

ISTRTEMUN'25

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office on drugs and crime
UNODC

**Drug Trafficking and Crime Control
in South America**

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Letter From Secretary General

Dear friends,

Welcome to ISTRTEMUN'25.

I won't fill this letter with big, formal words—because at the end of the day, what matters to me is that you feel supported, seen, and heard throughout this conference.

As your Secretary-General, I'm not just someone who opens and closes sessions. I'm someone you can come to when things get confusing, stressful, or even just a little too much. I'll be around—not just with my title, but with my heart and my time.

I truly hope this conference gives you something special. A moment of growth, a new friend, a good debate—whatever it is, may it stay with you after all of this is over.

I'll be just around the corner. You don't have to ask twice.

With all sincerity,
Hacı Ömer Gündoğdu
Secretary-General of ISTRTEMUN'25

Letter from Head of Academy

Dear Esteemed Delegates,

It is my utmost pleasure to welcome you to **ISTRTEMUN'25**. As the Head of Academy, I am thrilled to see a new generation of global thinkers, diplomats, and changemakers join us for this unforgettable journey of negotiation, collaboration, and critical thought.

Model United Nations is more than just a simulation—it is a unique platform where diverse perspectives converge to address the most pressing global challenges. This year, we have curated a set of thought-provoking and timely **agenda items**, carefully designed to reflect the complexity of the international landscape. From labor rights in the post-conflict world to economic resilience and futuristic global governance, each topic has been chosen to challenge and inspire you.

This academic preparation would not have been possible without the relentless dedication of our **Under Secretaries-General** and **Academic Assistants**, who worked tirelessly to develop insightful study guides. Their passion and commitment have laid the foundation for an exceptional conference experience, and I extend my sincere gratitude to each of them.

On behalf of the entire academic team, I welcome you once again to ISTRTEMUN'25. We look forward to seeing your ideas come to life in committee.

Warmest regards,
İbrahim Gülşeni Katman
Head of Academy
ISTRTEMUN'25

Letter From Under Secretary General

Dear Delegates,

It is a true honor to welcome you to the UNODC committee. You are here to tackle one of the world's most difficult challenges: drug trafficking and organized crime. These are not just political problems; they are human ones. Lives are lost, communities are shaken, and justice is tested every day. But I believe in the power of young minds and fresh ideas. Your voices matter. Your perspectives can shape the future. I am genuinely looking forward to seeing the solutions you bring to the table with hope, care, and courage.

Wishing you a meaningful and inspiring session.

With warmest regards,

Ahmet şehirli.

Introduction to Committee



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime. UNODC has approximately 500 staff members worldwide. Its headquarters are in Vienna and it has 21 field offices as well as a liaison office in New York. UNODC relies on voluntary contributions, mainly from governments, for 90 per cent of its budget. The three pillars of the UNODC work programme are:

- Research and analytical work to increase knowledge and understanding of drugs and crime issues and expand the evidence-base for policy and operational decisions;
- Normative work to assist States in the ratification and implementation of the international treaties, the development of domestic legislation on drugs, crime and terrorism, and the provision of secretariat and substantive services to the treaty-based and governing bodies;
- Field-based technical cooperation projects to enhance the capacity of Member States to counteract illicit drugs, crime and terrorism.

In 1998 the General Assembly gave UNODC the mandate to publish "comprehensive and balanced information about the world drug problem." Since then, the international community has recognized the importance of detailed, factual and objective information to the field of international drug control.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has published such assessments annually since 1999. This year UNODC introduces its first two volume edition of the World Drug Report, which merges the former Global Illicit Drug Trends publication and the World Drug Report. The consolidation of the two reports is designed to increase the breadth of analytical coverage, while maintaining the annual frequency of statistical output. The first volume covers market trends and provides in depth long term trend analysis, the second volume compiles detailed statistics on all of the drug markets. Together they provide the most complete picture yet of the international drug problem.

The aim of the present Report remains the same as previous years: to contribute to annual assessments by presenting supply (production and trafficking) and demand statistics and analysis on the evolution of the global illicit drug problem. However, by presenting a thorough consideration of the status of the world drug situation and through the presentation of long term trends, this year's report goes further than ever in providing an assessment of the world drug situation.

As in previous years, the present Report is based on data obtained primarily from the annual reports questionnaire (ARQ) sent by Governments to UNODC in 2003, supplemented by other sources when necessary and where available. Two of the main limitations herein are: (i) that ARQ reporting is not systematic enough, both in terms of number of countries responding and of content, and (ii) that most countries lack the adequate monitoring systems required to produce reliable, comprehensive and internationally comparable data. National monitoring systems are, however, improving and UNODC has contributed to this process over the last few years. (For more information on data sources and limitations please consult the Methodology section at the end of the report.)

Introduction to the Agenda Item



Drug Trafficking and Crime Control in South America;

This topic deals with the drug trade, which is a serious problem in many countries of South America, and the fight against the crimes that this trade leads to. The region is one of the major producers of drugs worldwide, with Colombia, Peru and Bolivia in particular having a large share in the production of cocaine. Drug cartels, combined with factors such as poverty and organized crime, further complicate this problem. Moreover, this trade has become an issue that affects not only countries in South America, but the whole world.

The production and consumption of cocaine, marijuana and other drugs is widespread, especially in countries such as Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. Drug trafficking has increased the power of organized crime syndicates and cartels and deepened security challenges in the region. The spread of drug trafficking has serious social and economic impacts on local populations. Increasing drug addiction has led to health problems, rising unemployment rates and decline in areas such as education.

Drug cartels have also led to violence that undermines state authority. In countries such as Colombia, drug cartels have caused civil war-like conflicts and directly affected the population. This situation seriously threatens security in the region. Drug cartels also lead to violence that undermines state authority. In countries like Colombia, drug cartels have caused civil war-like conflicts and directly affected the population. The fight against drug trafficking and crime is part of global security and health policies, not just South American ones. It requires the cooperation not only of states in the region, but also of countries around the world. In addition, combating the drug trade poses a number of important challenges, such as how to ensure economic development, public health and social peace.

Drug Trafficking in South America: Origins and Early Years



Where Did This Come From? – The Origins

Drug trafficking in South America didn't just suddenly begin one day. It has deep historical, cultural, and economic roots that go back hundreds, even thousands of years especially in countries like Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia. These countries are located in the Andes Mountains, where a special plant called the coca plant naturally grows.

The Coca Plant: Not Always a “Drug”: For the Indigenous peoples of the Andes such as the Quechua and Aymara coca was not considered a drug. In fact, it was a sacred plant used in traditional medicine, rituals, and daily life. They even would chew the leaves or make them into tea. This helped reduce hunger, pain, and fatigue and it was especially helpful at high altitudes, where oxygen is thin, because coca helped them breathe more easily and stay energized.

So for thousands of years, coca was completely legal and culturally accepted. It was even offered to the gods in ancient ceremonies.

The Turning Point; How Cocaine was Born: Everything started to change in the late 1800s. Firstly scientists in Europe figured out how to chemically extract cocaine from coca leaves. Cocaine was a strong stimulant that affects the brain and makes people feel very alert, energetic, and confident but it also had dangerous side effects and is highly addictive.

At first, cocaine wasn't even legal in some places. It was used in medicine and even in Coca-Cola (yes, that might be surprising but the original formula had a small amount of cocaine). But very quickly, governments realized it was harmful and started to ban it. Even though it became illegal, people in North America and Europe didn't stop wanting it. In fact, the opposite happened: demand increased in the 20th century. This created a big business opportunity: people in South America had the coca plants, and people in the U.S. and Europe wanted cocaine. That's when trafficking the illegal growing, making, and selling of drugs began to develop.

Demand Means Business – The Early Years

By the mid-1900s, the world had changed a lot especially in wealthy countries like the United States and parts of Europe. In those places, many people started using recreational drugs (drugs used for fun or escape, not for medical reasons). One of the most popular and powerful drugs was cocaine.

In the 1950s and 60s, more people in the U.S. and Europe started using drugs at parties, in music scenes (like rock and roll and later disco), and in nightlife culture. Cocaine became known as a “glamorous” drug used by celebrities, rich people, and even some politicians and businessmen. It was seen as cool and energizing, even though it was dangerous.

As demand for cocaine increased, someone had to produce and supply it and South America was the perfect place for that, because the coca plant grows naturally there.

At first, the cocaine trade wasn't controlled by big organizations. It started on a small scale: Firstly the poor farmers, mostly in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia, grew coca plants because it was more profitable than legal crops like coffee or corn. Then the coca leaves were then sold to local smugglers, who used simple tools to make a basic form of cocaine paste.

These smugglers would hide the product and find ways to sneak it across borders, usually by foot, boat, or mule. Back then, the trade was not well organized. It was more like a chain of small, separate operations and no one had full control over the system.

In the 1970s, everything changed. The global demand for cocaine has exploded, especially in the U.S. Prices rose sharply, and huge profits became possible.

Criminals saw an opportunity to take control of the drug supply chain — from farming to production to smuggling and distribution. This led to the rise of drug cartels large, powerful, and violent criminal organizations. These cartels were not just a bunch of gangsters. They were like corporations, with leaders, soldiers, accountants, and international contacts.

The Influence of Cartels on the South American Drug Trade

There were several conditions in South America helped the cartels grow:

Geographic Advantage: The coca plant grows best in the Andes, giving countries like Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia a natural monopoly.



Weak Government Presence: Rural areas lacked strong state control, allowing illegal coca cultivation and drug labs to operate with little interference.

Poverty and Inequality: Farmers were often poor and desperate. Coca was far more profitable than legal crops like coffee or corn, which barely covered basic living costs.

Corruption and Fragile Institutions: Police, politicians, and local officials were underpaid and easily bribed. In some regions, the state had no real control.

All of this created the perfect environment for organized criminal groups to take over.

As the profits skyrocketed, larger groups emerged to take full control of the supply chain from coca leaf collection to drug processing, trafficking, and exportation. These groups became what we now call drug cartels.

As the cartels grew stronger, they began to challenge the state itself. In Colombia, the Medellín Cartel launched a terror campaign in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They assassinated judges, politicians, and journalists. They bombed police stations and even downed a commercial airplane to kill a presidential candidate. For a time, they were more powerful than the government in certain regions.

Cartels also began to influence elections, bribe top officials, and create their own "narco-governments" in areas they controlled. The line between the legal world and the criminal world blurred.

Over time, the cartel model spread beyond Colombia. Mexican cartels began to dominate smuggling routes into the United States. New players emerged in Brazil, Venezuela, and even in Africa and Europe. But the Colombian cartels of the 1980s set the blueprint: full control of production, brutal enforcement, deep corruption, and international reach.

Economic Effects



The economic impact of drug cartels in South America is complicated. On the surface, the drug trade has brought money, jobs, and development to areas that were previously very poor and isolated. For many small farmers, especially in rural Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, growing coca became the only realistic way to make a living. Legal crops like coffee or maize simply didn't pay enough to survive, while coca offered quick and stable income.

In some regions, cartels even acted like employers buying coca at high prices, providing tools, or offering loans to farmers. This illegal economy became a lifeline for entire communities, especially where government support was missing. Some small towns saw new buildings, roads, and businesses, all funded by drug money.

However, this short-term gain came with serious long-term problems. Since the drug trade operates outside the law, the money earned is often laundered, hidden, or invested in other criminal activities. Local businesses struggle to compete with cartel-backed enterprises, and economic inequality often gets worse. Most importantly, because this money isn't taxed or reported, governments lose revenue that could be used for education, healthcare, or infrastructure.

In the end, cartel-driven economies may look active or even rich, but they are unstable, unsustainable, and dependent on crime. This makes real, legal development much harder in the long run.

Political Effects

The influence of drug cartels on politics in South America has been profound and deeply damaging. As cartels grew wealthier and more powerful, they didn't just stay in the shadows; they began to directly influence the political systems of the countries where they operated. Their goal was simple: protect their operations and avoid punishment.

One of the main tools cartels use is corruption. In countries like Colombia and Mexico, it became common for cartels to bribe police officers, military personnel, judges, and politicians at both the local and national levels. Sometimes these bribes were accepted out of greed; other times, officials were forced to cooperate under threats of violence. In many regions, it became difficult to tell where the government ended and the cartel began.

In more extreme cases, cartels have used terrorism and assassination to get their way. In the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia saw a wave of political violence led by the Medellín Cartel under Pablo Escobar. The cartel bombed public buildings, assassinated presidential candidates, judges, and journalists, and even forced changes in national law through fear. The violence reached such a level that parts of the country were ungovernable.

This has serious long-term consequences. Political institutions lose credibility, and public trust disappears. When people believe the system is corrupt or that their leaders are controlled by criminals, democracy weakens. It becomes harder to pass laws, enforce justice, or protect citizens. In some areas, cartels effectively become shadow governments, offering protection or "justice" in return for loyalty.

In short, the rise of drug cartels in South America has undermined the rule of law, weakened democratic institutions, and made true political progress far more difficult.

Sociological Effects

The sociological effects of drug cartels in South America are deep, long-lasting, and often invisible to outsiders. These effects shape the way people live, think, and interact within society and they can affect entire generations. One of the most devastating consequences is the normalization of violence. In areas controlled by cartels, people grow up surrounded by murder, kidnapping, extortion, and war between rival gangs. Children may witness shootings or know people who have been killed. Over time, this leads to desensitization where violence becomes a part of everyday life, and fear becomes constant.

Cartels also affect how people see power and success. In many poor neighborhoods, cartel leaders are seen as local heroes because they are rich, confident, and powerful. While governments may be absent or corrupt, cartels often provide jobs, food, and even build schools or churches. This confuses moral boundaries and makes it harder for young people to see crime as wrong especially when legal paths to success are blocked by poverty and inequality.

Families and communities also suffer. Many people are forced to leave their homes due to violence or threats, becoming internal refugees. Others lose family members to prison, addiction, or death. Fear silences communities. People didn't speak out against cartels, even when they were victims. This leads to isolation, mistrust, and broken social bonds.

In urban areas, the influence of cartels has helped fuel youth gangs, drug addiction, and street violence. In rural areas, entire communities become economically dependent on coca farming, making it hard to switch to legal crops without support. Ultimately, drug cartels don't just control land or money they reshape culture, identity, and hope. Breaking free from their influence requires more than just police action; it demands education, opportunity, and rebuilding trust in a system that many people no longer believe in.

Cartels that Played a Pivotal Role in Shaping the Drug Trafficking Landscape:

When we talk about the drug trade in South America and beyond, it's important to understand that not all cartels are the same. Some groups came and went without leaving much behind, but a few were so powerful, so violent, and so influential that they completely changed how the drug trade worked not just in their countries, but worldwide.

Some cartels used extreme violence to create fear and control, while others preferred quiet bribery and deep corruption. Some focused on the U.S. market, while others reached into Europe, Asia, and even Africa. But all of them, in their own way, helped shape the modern global drug trafficking system.

Here are some of the most pivotal cartels:

Colombian Cartels

Medellín Cartel

Founded and led by Pablo Escobar in the late 1970s, this was one of the most powerful and violent cartels in history. At its peak, it controlled up to 80% of the world's cocaine trade. Escobar became one of the richest men on Earth and launched a reign of terror that included assassinations of politicians, bombings, and a war with the Colombian state. The Medellín Cartel showed the world how drug money could buy not just power but entire systems.

Cali Cartel (Colombia)

While not as flashy or brutal as the Medellín Cartel, the Cali Cartel was just as dangerous and even more sophisticated. It operated like a corporation, using high-level bribery, financial networks, and legal front businesses. At its height in the 1990s, it smuggled tons of cocaine into the U.S. and Europe every month. They proved that cartels didn't need bombs to take over just silence, strategy, and deep pockets.

Mexican Cartels

Sinaloa Cartel

This cartel, led for years by Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, became dominant in the early 2000s and is still one of the most powerful drug organizations today. Unlike Colombian cartels, Sinaloa had control over the trafficking routes themselves moving drugs from South America through Central America and Mexico into the U.S. The Sinaloa Cartel is known for its flexibility, reach, and ability to adapt, making it one of the longest-surviving cartels ever.

Los Zetas

Originally formed by ex-military commandos, Los Zetas brought extreme violence and militarized tactics to the cartel scene. They weren't just traffickers, they were known for massacres, public executions, and brutal intimidation. Their rise in the 2000s changed the way cartels fought wars, making everything more violent and more unpredictable.

Peruvian Cartels

"Sendero Luminoso" (Shining Path)

Shining Path originally started as a Maoist guerrilla group in the 1980s. While their primary goal was political revolution, over time they became deeply involved in the cocaine trade to fund their armed struggle.

They operated mainly in the Upper Huallaga Valley, one of the world's most productive coca-growing regions. The group protected coca farmers, taxed drug traffickers, and even managed shipments of coca paste the raw material for cocaine.

By mixing revolutionary ideals with narco-financing, Shining Path blurred the line between insurgency and organized crime, showing how drug money could fuel long-term political violence.

Bolivian Cartels

"El Cartel de Valle" or Local Cocaine Syndicates

Bolivia hasn't had a cartel as globally known as Medellín or Sinaloa, but it has seen the rise of smaller but well-organized cocaine syndicates, especially in the Chapare and Yungas regions, where coca is heavily grown.

Some of these groups are tightly connected to political elites or corrupt officials, and they act as key middlemen in the trafficking chain collecting coca paste, processing it into cocaine, and transporting it to Brazil, Paraguay, or even directly to Europe via air routes.

These groups operate more quietly and locally, but their role is essential: they keep the supply chain moving between farmers and larger transnational networks.

Cocaine Today: Its Role in Global Crime and Public Health

Cocaine remains one of the most influential and dangerous illicit drugs in the modern world. Despite being outlawed in nearly every country, it continues to fuel violent criminal networks, underground economies, and serious public health crises especially in regions with high production, trafficking, or consumption rates.

From its origins in the coca plant, grown mainly in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia, cocaine has evolved into a multi-billion-dollar global industry. Powerful drug cartels, such as those in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, use the cocaine trade to finance weapons, corrupt public officials, and control territory. As a result, cocaine trafficking is often linked with violence, political instability, and cross-border crime.

In consumer countries especially in North America and Europe cocaine use contributes to addiction, mental health issues, and overdose deaths. In recent years, the mixing of cocaine with synthetic drugs like fentanyl has led to a sharp increase in fatal overdoses. Health systems face growing pressure to provide addiction treatment, while law enforcement struggles to stop the steady flow of the drug into cities. International efforts such as Plan Colombia, U.S.-Mexico cooperation, and UN-led drug monitoring programs have aimed to reduce supply and promote development alternatives.

However, demand remains strong, and traffickers continuously adapt their methods using new routes, digital tools, and smuggling techniques. Cocaine today is not just a product of organized crime; it is a social and health issue that affects millions of people worldwide. To truly address the problem, governments must balance law enforcement with education, healthcare, and international cooperation.

Questions To Be Addressed:

1. Which measures should be taken to reduce the competition between cartels?
2. What strategies should be taken about drug use in some specific medicine?
3. How can we encourage farmers to use other crops instead of coca?
4. What steps should be taken to minimize the political connections of cartels and criminals?
5. Which methods should be followed to reduce drug addiction?
6. What decisions must be made to reduce the impact of public effects?
7. Should there be a regulation regarding the sentences of offenders convicted of crimes such as drug trafficking or production?



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