place at sea.

In **Maldives**, several of the relevant agencies, including the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, Ministry of Defence, Maldives Police Service, Attorney General’s Office, National Disaster Management Agency, and Maldives Meteorological Service and Environmental Protection Agency took part in the exercise.

In **Bangladesh** officers from the Ministry of Shipping, Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Coast Guard, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change attended. Participants got the opportunity to acquaint themselves with Incident Management Systems (IMS) and participate in various exercises, including IMS tabletop exercises, organizational function exercises, and capability assessments to better understand how to effectively manage disaster related incidents in Bangladesh.