

Taking on the global mafias

The end of the 20th century saw one of the largest outcries against corporate dominance of the global economy. The November/December 1999 protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organisation carried the message that globalisation is a dangerous phenomenon if it is not treated with great multicultural care.

According to economist Herman Daly, globalisation refers to a system where there are uniform rules in which capital and goods move at will without the rule of individual nations. Despite the many benefits that ensue from the free flow of goods and trade, often there is neglect for local, national and international laws that traditionally set and regulate standards. Globalisation does not always provide for a better future and, not surprisingly, there are endless numbers of individuals waiting to exploit the instabilities and inequalities characteristic among countries of the world. Globalisation should serve people's aspirations, not prey upon them.

In the era of globalisation, transnational organised crime has become a worldwide concern and although groups such as the Colombian cartels, the Asian triads and the Italian mafias are hardly new contenders to the scene, they are beginning to play larger roles in the international arena. New organised criminal groups also are emerging at an enormous speed, acting as networks to pursue the same types of joint ventures and strategic alliances as legitimate global businesses. The scope of their activities is broad: corruption, drug and arms trafficking, human smuggling, fraud, money laundering, and cybercrime present only a few examples of the tran-

The United Nations has declared war on international criminal networks in a new convention now open for signing by member countries at a meeting in Palermo, Sicily, a city famous for its mafia connections.

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snational crimes that threaten international security.

The roots of organised crime are deep and they frequently have powerful connections with politicians, government officials, and law enforcement officers. Criminals would rather influence and intimidate a government and undermine legitimate businesses than overtly destroy them. Once the government is powerless to fight against transnational crime, sovereignty is threatened and national social fabric deteriorates under the growing power of the organised criminal groups.

The dark side of globalisation must be acknowledged and addressed because every nation, irrespective of its geographical, political or economic situation, is affected.

Can international efforts truly dismantle organised crime? In November 2000, former prime minister Anand Panyarachun told Asean army chiefs that countries, in particular Asean member countries, must be open to new ideas because previously employed tactics could not counter new situations effectively. "The first, and perhaps the most pressing (new security issues), is

international crime," Mr Anand pronounced.

The international community requires leverage to combat the evils of organised crime. Representing the first legally binding UN instrument in the field of crime, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime will open for signature at a high-level conference currently being held in Palermo, Italy and finishing today.

The convention is a tool to help countries focus on actions they could adopt independently or co-operatively in the areas of mutual legal assistance, corruption, money laundering, confiscation and judicial measures, informal co-operation and joint investigations, and special investigative techniques.

For many countries that choose to ratify the convention, they will be entering into uncharted territory. Nevertheless, any step towards establishing protection against organised crime is positive since criminals seek out countries that have less effective regulatory and enforcement systems. Any country that does not have appropriate defences against transnational organised crime

generates an increased vulnerability to its neighbouring countries.

In this field, the new UN convention carries a bold statement, if there is a will, there is a way to win over the global mafias.

Government, communities, civil society and the private sector must unite to meet the changing dynamics of crime and develop viable solutions. "To combat transnational organised crime, a new sort of mentality must be created — one that understands and is capable of putting up organised resistance," said Pino Arlacchi, executive director of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, about the United Nations efforts in the fight against International Organised Crime. "Above all, the international community needs to act more effectively than the criminal organisations that threaten us."

Transnational organised crime should not be viewed as a single entity; the interconnecting relationships among the various offences must be recognised if these phenomena are to be addressed effectively.

To rebuild human security in a globalised world will not be an easy task but co-operatively, the proliferation of organised crime can be controlled. Can we afford to do it? Rather, we should consider whether we can afford not to do it.

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