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The *mafias* and their global plunder
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Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you to everyone for being here this morning.

I wish to thank *Libera: associazioni, nomi e numeri contro le mafie* for inviting me again to keep on continuing the path together in this FLARE initiative. I hope that in my capacity as the Director of the United Nations Interregional Crime & Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and as human being, these few words will trigger an increase of awareness of the affliction of organized crime in our societies, and of their global plunder.

The United Nations as a whole, and the various agencies and institutions of the U.N. – among which UNICRI – confer enormous importance on the respect of human rights: human rights that are undermined by the acts of organized criminal groups around the world.

As crime becomes increasingly internationalized, new forms of crime emerge and organized crime spreads: drugs and human traffickers, weapon smugglers, money launderers and human organs brokers are riding the globalization process to fulfil their own goals and to spread their turnover.

Transnational organized crime leaders are experimenting new paths to make ‘quick big money’. It is a real cancer to development and peace and it is extending like a worldwide octopus. The magic formula finds its root on two major pillars.

The first pillar, dictated by the globalization of the markets, is represented by decentralized administration. Indeed, where national governments were not able, or did not want, to control and regulate the market we may find savage capitalism. Due to the deregulation, devolution and decentralization, regional authorities are the only ones who control the process of production, thus the process of wealth and enrichment. In most cases these authorities do not have any type of control or exercise on either crime or monopoly. Despite all of this, there is one element which allows these politicians to retain their power: a distorted people’s power which feeds itself from its satisfaction – or not – of its alleged need to a hasty enrichment.

The second fundamental pillar is even more nasty, destabilizing and dangerous. Transnational organized crime ‘wins’ because it places itself in those areas abandoned

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from the control of the governments. Indeed, few governments have already given up the fight: maybe because crushed from political and administrative decay, paralyzed by ridiculous bureaucracies that are mostly created due to lack of training of officials, lack of resources and technologies, and lack of will.

Globalization, the end of Cold War and growing economic interdependence have encouraged and promoted the transformation of crime beyond borders in all parts of the world. Improved communications and information technologies increased the blurring of national borders, greater mobility of people, goods and services across countries.

Because of these, international criminals exploit freedom of movement, making it easier for them to cross borders and to expand the range and scope of their operations. As a result, virtually every region or country in the world has seen an increase in international criminal activity - as either a source or transit zone for illegal contraband or products, a venue for money laundering or illicit financial transactions, or a base of operations for criminal organizations with global networks. Many regions or countries serve all three purposes for international criminal operations.

Organized crime is a dynamic concept which keeps adapting to an ever changing environment and to new opportunities of crime. Criminal justice officials today are increasingly being asked to deal with offences and offenders whose origins and connections lie outside their country. Drugs and drug offenders are the most obvious of these, but by no means the only ones. Transnational crimes include trafficked prostitutes from Southeast Asia or the former Soviet Union; migrant workers being exploited in sweatshops or farm fields; arrays of credit cards and banking frauds; automobiles stolen for overseas shipment; guns smuggled in an effort to evade regulation; and children trafficked for use by child pornography rings. Unfortunately the list could go on.

Most serious organized criminal activities require some measure of criminal collaboration and infrastructure, and this lies behind the pattern of organized crime groups and networks. A wide range of structures exists but organized crime is known for its diversity, flexibility and capability to quickly take advantage of new opportunities. Some serious organized criminals belong to established groups with clear hierarchies and defined roles, but many are part of looser criminal networks and collaborate as necessary to carry out particular criminal ventures. Such contacts are reinforced by links of kinship, ethnicity, or long association.

What is shocking is that criminal organizations, today, are increasingly working together because have soon realized that it is more profitable to work in cooperation rather than in competition.

Let me give some relevant examples of the major international criminal organizations:

Russian Organized Crime

The Russian, together with the Italian Mafia is considered the most powerful criminal organization in the world. Russian organized criminal groups, or *Russkaya Mafiya* appeared in the former Soviet Union territories after its disintegration in 1991. The Russian Mob's own members are well known to call their crime group *organizatsiya* ("The Organization"). Indeed, during the economic disaster and mass emigration of the 1990s, many former government workers turned to crime because desperate for money while others joined the large numbers of Soviet citizens who moved overseas - primarily to the United States. The Mafia became a natural extension of this trend: former KGB agents, sportsmen and veterans of the Afghan and Chechen wars finding themselves jobless but with experience in areas which could prove useful in crime, joined the increasing crime wave.

Russian Organized Crime is present worldwide – although primarily in the U.S. - and active in different areas, such as fraud, money laundering, extortion, drug trafficking and counterfeiting. These groups keep their circles of criminal associates tight, sticking to family members or people coming from the same city overseas. Usually, when organization members get arrested, they often just make bail and flee back home.

The criminal groups often target on their own people, not only intimidating them with violence but also threatening to have their families hurt back home.

Japanese Organized Crime

In the era of globalization and in which conformity is highly valued, the Japan's native organized crime group, the **yakuza**¹, deliberately refuses to be "hammered down," referring to the frequently quoted national proverb, "The nail that sticks up must be hammered down."

Current yakuza members fall under three general categories: *tekiya* (street peddlers), *bakuto* (gamblers), and *gurentai* (hoodlums). The peddlers and gamblers trace their roots back to the 18th century while the hoodlums came into existence after World War II when the demand for black market goods created a booming industry.

Yakuza members are proud to be outcasts, indeed, the word *yakuza* reflects the group's self-image as society's rejects: in regional dialect *ya* means 8, *ku* means 9, and *sa* means 3, numbers that add up to 20, which is a losing hand in the card game *hana-fuda* (flower cards). Thus, the yakuza are the "bad hands of society."

In Japan there are 110,000 active members divided into 2,500 families.

¹ The origin of the yakuza is a matter of debates:

1. descendents of the 17th-century *kabuki-mono*, also known as *hatamoto-yakko* (servants of the shogun): they eventually shifted their focus from community service to theft and mayhem;
2. Modern yakuza members refute this theory and declare themselves to be the descendents of the *machi-yokko* (servants of the town) who protected their villages from the disobedient *hatamoto-yakko*.

The official yakuza history portrays the group's ancestors as heroes who stood up for the poor and the defenseless, just as Robin Hood helped the peasants of medieval England.

The yakuza have a firm and long-standing political alliance with Japan's right-wing nationalists. In addition to the typical vice crimes associated with organized crime everywhere, the yakuza are well ensconced in the corporate world. Their influence extends beyond Japanese borders and into other Asian countries, and even into the United States.

The yakuza's offences and crimes reach into many different areas, above all corporate extortion, gambling, smuggling, loan sharking, money laundering, narcotics, real-estate, sports, entertainment, stock manipulation, tourist scams, sex tours, prostitution, slavery, pornography, and gun running. Internationally the Japanese Mafia is mostly active in drug trafficking and arms smuggling. As an example, the Yakuza smuggles crystal methamphetamine into the United States and smuggles back firearms to Japan. In Latin America, Japanese Organized Crime is most notably in the illegal immigration business in Mexico and Peru.

Italian Mafia in the Balkans

Because of the geographical proximity to the Balkans, the Italian mafia has become the dominant force of organized crime in the Balkans. Its areas of activity are mostly connected to trafficking, ranging from illegal weapons and immigrants to drugs and counterfeit products. The main shipping routes for this trade passes through Albania and Apulia, a province in the south-east of Italy.

The Mexican Mafia

The Mexican Mafia, also referred to as La eMe, (Spanish for the letter "M"), was formed in 1957 by Chicano street gang members incarcerated at the Deuel Vocational Institution in Tracy, California.

The Mexican Mafia's headquarters are located in San Antonio, but its members reach across several jurisdictions, including California, Arizona, Corpus Christi, El Paso, Houston, Dallas, and Midwestern and southern Texas.

In 1992, membership within prison was hovering at 700, while in 1998 it was just under 1,500. Today it continues to rise. Outside of prison, La EME is still very threatening because responsible for 10% of San Antonio's total homicide rate, and an estimated 30,000 total members across the United States.

The Texas branch identifies itself as "Mexikanemi," (Soldiers of Aztlan), or La EMI, while the California branch identifies itself as La EME although they both operate by the same broad title. In addition, southern California's branch of the Mexican Mafia calls itself the Surenos (or Sur-13), as opposed to the Nuestra Familia's subdivision in northern California, the Nortenos.

The Mexican Mafia is a 'criminal organization' that works 'in any criminal aspect or interest for the benefit and advancement of Mexikanemi. They deal in drugs, contract killings, prostitution, large-scale robbery, gambling, weapons and they declare that the only punishment approved by the organization is death².

The Mexican Mafia operates on a paramilitary structure, with a president, vice president, and numerous generals, captains, lieutenants and sergeants. Below we may find soldiers, also known as *carnales*, as well as suppliers and associates - whose activities are overseen by the generals. Only one general operates in the federal prison system, while another one operates in the state prison system. The state general appoints a committee of lieutenants and captains who command prison units across the entire state³.

Mexican Mafia members exercise their influence in both federal and state prison systems through either violence, or the threat of violence. Members of the gang remain loyal to the criminal organization both in and outside of prison, and particularly in Southern California cities such as Los Angeles and San Diego.

High-ranking members of the Mexican Mafia even when locked in private cells for 23 hours a day, are still able to communicate with their associates, through several methods ranging from tapping in code on prison plumbing pipes to smuggled letters. The primary rivals of the Mexican Mafia are Nuestra Familia. Mexican Mafia is also a rival of the Black Guerilla Family prison gang, which holds a loose alliance with Nuestra Familia.

As visible from the above mentioned examples, organized crime is a threat to States and societies, eroding human security and the fundamental obligation of States to provide for law and order. It has profound social, economic and political consequences.

² According to Robert Fong (1990), the Mafia's Constitution outlines 12 principal rules.

1. Membership is for life, meaning "blood in, blood out."
2. Every member must be prepared to sacrifice his life or take another's life at any time when required
3. Every member shall strive to overcome his weakness to achieve discipline within the MEXIKANEMI brotherhood
4. Never let the MEXIKANEMI down
5. The sponsoring member is totally responsible for the behavior of the new recruit. If the new recruit turns out to be a traitor, it is the sponsoring member's responsibility to eliminate the recruit
6. When disrespected by a stranger or a group, all members of the MEXIKANEMI will unite to destroy the person or the other group completely
7. Always maintain a high level of integrity
8. Never release the MEXIKANEMI business to others
9. Every member has the right to express opinions, ideas, contradictions and constructive criticisms
10. Every member has the right to organize, educate, arm, and defend the MEXIKANEMI
11. Every member has the right to wear the tattoo of the MEXIKANEMI symbol
12. The MEXIKANEMI is a criminal organization and therefore will participate in all aspects of criminal interest for monetary benefits (Constitution of the Mexican Mafia of Texas).

³ Source: San Antonio Express-News, citing a 2005 trial.

It compromises the normal function of economic, government and social institutions. Organized crime can undermine democratic processes and corrode trust in public institutions. It is driven by greed and perpetuates itself through addiction, enslavement and the exploitation of human vulnerability.

Serious organized criminals have an excellent and dynamic understanding of criminal markets and are quick to respond to threats from law enforcement measures or rivals and to seize and create money-making opportunities. The current nature of organized crime requires a global response, through increased international cooperation. The collective response to organized crime first and foremost depends on the consolidation and strengthening of national responses and international cooperation which must work alongside

Despite the above mentioned fast and ever-changing forms of crime emerging in our societies and the spread of the results that every day we citizens have to suffer, I still see a lack of sense of urgency to the response to organized crime thus making our efforts sometimes weak and ineffective. On the contrary, the best forces like public opinion, civil societies, political institutions and economic power have effectively joined their will and their capacity where a sense of clear and present danger was perceived. There is no worse vulnerability than that of a person, of an enterprise, of a trade union, of a government unaware of the real impact of crime.

But what is behind all this? Money! Money is the key and common denominator to all organized criminal groups; it is the major fuel of the engine of this global plunder: it is the ultimate aim of all criminal groups.

2008 is the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This should remind us of the serious commitments which the international community has taken without forgetting that these organized crime groups too often take heavy toll in order to make quick big money: human beings.

We shall never forget victims of these *mafias*: we shall always put the people at the centre of what we do.

Thank you