

## **Remarks by the Rt. Hon. Raila A. Odinga EGH MP, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kenya, at the launch of the report on transnational organised crime and state erosion in Kenya**

*(Peter Gastrow, IPI Director of Programs, transcribed the content of this document, including the above heading, directly from the original hard copy from which the Prime Minister read during his address in Nairobi on October 4, 2011. The hard copy is available.)*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the organisers of this conference. The government is deeply concerned about organised crime in our country and in our region, and it welcomes initiatives to combat this scourge.

Since 2008, we have spent large sums of money upgrading the physical infrastructure of our country, as well as on improving education and bolstering the economy in general.

These advances are losing ground, however, to the spreading cancer of organized crime. This is a political, economic and social problem we must urgently confront as a nation.

It is a matter of serious concern that money from criminal networks has in recent years found its way into public life. It is being used to buy elections and to influence political outcomes.

Organised crime is financing political activities, and criminals are in turn being guaranteed protection, tying them directly to the culture of impunity pervading Kenyan politics and business. There are credible fears that key members of our security institutions are also involved.

Organised crime is also an economic issue because it diverts resources, depriving the state of revenue for investment, and making it difficult for honest and legal firms to survive. It has led to unpunished trade in counterfeit and other illegal imports.

Criminal networks defraud the public through tax evasion at our ports and airports, costing our economy billions of shillings and undermining manufacturing and growth. Organised crime has also led to the widespread availability of small arms, and to an unprecedented level of wanton murder. At the worst end of the spectrum, international drug cartels are operating freely here, facilitating their trade through co-operation with other criminal networks.

Kenya has become a significant transit hub for cocaine destined for North America and Europe, while heroin is mowing down our youth in the thousands, especially in Nairobi and at the Coast. The drugs trade and drug use are undermining national development, hampering governance, eroding trust in institutions, constantly testing international confidence in our country, and rendering useless our massive investment in education and the national infrastructure. This is having a devastating effect on social cohesion. Organised crime networks are stealing our future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Increases in money-laundering, trafficking in human and natural resources, the availability of guns, the counterfeit goods trade, drugs, and the emergence of extortion rackets are all reasons for us to rise to action. If left unchecked, these evils can defeat the will of the Kenyan people for change and the rule of law, and can negate the promise of a transparent and prosperous Kenya.

While we have not been standing still, we have been slow to recognise the remarkable ability of international criminal groups to adapt to changing circumstances, and to take advantage of where we are weak.

While current reforms to the judiciary and the police force are giving us what we hope are effective new tools, and while we have in the past few years enacted legislation to combat threats to our national integrity, these initiatives are not enough. We might have implemented fine laws, such as the Proceeds of Crime Act and other anti-money laundering legislation, but these have not dealt with the problem adequately.

We have struggled to up our game – but today's battle is a different one. We face a new breed of organised criminals quite different from the one we faced a generation ago. They are more sophisticated, richer, have greater influence over Government and political institutions worldwide and they are savvier about using the latest technology to perpetuate and cover their crimes.

Signing up to international conventions and adopting new legislation will do no good unless the measures we embrace are fully applied – and that is the fundamental truth we must take on board. We have to recognise that it is the work of criminal networks to try and defeat the law – and as long as there is a lack of political will, or a lack of capacity, to implement legislation fully and effectively, criminals will find ways to circumvent our efforts.

In our increasingly integrated economies, regional cooperation is critical to the war on organised crimes. We need police cooperation and judicial cooperation at the regional level if we are to make progress. We need to help each other in the region build honest incorrupt institutions that are truly committed to fighting this vice. We must cooperate regionally and globally in building strong police services, creating more effective judiciaries and transforming Customs services.

These efforts would not only protect us from the criminal networks but also help attract investment. We all agree that without property-law properly enforced, no investor will come to our economies. That is the reality, and that is what we must seek to deal with.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my hope that the report<sup>1</sup> being launched today will direct us towards better ways of equipping our people and our institutions to tackle these problems. I hope conference participants will come up with credible and workable suggestions on how we can take organised criminals head-on and defeat them.

History shows us that the price paid by nations which have flirted with crime is a high one. They have become captive to criminal elements, and have suffered perpetual instability.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is a road we do not wish to travel. This one battle we cannot afford to lose. I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Gastrow, "Termites at Work: A Report on Transnational Organized Crime and State Erosion in Kenya," New York: International Peace Institute, October 2011. Available at [www.ipinst.org](http://www.ipinst.org)