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**First session**

Agenda item  
20 March 2021

**Synopsis for Combating Falsified  
Medical Product-Related Crimes**

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**Note by the Secretary-General**

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime the topic synopsis entitled "Combating Falsified Medical Product-Related Crimes" (UNODC/SYN/IIE/01.3).



# Combating Falsified Medical Product-Related Crimes

unodc@thsmun.org

## Section I—Introduction

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is a branch within the United Nations dedicated to fighting against illicit drugs and international crime. Since its establishment in 1997, it has worked to improve technology across the field to better counteract illicit drugs, crime, and terrorism, while also working with member states to implement international treaties through legislation combating drugs and crime.

## Section II—Topic Background

Criminal enterprise takes many forms. Among the variety of criminal activity investigated by the UNODC, falsified and counterfeit medical products and medicines can be the most difficult to track and prosecute. Patients, especially in underdeveloped and underserved communities, suffer potential complications, life threatening reactions, or even death at the hands of products purported to be extending or saving their lives. Worse yet, given the deteriorating nature of the patient's health, it is very possible the falsified medical product will not be identified as a contributing factor to the decline. This issue can be compounded by social and political unrest, sectarian violence and so on. It is precisely for these reasons that criminal organizations make falsified medical products.

From a global health perspective, falsified medical products contribute to the epidemic of drug resistant infections. The speed by which products can be distributed around the globe complicate the issue because by the time an anomaly is discovered the product may already be in the hands of consumers. Pharmaceutical companies whose products' reputations are compromised by counterfeiting face increased difficulty in rolling out new medications and therapies. According to a 2017 World Health Organization, falsified and substandard medical products are a 30 billion US dollar enterprise, and in low-and-middle income countries suffer a failure rate for medicines of 10.5%. The 1-in-10 failure rate disproportionately afflicts nations with at-risk populations.

## Section III—Possible Solutions

There is a wide spectrum of crimes relating to falsified medical products that member states must be aware of. A vital plan of attack would have to target the illicit trafficking of the products themselves, consisting of both of the trade routes that are used across various borders and the online component that is used in selling. Manufacturing of more secure firewalls on the internet and adamant border control are necessities for solving the issue. Legislative and judicial breaches are also commonly exploited components of the illegal process, therefore, it is crucial that legal framework within individual nations and global regulations are enhanced. The confines of each member state sovereignty must be respected and comprise be made in order for a combined effort to be formulated, whether that be the formation of a group or planned advances in each country.

## Section IV—Bloc Positions

African Bloc: The effect of falsified medical-related crimes is extremely prevalent in African nations such as Uganda, Ghana, Congo and Nigeria due to negligent criminal legislation, fragile governments, and healthcare insufficiency. The region accounts for almost half of global false medicine but is showing signs of improvement and awareness in recent news. The countries stated above have collaborated in an initiative attempting to restrict the distribution and sale by criminalizing it in their legal systems.

Asian Bloc: Due to free-trade agreements between the nations, countries in the Asian bloc are major transit areas for global distribution. Certain countries have adopted amendments to deter unlicensed manufacturers, distributors, and violators of pharmaceutical regulations, resulting in a decrease of illicit maritime traffic in these areas. However, due to the lack of seizures and arrests in countries in which forged medicine is manufactured, it proves increasingly difficult to exterminate these imports without the proper resources. With the spread of technology, however, governments are introducing new ways to monitor distribution, enforce harsher laws, and establish faster drug approval rates.

Latin America Bloc: The severity of the issue has only risen in this region, with artificial products making up nearly thirty percent of the market and leading to an increasing number of consumer casualties. Corruption and poverty go hand in hand as reasons for the falsified medical products, with leaders, such as in Honduras, working with corrupt companies to sell low-quality false medicinal items and then having higher prices on them for destitute citizens. Assessments and regulations within the region are central weaknesses in the nations of this bloc.

Middle Eastern Bloc: Political instability and corruption in the region make enforcement difficult. In spite of this, the region has netted some success via Qanoon—a multi-national initiative which aims to build cooperation among nations of the Middle East and North Africa.

Western Bloc: While no countries in this bloc are free from the crimes entirely, they do have much stricter and stern regulations when it comes to the legislation against counterfeit medicine. The European Union, in particular, holds high measures in combating the trafficking and business of the deceptive merchandise. Operation Pangea was a rigid operation taken by Australia, and similarly, the United States has several judicial bodies such as the FDA for providing regulatory oversight.

## Section V—Questions That Should Be Taken Into Consideration

What regulations and laws seem to directly combat the spread of falsified medical products in your nation?

How could border security be enhanced and collaborated with both in your country and its neighbors?

How does the illicit trafficking of falsified medical products and the crimes associated affect the safety of your country's civilians?

What judicial and legislative changes could be made within your nation and then globally for all member states while respecting sovereignty?

What strategies for detecting counterfeit medicine are there in your country and how can they be extended with the global community?

## Section VI—Helpful Sites and Resources

Overview—United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime—Falsified Medical Products

[bit.ly/3bVlxCU](https://bit.ly/3bVlxCU) (Shortened URL from [www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org))

Overview—United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime—Manufacturing Of And Trafficking In Falsified Medical Products [Regulatory Framework]

[bit.ly/2PbMdH3](https://bit.ly/2PbMdH3) (Shortened URL from [www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org))

Article—United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime—UNODC Launches Guide To Combat Crime Related To Falsified Medical Products

[bit.ly/2wyS42L](https://bit.ly/2wyS42L) (Shortened URL from [www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org))

eBook—United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime—Combating Falsified Medical Product-Related Crime: A Guide To Good Legislative Practices

[bit.ly/2HHA6gF](https://bit.ly/2HHA6gF) (Shortened URL from [www.unodc.org](http://www.unodc.org))

Article—Frontiers in Pharmacology (Journal)—Combating Sale Of Counterfeit And Falsified Medicines Online: A Losing Battle

[bit.ly/2SYyUL7](https://bit.ly/2SYyUL7) (shortened URL from [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov))

Overview—Interpol—Pharmaceutical Crime Operations

[bit.ly/2vMeOvM](https://bit.ly/2vMeOvM) (Shortened URL from [www.interpol.int](http://www.interpol.int))

Article—Mosaic Science—Fake Drugs: The Global Industry Putting Your Life At Risk

[bit.ly/2uffCZL](https://bit.ly/2uffCZL) (shortened URL from [mosiacscience.com](http://mosiacscience.com))

Potential Search Terms—Counterfeit Medicine, CCPCJ, substandard medicines, Falsified Medical Products