

UPF Vienna, Austria: Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations Web Conference

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Vienna, Austria -- On October 15, 2020, the Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations held a web conference titled "Social Harm of Organized Crime on Communities." The conference had 82 attendees from 22 countries. UPF is a founding partner and member of the Coalition.

Dr. Michael Platzer (*Co-chair, Coalition of Faith-Based Organizations*), moderator for the panel, explained that the webinar is a hybrid/in-person format due to Covid-19, and that it is being held as a side event to a major program organized by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Austria. Dr. Platzer pointed out that the pandemic crisis has allowed criminal activity to increase.

Dr. Karin Bruckmüller (*University Professor at the Sigmund Freud University in Vienna*) welcomed the participants on behalf of the Faculty of Law at the University. This is a very important topic not only for the communities but for the victims. International criminal law and prevention of human trafficking are major focuses of the university, as well as the prevention of organized crime. Dr. Bruckmüller praised the panel and its efforts to raise awareness of the serious impact of trafficking and organized crime on society.



Panelists

Don Luigi Ciotti (*Italian priest and activist; Founder of the Libera Association*) was the first speaker. Despite the extraordinary struggles of judges and law enforcement professionals against organized crime, political and cultural support, as well as any understanding of the origins of the problem, are often lacking. There is need for a paradigm shift that recognizes how deeply the organized criminal world is intertwined with modern life. Criminal organizations, especially the Sicilian Mafia, often take advantage of religious institutions to win public support and mask their activities. Pope Francis has made rhetorical and material efforts to strip away the Mafia's ability to take advantage of the Roman Catholic Church, and

the Libera Association works worldwide to mobilize religious leaders in opposition of organized crime.

Anna Alvazzi Del Frate (*Chair, Alliance of NGOs for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice*) recognized the Libera Association's work for a transformative approach to organized crime. For example, it has advocated for laws that allow assets seized from criminal organizations to be spent on local social programs. She emphasized the fact that organized crime, through control of illicit markets, mediates a community's access to goods and services; therefore, it is necessary to account for the economic wellbeing of communities that may have relied on a criminal organization for certain needs. She expressed optimism about the panel's role in developing a more nuanced and effective approach to organized crime.



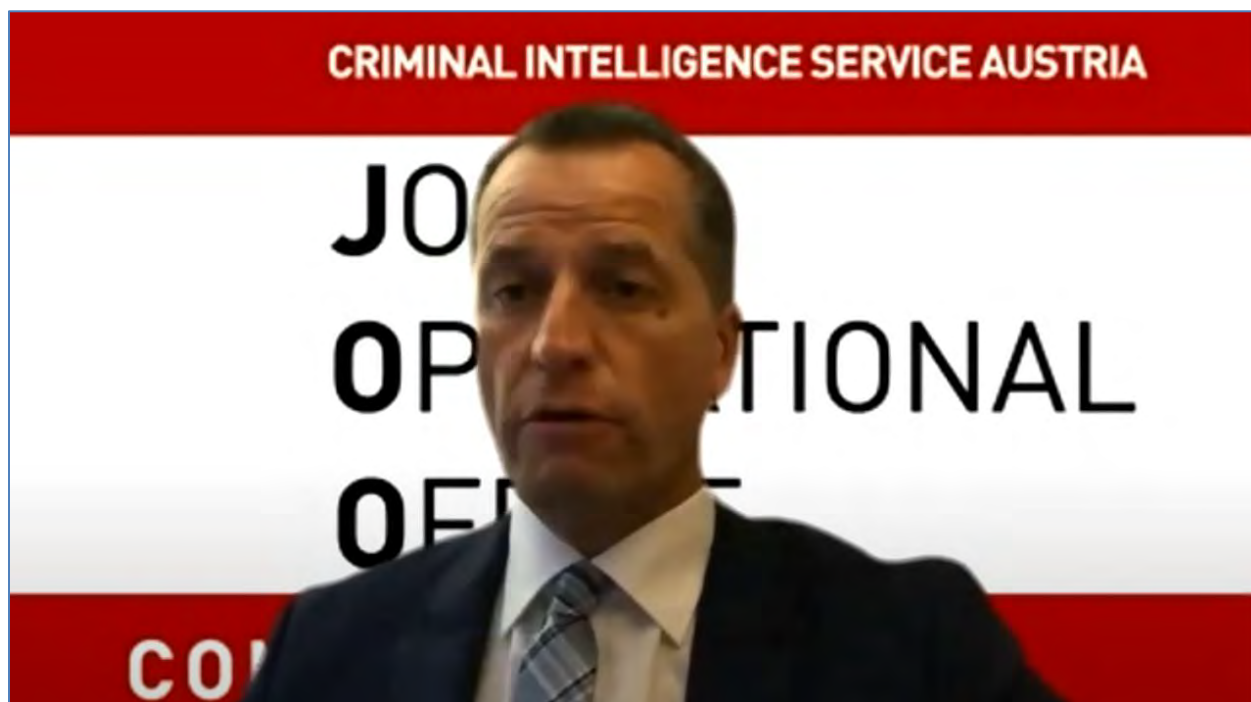
Angela Me (*Chief Research and Trend Analysis Branch, UN Office on Drugs and Crime*) followed with a data-driven presentation. Organized crime causes not only visible harms, such as violence and violation of rights, but also "invisible" harms, such as disrupting economies, skewing wealth distribution, and undermining the rule of law. Organized crime kills a million people per year globally -- about the same number as armed conflict. The incidence of this homicide is asymmetric: The majority of victims are young men, but organized crime also strongly correlates with violence against women through human trafficking and domestic abuse at the hands of gang members.



Brigadier Gerald Tatzgern (*Central Office for Human Trafficking and Smuggling Migrants, Federal Criminal Police Office, Vienna*) observed that the COVID-19 crisis has made it harder to help victims of human trafficking. Travel restrictions have made it harder for law enforcement to operate in North Africa, and social distancing requirements hamper investigation. In order to compensate for these problems, the Office has acquired technical equipment and built relationships with authorities in North African

countries. These adaptations should help law enforcement adjust to the ongoing situation.

Dr. Leo Gabriel (*Director, Institute of Intercultural Research and Cooperation, Vienna*) followed with his remarks. Organized crime develops within societies that are economically and socially unequal. The refugee crisis is a key source of opportunity among worldwide criminal organizations. The criminalization of refugee communities forces refugees into situations where they can be extorted by criminal organizations. Efforts to integrate refugee communities are much more effective in undermining organized crime than efforts to reject and obstruct refugees. Dr. Gabriel concluded by emphasizing the role that religion has to play in these integration efforts.



Evelyn Probst (*Head of the LEFO -- Intervention Center for Persons Affected by Trafficking in Women*) spoke next. LEFO provides services to women affected by human trafficking and thus she has had much experience with this issue. Poverty and social exclusion based on ethnicity are root causes of human trafficking, and thus solutions must address these issues. In Europe, the failure to recognize domestic work, caretaking, and seasonal work as legitimate occupations can obscure the situation that people who are trafficked are forced into that type of work. Further, it is necessary to break up the "culture of impunity" that shelters many perpetrators of human trafficking from consequences. She also emphasized the role of faith-based organizations in anti-trafficking.

Billy Batware (*Program Officer, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, UN Office on Drugs and Crime*) was the final speaker. He presented a new UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) video on the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). Through UNTOC, states commit to take cooperative measures against organized crime. In 2018, a mechanism for reviewing the Convention's implementation was adopted, allowing states to better assess their progress against organized crime. UNODC is in the process of building the capacities of government and non-government organizations in member states in order to ensure the effectiveness of this review mechanism.

QandA followed.

In response to a question about the relationship between human trafficking and pornography, Brigadier Tatzgern made a distinction between the commercial pornography industry, for which there is little evidence of a particularly strong connection to human trafficking, and the black market, which very often exploits trafficking victims. Angela Me pointed to technology as an avenue for recruitment and exploitation. Although trafficking can be the business of organized crime, individual criminals also participate in the practice, making use of resources like the "dark web." To the notion that migrants have an unrealistic ideal of what Europe is like, Dr. Gabriel pushed back: Migrants know that things can be difficult, but they find themselves in situations where there is no alternative.