



SEMAPHORE

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Association of Australia and New Zealand



UN Security Council Targets Maritime Crime

A warning that criminal groups are finding “increasingly-sophisticated” means of evading jurisdiction and enforcement on the high seas was issued during a first-ever debate on international maritime crime held by the United Nations (UN) Security Council.

In a briefing to the council last month, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) executive director Yury Fedotov described linkages to terrorism, piracy and illegal trafficking as he stated that perpetrators were posing “immediate danger to people’s lives and safety”.

“Two-thirds of the world’s surface is ocean, nearly all of that is beyond any state’s territorial waters and largely not subject to a single state criminal jurisdiction,” he said.

“The high seas are open for vessels of all countries, both coastal and landlocked, to support international trade and economic co-operation, contact among peoples and the responsible use of natural resources. However, in recent years the freedom of navigation is being exploited by criminal groups.

“Maritime crime by its nature involves vessels, cargoes, crews, victims and illicit money flows from many regions.”

Nonetheless, Mr Fedotov highlighted the success of the UNODC’s counter-piracy programme off the coast of previously high seas crime-plagued Somalia as well as other initiatives in Kenya and Seychelles.

In addition to advancements being made through the Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime, Mr Fedotov said the agency was:

- supporting inter-regional co-operation against criminal activities at sea
- working to secure the container trade supply chain
- combating terrorism, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, wildlife and fisheries crime, firearms trafficking and emerging crimes

“All our work at sea, where jurisdiction is complex – crime is often committed unseen and enforcement is difficult – builds on UNODC’s long experience and research expertise in addressing all forms of organised crime, terrorism and corruption.”

Mr Fedotov emphasised the need for countries to ratify and implement international commitments, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, as well as to provide technical assistance.

Foreign Minister of Equatorial Guinea Simeon Oyono Esono Angue, which presided over the council for the month of February, pointed out that in the last decade, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea accounted for 30% of attacks in African waters.

“What is happening in the Gulf of Guinea is important for all of us here,” he stated.

Although a security threat, the Gulf provides the resources that sustain Equatorial Guinea’s economy.

“This area is of vital importance for my country’s subsistence.”

The Foreign Minister asked the African Union Commission, the United Nations and strategic partners represented in the debate to support efforts to ensure peace and marine security, the fight against terrorism and piracy as well as the sustainable development of the countries in the region.

Gulf of Guinea Commission Executive Secretary Florentina Adenike Ukonga also described crime in the region “as a threat to world peace and security”.

Comprised of countries from Liberia to Angola, the Gulf of Guinea area encompasses a 6000-kilometre coastline, which Ms Ukonga called “a wide expanse of water that no country in the region can successfully patrol”.

However, she did make some recommendations, and stated: “Transnational organised crime at sea in the Gulf of Guinea region can be reduced with a better and more co-ordinated intervention at national, regional and international levels.”

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