Economic and Social Council
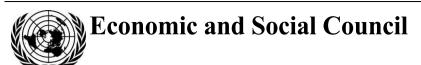
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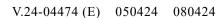Item 6 (e) of the provisional agenda[*]
**Integration and coordination of efforts by the
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and by
Member States in the field of crime prevention and
criminal justice: other activities in support of the
work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and
Crime, in particular activities of the United Nations
crime prevention and criminal justice programme
network, non-governmental organizations and
other bodies**

Report of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute

Note by the Secretary-General

The report of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) was prepared pursuant to article IV, paragraph 3 (e), of the statute of UNICRI and approved by a decision of the Board taken at its meeting held on 17–19 October 2023, for submission to the Economic and Social Council, through the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

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[*] E/CN.15/2024/1.

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Results achieved by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute

Report of the Board of Trustees

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) was established pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1086 B (XXXIX) of 1965. The Institute is an autonomous institution of the United Nations and is governed by its Board of Trustees, which provides strategic direction and contributes to the setting of priorities.

2. Within the broad scope of its mandate to develop and implement improved policies in the field of crime prevention and control, the mission of UNICRI is to advance justice and the rule of law in support of peace and sustainable development.

3. UNICRI works in specialized niches and selected areas related to crime prevention, criminal justice, security governance, counter-terrorism and the risks and benefits of technological advances. The Institute contributes to United Nations policy and operations through its specialized, cutting-edge and action-oriented research, training and capacity-building programmes. Within the scope of its mandate, the Institute serves as a conduit for channelling innovative ideas from within and outside the United Nations system.

4. Following the first formal oral report of UNICRI to the Economic and Social Council following Council decision No. 2022/338, the Council, in its resolution 2023/8, acknowledged the role of UNICRI as a valuable component of the United Nations system and as a contributor to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the same resolution, the Council encouraged UNICRI to continue its efforts to advance evidence-based and data-centric approaches to address the global challenges of transnational organized crime in its many evolving dimensions and to promote the rule of law.

5. The present report of the Board of Trustees contains a summary of the work carried out by UNICRI in 2023 in line with the UNICRI Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026.

A. Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026

6. Through its action-oriented research, needs assessments and analyses of evolving trends, as well as engagement and consultations with Member States, United Nations entities and international organizations, academic and government institutions, subject matter experts, non-governmental organizations, programme partners and beneficiaries of UNICRI projects and research, UNICRI identified the following interrelated transnational crime and justice threats and challenges in its Strategic Programme Framework for the period 2023–2026:

    (a) Rising insecurity and terrorism;

    (b) Reach of organized crime;

    (c) Role of new and emerging technologies;

    (d) Human rights abuses and exploitation.

7. Responding to the threats and challenges, the Framework contains the following five strategic priorities, which govern the activities covered by the present report:

    (a) Preventing and countering transnational security threats, terrorism and points of nexus;

    (b) Countering criminal enterprises, illicit financial flows and corrupt practices;

(c) Promoting responsible use of new and emerging technologies to address crime and exploitation;

(d) Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization;

(e) Promoting rule of law and safeguarding access to justice.

8.   The priorities of UNICRI contained in the Strategic Programme Framework support the proposed actions contained in report of the Secretary-General entitled "Our Common Agenda" (A/75/982) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with particular focus on Sustainable Development Goal 16 related to peace, justice and strong institutions. These priorities reflect the critical importance of gender, climate change and youth as cross-cutting considerations.

9.   Building upon a strong evidence-based approach, UNICRI offers an integrative programmatic framework that provides a coherent research-to-practice continuum of analysis, field evidence and data, learning, best practices, programme design and implementation and evaluation.

B.   UNICRI Gender Strategy

10.   To complement the Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026, UNICRI prepared the Gender Strategy to articulate how it will meet its commitment to gender as a cross-cutting theme and where it will focus its efforts and action for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

11.   The Gender Strategy recognizes that effective gender-specific action needs to be adaptive to diversity in people, culture and locality. The Strategy evolves and adapts to a rapidly changing world as a living instrument. This makes it ideally suited to the complex and dynamic areas of the work of UNICRI in transnational crime, security and justice, including its myriad intersections. Furthermore, tools, guidelines and resources are included as an addendum to help guide the Strategy's application and operationalize its objectives: to turn promises into action.

C.   Tools and approaches

12.   Addressing specialized niches and selected fields of crime prevention, justice and security, UNICRI continued to expand its multisectoral and holistic approach through applied and action-oriented research, exchange and dissemination of knowledge, provision of training and technical assistance, the creation of strong partnerships and policy support.

13.   UNICRI promoted action-oriented research to expand knowledge and understanding of specific problems and appropriately tailored interventions. The Institute produced multiple reports and analytical briefs on a wide range of topics, including the following:

(a) *Afghanistan's Security Landscape under the Taliban and Its Effects on Regional and International Stability*;

(b) *SDG 16: Through a Digital Lens*;

(c) *Voices of Resilience: A Gender Needs Analysis on Preventing Violent Extremism in the Sahel*;

(d) "CBRN proliferation financing: a perspective from Southeast Asia";

(e) *Handbook to Combat CBRN Disinformation*;

(f) *Guide for Policymakers for the Use of Sport for the Prevention of Violent Extremism*;

(g) *A Prosecutor's Guide to Chemical and Biological Crimes*.

14.   The research carried out by the Institute supported the formulation of targeted social and criminal policy strategies by Member States. By disseminating qualitative and quantitative data and analysing the latest trends in crime, the Institute helped Member States to raise awareness of the needs and gaps in criminal justice systems and related policy frameworks.

15.   UNICRI training and learning activities actively contributed to the transfer and dissemination of the Institute's expertise acquired through the implementation of projects and programmes under its five strategic priorities. The Institute's well-developed in-house capacity to design, deliver, manage and evaluate learning activities, together with its growing network of experts and partnerships, enabled it to organize numerous training activities in person and online.

16.   UNICRI delivered its projects and programmes at the national, regional and international levels, benefiting a wide range of stakeholders. The Institute conducted more than 50 training activities for some 1,700 trainees. These activities included, for example, the training of more than 300 staff from relevant law enforcement agencies to build capacities for the use of artificial intelligence to combat online child sexual abuse material; the training of 400 law enforcement and security officials on the mitigation of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risks and the prevention and detection of trafficking in radiological and nuclear materials; the training of 100 representatives from law enforcement and forensic agencies to raise awareness on how criminals and organized criminal groups are infiltrating the legitimate supply chain; and the training of 40 representatives of law enforcement authorities and 20 university students to raise awareness on misinformation, disinformation and hate speech.

17.   Applying the findings and lessons learned from its research, UNICRI continued to provide training and on-the-ground practical advice and mentoring in highly specialized areas relating to crime and justice. It also advised counterparts on crime and justice-related issues at the policy and operational levels to enable them to respond more effectively to specific and emerging challenges.

18.   The Institute employed various methods to enhance learning and raise awareness in the field of crime and justice, such as holding and hosting international online conferences, workshops, specialized courses for practitioners, and the annual Master of Laws in Transnational Crime and Justice programme. Furthermore, to promote cooperation and sharing experiences, UNICRI directly supported the capacity development of national stakeholders in the field. These efforts were strengthened through the Institute's publications, including its *Freedom from Fear Magazine*, policy papers and specialized materials produced through research projects, training and field operations.

19.   Through its websites, social media platforms, reports, campaigns and videos, UNICRI contributed to reinforcing knowledge of priority issues within the scope of its mandate and relevant available tools to address them.

20.   The work undertaken by UNICRI in 2023 was funded exclusively by voluntary contributions. Its primary donors were Canada, Italy, Japan, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, as well as the European Union, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and SICPA.

21.   UNICRI delivered its programme of activities through its headquarters in Turin, and through liaison offices in Rome and New York, a project office in Brussels, the Knowledge Centre "Security Improvements through Research, Technology and Innovation" in Geneva, the Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in The Hague, and the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence in Abu Dhabi, Algiers, Amman, Manila, Nairobi,

Rabat, Tashkent and Tbilisi. UNICRI participates in the United Nations system coordination mechanisms in the locations where it has an official presence.

II. Preventing and countering transnational security threats, terrorism and points of nexus

22.   Responding to global security and justice threats, UNICRI continued to work with Governments and security and law enforcement agencies across the key niche areas and nexus points to develop innovative programmes.

A.   Protection of public institutions, infrastructure and soft targets

23.   UNICRI assisted Member States in adopting measures necessary to protect vulnerable targets, crowded spaces and critical infrastructure. The continued perpetration of mass-casualty attacks on crowded and public places has demonstrated the need to further address the vulnerabilities of so-called "soft targets" by further developing effective methodologies for security planning.

24.   Applying the updated version of the UNICRI Security Planning Model and the Public-Private Partnership Handbook, UNICRI provided Member States with a new set of tools and benchmarks to measure and improve their preparedness and level of security in crowded and public spaces, considering the latest challenges faced by security-makers worldwide. A special focus was placed on integrating safety, security and services, promoting an integrated security planning approach with the involvement of different governmental authorities and the private sector.

25.   UNICRI successfully delivered training on major events security in partnership with different programmes. These included the Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events and Promotion of Sport and Its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism, the Global Programme on the Protection of Vulnerable Targets (both coordinated by the Office of Counter-Terrorism) and the regional initiative established by the Organization of American States. UNICRI contributed to organizing 12 dedicated training workshops aimed at supporting the security planning of major events in Africa, the Americas and Asia.

26.   UNICRI played an important role in enhancing tourism security by designing integrated tourism security plans and improving national security frameworks in Central America and the Caribbean, in particular in cooperation with Member States in which tourism is a significant contributor to the national gross domestic product, a factor that heightens the vulnerability of their economy and national welfare in the event of attacks relevant for public security.

27.   In addition, UNICRI supported authorities of the Republic of Moldova in improving the capacity of law enforcement authorities to manage bomb alert cases following the increased number of emergencies faced. This included training workshops for experts from various agencies, focusing on selected European best practices for the management of bomb alert cases.

28.   In 2023, UNICRI significantly increased its efforts in researching and developing effective security policies that promoted the Sustainable Development Goals, namely those related to gender equality, respect for the environment, social inclusion and the overall safeguarding of human rights. These new policies and related tools will be included in the Institute's capacity-building programme to be offered to Member States in 2024.

B.   Nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism

29.   UNICRI expanded implementation of good practices that it developed and were endorsed by the Global Counterterrorism Forum, "The Hague Good Practices on the

Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism" and the related Policy Toolkit. Using these tools as the basis for the assistance to Member States and for organizing capacity-building activities for policymakers and practitioners, UNICRI enhanced national- and regional-level capacities to identify the nexus between organized crime and terrorism and, as a result, to develop policies, strategies and initiatives that target terrorism and transnational organized crime and the links between them. UNICRI also promoted inter-agency cooperation in countering terrorism and organized crime, in particular collaboration between law enforcement agencies, judicial officers and prosecutors.

30. UNICRI initiated several research activities, including organization of expert group meetings, to continue expanding the knowledge and understanding of the nexus between organized crime and terrorism. This included research on the nexus between trafficking in cultural heritage and terrorism financing, the nexus between transnational terrorism and transnational crime in Latin America, and the nexus between food security and violent extremism in East Africa. The research carried out on these topics will allow UNICRI to expand in various relevant global regions and obtain data that can contribute to consolidating the recommendations contained in the Policy Toolkit, which are relevant to Member States concerned.

31. UNICRI, in partnership with UNODC, supported Algeria, Benin, Mali and Togo in this regard by sharing best practices, knowledge-building and skills development for national policymakers and criminal justice officials. Those efforts were aimed at enhancing national frameworks and strengthening capabilities to better understand, detect and address the nexus between terrorism and organized crime, with the goal of reducing the damaging effects of the nexus within and between the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa and preventing spillover to other global regions.

32. Through research and expert group meetings, UNICRI also prepared and published the report on "Afghanistan's security landscape under the Taliban and its effects on regional and international stability", which provided a critical analysis of the evolving security landscape in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover in 2021. The report identified key trends and examined their implications for regional and global peace, security and stability. The report detailed three major security trends in Afghanistan: (a) fragmentation within the Taliban; (b) the presence of regional and global terrorist and violent extremist organizations; and (c) the emergence of anti-Taliban resistance groups. It underscored concerns about the long-term control of the de facto authorities amid internal tensions and power struggles. The report underlined that, amidst evolving threats, it was imperative for the international community and the United Nations to concentrate their efforts on mitigating the risks posed by the shifting security landscape in Afghanistan. By providing a thorough analysis of the current situation and emerging trends in Afghanistan, this comprehensive report serves as a vital resource for informed decision-making and strategic planning.

C. Chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear safety and security

33. UNICRI continued to support the efforts of 64 Member States from eight regions participating in the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative to improve existing policies aimed at enhancing overall preparedness for and capacity to mitigate the consequences of incidents involving chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials, particularly through strengthening inter-agency coordination and cooperation.

34. In addition to continuing to support Member States in preparing and completing national CBRN action plans, which identify actions to mitigate CBRN risks, UNICRI facilitated several targeted activities in different regions, as follows:

(a) It celebrated the graduation of the second cohort from the first African CBRN Masters programme in the African Atlantic façade region. The programme equipped some 50 highly trained managers in eight African countries to advance the adoption of best practices for mitigating CBRN risks;

(b)   It implemented national and regional capacity-building interventions in Central Asia on food, water and chemical safety for stakeholders in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan and Uzbekistan;

(c)   It supported the development of a model law on medication and health products in East and Central Africa, which the African Union Development Agency is using to propose a model law for Africa;

(d)   It organized the first European Union CBRN Centres of Excellence – African Union joint forum on CBRN risks in Africa, bringing together a wide range of African Union entities, regional economic communities and international organizations at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa;

(e)   It organized a train-the-trainers regional conference focusing on medical preparedness and capabilities for response to CBRN incidents in the Gulf region, which brought together 52 health and civil defence first- and second-line responders with responsibilities for CBRN casualties;

(f)   It launched a new initiative in the Middle East region on chemical risks to address the countries' concerns arising from the explosions at the port of Beirut in August 2020 and from the chemical incident that took place in Aqaba, Jordan, in June 2022;

(g)   It organized at Niamey airport a regional field exercise on CBRN security at the border for selected countries from North Africa and the Sahel region;

(h)   It delivered, in partnership with the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, a regional workshop that helped to strengthen national implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention in South-East Asia;

(i)   It supported partnership countries in South-East and Eastern Europe with the review and development of national CBRN action plans through dedicated workshops and meetings conducted in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia.

35.   In partnership with UNODC, UNICRI supported Indonesia in identifying, detecting, disrupting and responding to the acquisition, development and use of chemical weapons by non-State actors for terrorist purposes. Focusing on prevention strategies, multisectoral cooperation and security measures, UNICRI provided capacity-building activities on chemical terrorism to raise awareness and enhance national authorities' knowledge of the complexities of chemical terrorist threats, as well as of the risks associated with chemical hazardous materials and their potential infiltration into the legitimate supply chain. This impact is expected to be evident across various dimensions, indicating a more informed, coordinated and proactive response to the evolving threat of chemical terrorism.

36.   Committed to supporting Member States in their efforts to strengthen regional security and respond effectively to evolving chemical weapon threats through knowledge dissemination, UNICRI provided technical assistance to enhance efforts by Morocco and Tunisia in preventing, through intelligence-led operations, non-State actors from planning and carrying out chemical weapons attacks. Following the delivery of train-the-trainers courses promoting inter-agency collaboration and focusing on topics such as financial intelligence, the illegal acquisition of chemical warfare agents and toxic industrial chemicals, and strategies employed by non-State actors in selecting their targets, two national inter-agency training teams were established and tasked with organizing similar training events for their peers. The training significantly improved the exchange and sharing of timely information with relevant financial intelligence authorities.

37.   With a view to fostering cooperation and enhancing the capacities of State security and law enforcement officials in executing intelligence operations to thwart attempts to traffic radiological and nuclear materials, UNICRI expanded its support in the Black Sea region (Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine), and in

South-East Asia (Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Philippines). The Institute offered advice and support for planning special operations to respond to actual radiological and nuclear trafficking incidents.

38. In South-East Asia, as a result of the assistance provided by UNICRI, trained nuclear security officers in each country successfully organized national training sessions to elevate the knowledge of their colleagues regarding combating radiological and nuclear trafficking through an intelligence-led approach. In addition, UNICRI brought together nuclear security officials and representatives from relevant international organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Network of Regulatory Bodies on Atomic Energy, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to discuss emerging threats, identify joint actions and strengthen regional coordination and the exchange of information related to radiological and nuclear trafficking cases.

39. In the Black Sea region, UNICRI facilitated the incorporation of a training curriculum on countering radiological and nuclear trafficking into the existing national training system, thereby contributing to the long-term sustainability of nuclear security training. Following regular coaching, mentoring sessions and educational support to national instructors, some regional training institutions independently conducted their initial training sessions. To enhance regional and national inter-agency cooperation, UNICRI organized regular events for intelligence, regulatory and law enforcement authorities from the three countries of the region, along with representatives of other Member States and international organizations, to share case studies, experiences and challenges related to combating radiological and nuclear smuggling in the region.

40. To combat CBRN proliferation financing risks in South-East Asia, UNICRI equipped key stakeholders in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Philippines to enhance their capabilities in investigating and disrupting proliferation financing-related activities through the timely identification of red flags, financial intelligence-gathering and analysis, and other investigative strategies. Through regional expert-level training workshops, the awareness of emerging trends and risks, focusing on cyberattacks and virtual assets and measures needed to mitigate related threats, was significantly improved. Moreover, the training by UNICRI equipped stakeholders from various sectors with essential tools to enhance national compliance with international norms and sanctions to counter proliferation financing, including practical exercises simulating real-life scenarios related to sanctions enforcement. Through this approach, which combines theory and practice, UNICRI will establish a sustainable network of national counter-proliferation experts who can effectively ensure compliance with and enforcement of international obligations and standards at the national level, ultimately improving the overall counter-proliferation financing regime.

41. To reinforce its assistance in combating CBRN proliferation, UNICRI published the report entitled "CBRN proliferation financing: a perspective from Southeast Asia" to serve as the foundation for subsequent initiatives addressing proliferation financing in South-East Asia and globally. The report provided insights into proliferation financing threats in South-East Asia, with a focus on the risk of exposure to proliferation financing. It addressed concerns such as weapons of mass destruction procurement schemes, weapons of mass destruction proliferation networks and revenue-generating activities designed to evade non-proliferation sanctions programmes. The report analysed South-East Asia's proliferation financing landscape, taking into consideration the region's extensive maritime borders, rapid economic growth, expanding financial markets and the intricate network of cross-border transactions.

42. UNICRI prepared the publication *A Prosecutor's Guide to Radiological and Nuclear Crimes*, in close coordination with over 30 subject matter experts from IAEA, UNODC, the International Association of Prosecutors, the European Commission Joint Research Centre and other partners. A series of capacity-building and training

courses on building a case for the prosecution and adjudication of CBRN crimes were developed and tested in practice in Singapore and Ukraine.

43.   Supported by CBRN experts and UNICRI stakeholders, and by collecting data and information during various global and regional events, UNICRI initiated the development of a toolkit on effective CBRN planning and response on addressing challenges following a CBRN incident. The toolkit will provide a practical planning framework that identifies, describes and streamlines key measures for policymakers and CBRN managers to plan and implement CBRN response plans.

44.   UNICRI produced the *Handbook to Combat CBRN Disinformation* to present different techniques to detect, analyse and debunk disinformation. The *Handbook*, which is available in English and Ukrainian, was tested in training sessions for government officials from Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

45.   To complement the *Handbook*, UNICRI tested an innovative table-top exercise, entitled "Krypton vs Iron", with countries belonging to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to simulate and equip participants on how to respond effectively to real-time CBRN disinformation campaigns.

D.   Crime and security implications of complex global crisis

46.   The conflict in Ukraine exacerbated security threats and political, economic, social, security and environmental fragility within the country and throughout the region. The escalating threat of hybrid activities and various forms of trafficking, including trafficking in humans, weapons, drugs and radiological sources, compromised national security in the affected countries. As a follow-up to research by UNICRI in its 2022 publication *The Conflict in Ukraine and Its Impact on Organized Crime and Security*, and recognizing the urgency of addressing the escalating security and organized crime challenges, UNICRI implemented a series of initiatives to enhance the capabilities of the criminal justice system and law enforcement and security agencies in the region, in particular in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

47.   Ukrainian authorities reported a loss of regulatory control over a significant number of radioactive materials and expressed concern that some of these materials could fall into the hands of criminal groups, thus posing a risk of smuggling and potential transactions with criminal and terrorist organizations. In response to these security challenges, UNICRI supported the Governments of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in building their capacities to gather and analyse intelligence information, with the aim of thwarting potential incidents of radiological and nuclear trafficking. UNICRI also facilitated workshops and exercises, providing relevant agencies in both countries with opportunities to meet and discuss strategies for enhancing cooperation to address these security concerns.

48.   UNICRI continued to expand its training programmes for the Republic of Moldova, including in the areas of improving the ability of law enforcement authorities to handle bomb alert cases, address disinformation and prevent and counter online drug sales. UNICRI also facilitated bilateral meetings between the relevant authorities from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine aimed at enhancing cross-border cooperation.

49.   To further improve understanding of the impact of the current situation on security in the Republic of Moldova, UNICRI conducted two comprehensive needs assessments: one on explosives for civil use and the other on the drug supply chain from production to trafficking and distribution.

50.   During the needs assessment, UNICRI identified several key areas for development to enhance the capabilities of the Republic of Moldova in addressing drug trafficking and managing explosives. In the context of drug-related issues, the assessment recognized the importance of reinforcing law enforcement capacity, including augmenting staffing levels and providing ongoing training to better address the complexities of drug trafficking. The assessment also highlighted the need for

focused efforts on the border of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, in particular in tackling the smuggling of synthetic drugs, which has intensified. UNICRI also recommended implementing an early warning system to improve preparedness and response mechanisms. In addition, UNICRI recommended enhancing training programmes and upgrading equipment to more effectively counter the prevalent issue of online drug trafficking in the Republic of Moldova.

51. Regarding explosives management, the assessment by UNICRI identified opportunities for streamlining jurisdictional oversight and improving access to legislative documents. Aligning more closely with European Union standards, in particular directive 2014/28/EU, was noted as an area for improvement. The assessment recommended clearer and more consistent definitions across legislative documents to ensure effective regulations, as well as clearly defined roles for various stakeholders to improve the efficient management of explosives. To support these improvements, UNICRI recommended developing specialized training modules to strengthen the expertise of key personnel in line with international best practices and standards.

III. Countering criminal enterprises, illicit financial flows and corrupt practices

A. Stolen public and cultural asset recovery and repatriation

52. UNICRI assisted the European Union Freeze and Seize Task Force, the European Union Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers and the European Union Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs by promoting discussion on advanced mechanisms for confiscation, supporting the spirit of the new European Union Directive on Asset Recovery, as well as a proposal to criminalize the violation of the European Union restrictive measures in the occasion of the European Union Asset Recovery Offices Platform meeting with Member States.

53. UNICRI also assisted Armenia and Azerbaijan in seeking clarification from foreign jurisdictions with respect to assets suspected of being illicitly acquired, including real estate and bank accounts, located in those jurisdictions. UNICRI managed to receive additional feedback from some of these jurisdictions and to engender a more cooperative approach to overcome the obstacles identified.

54. UNICRI provided technical support to the Republic of Moldova (specifically its Financial Intelligence Unit and its Criminal Asset Recovery Agency) to help them complete its needs assessment on information technology equipment to support financial investigation as well as intra-institutional cooperation (e.g. accesses to virtual assets databases and interoperability software that allows for real-time access to information to effectively trace and identify assets linked to individuals suspected of criminal activity).

55. Moreover, UNICRI supported the Republic of Moldova in reviewing a draft law on civil confiscation, encouraging its adoption in a comprehensive form that is consistent with international guidelines and good practices.

56. UNICRI organized a regional workshop for asset recovery practitioners from Libya and the European Union Eastern Partnership region, at which practical issues on international cooperation were discussed; this included practical measures to deal with the tracing and recovery of illicitly acquired cryptoassets, with the support of inputs from representatives of key exchanges, such as Binance and Coinbase. Consistent with the practice-oriented approach of UNICRI, operational and policymaking officials were joined by civil society leaders to discuss the evolving need to seek the input of civil society organizations in the asset recovery process – for example, to assist in identifying community and other needs that recovered assets could be used to most effectively address.

57. UNICRI also worked closely with the Libyan Asset Recovery and Management Office (LARMO) and other parties on pending cases involving Libyan assets in

foreign jurisdictions and proposed the next steps in the recovery process in multiple jurisdictions worldwide. With the support of UNICRI, LARMO published its "Good governance and transparency policy" to demonstrate Libya's improved institutional capacity and transparency in the management of seized and confiscated assets in foreign jurisdictions.

B. Counterfeiting, fraudulent goods and supply chain integrity

58.   UNICRI continued to disseminate knowledge and lessons learned related to current and emerging threats posed by organized crime in supply chain security, thus supporting the development of improved national and regional responses to combat crime in this field. In this regard, UNICRI prepared several risk scenarios that helped to define the modi operandi used by organized crime to infiltrate the supply chain of different commodities and exploit legitimate companies that fall under their direct or indirect control. The risk scenarios also present the environments that allow criminals to infiltrate their products and how law enforcement responses could be improved, including through technology.

59.   Using the risk scenarios to demonstrate how criminals infiltrate legitimate supply chains in key areas (illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; illicit pesticides; fuel frauds; and falsified medicines), UNICRI organized, in partnership with IAEA, a regional workshop in Accra for law enforcement and technology experts from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The workshop facilitated sharing experiences and obtaining first-hand information from first-line officers confronted with the need to counter these illicit activities more effectively in their daily work. Participants also discussed how recent technological advances could help address and combat such threats in these areas by supporting customs officers, field inspectors and investigators in detecting and investigating these crimes.

60.   With a view to increasing knowledge on various ways in which intellectual property infringements occur and to improving the effectiveness of national and international responses, UNICRI continued to conduct in-depth analyses of case studies on the infringement of intellectual property rights, in cooperation with the European Union Intellectual Property Office.

61.   UNICRI prepared three case studies in 2023. The first case focused on an investigation in Spain on plant variety rights infringements, the second focused on a case in Belgium on counterfeit toys sold at various fairs, and the third focused on a cybersquatting fraud case in the United Kingdom. Each case study presented a real and complete case that had already reached the last stage of the trial. The case studies included a description of the investigation and prosecution strategy, which facilitated a better understanding of how intellectual property crimes are perpetrated, how they relate to organized crime and the modi operandi used by perpetrators in both the online and physical worlds.

62.   The case studies are aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of investigative and prosecutorial strategies to counter intellectual property crimes. Since each case study provides a complete analysis, from the investigation to the prosecution and sentencing, prosecutors from the European Intellectual Property Prosecutors Network referred to the case studies as a source of reference and inspiration when conducting similar investigations. This includes, in particular, the fields of information technology investigations, digital display advertisement as a profit-making tool, establishing the scope and scale of intellectual property violations, cooperation with the private sector to secure preliminary evidence, and establishing criminal intent and using judicial cooperation mechanisms.

IV. Promoting responsible use of new and emerging technologies to address crime and exploitation

63. UNICRI continued to reinforce the capacity of Member States to navigate the risks and opportunities offered by rapid advances in science and technology, including in the areas of artificial intelligence, big data analytics, robotics, augmented and virtual reality, the metaverse and decentralized technologies.

64. To that end, UNICRI increased understanding among law enforcement agencies of: (a) risks related to the malicious use of technology; (b) use cases for the application of new technology to counter security threats and various forms of criminal activities, such as terrorism and child exploitation; and (c) the legal, ethical and social challenges associated with the use of such technology.

65. Traditional information and communications technologies and new and emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, can advance public security and safety. However, the full potential of these sophisticated tools to efficiently prevent, detect and counter crime and terrorism has not yet been fully explored. UNICRI continued to advance policy discussions on innovation in the security sector and to facilitate understanding of these evolving technologies among law enforcement and counter-terrorism community practitioners.

A. New and emerging technologies in law enforcement

66. UNICRI initiated a research study to explore the potential of new technologies in enhancing prisoner rehabilitation and to establish the ethical principles that could guide the use of digital rehabilitation in prisons, the planning for the development, implementation and continuing provision of digital resources to support rehabilitation; and the applications and systems that can be used to support rehabilitation, reduce reoffending and promote desistance. With a view to gathering perspectives and insights on the risks and benefits of introducing new technologies in prison environments, UNICRI organized several working group meetings with experts from academia, international organizations and the private sector. The final research study is scheduled to be completed in 2024, followed by testing through training programmes in selected countries.

B. Governance and frameworks of artificial intelligence

67. UNICRI, largely through its Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics, advanced global understanding of artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and the broader ecosystem of related technologies vis-à-vis crime, terrorism and other security threats.

68. Through the expansion of the AI for Safer Children Global Hub, UNICRI accelerated its work to explore the use of innovative technologies and new technological tools and approaches to protect vulnerable children online and support law enforcement authorities in integrating AI in their approach to online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Efforts to grow the Global Hub content and user base were enhanced, with the number of tools on the Global Hub growing to 70 different AI tools from 35 technology providers and the number of users growing to more than 550 law enforcement investigators from 255 different law enforcement agencies in 106 countries.

69. Expanding the Global Hub, which has become a key resource for investigators working to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse, attention also shifted to leveraging the knowledge contained in the Global Hub by converting it into a training programme made available to law enforcement agencies participating in the Global Hub. UNICRI developed a comprehensive training curriculum focused on developing knowledge related to AI and the integration of AI into investigative workflows for child abuse cases, and training courses were then delivered to several countries.

70.   UNICRI concluded a peer review of its Toolkit on Responsible AI Innovation in Law Enforcement, with 20 experts participating in reviewing the resources. A training curriculum based on the Toolkit was developed, and initial trainings were delivered for law enforcement agencies from the Caribbean in partnership with the Caribbean Community, the Arab region in partnership with the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, and Europe in partnership with the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training. The resources developed as part of the Toolkit lay the foundations for the guidance and support requested by law enforcement agencies on the responsible use of AI and equip them with the necessary knowledge and understanding to enable them to responsibly tap into the positive potential of AI, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and efficiency to prevent and combat crime.

71.   With a view to further promoting the responsible use of AI innovation in law enforcement, UNICRI, through its Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics, also attended and shared its expertise in a wide range of conferences and events, such as the AI Safety Summit in the United Kingdom, the Hackathon for Good, the United Nations Immersion Programme run by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the annual Foreign Law Enforcement Community conference in London, the CogX Festival and the AI for Good Global Summit.

C. Digital cooperation, digital inclusivity and the digital divide

72.   During the first formal oral report from UNICRI to the Economic and Social Council following decision No. 2022/338, UNICRI launched a report entitled *SDG 16: Through a Digital Lens*. The report moved away from the niches of UNICRI in justice, security and the rule of law to explore more broadly the intricate interplay between the trend towards digitalization and the pursuit of peace, justice and strong institutions. It delved into the related complexities, providing much-needed analysis near the halfway point in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and outlined a high-level vision for how to ensure that digital transformation advances, rather than hinders, progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 16. The report emphasized that Goal 16 should be looked at "through a digital lens". Failure to consider both the digital enablers and barriers of progress will only result in the international community falling short of its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals. This report, however, was only an initial contribution in terms of the research, analysis and action needed on digitalization and Goal 16. UNICRI will continue to explore the digitalization aspects of its work through research and training, with the hope that this report will also serve as a catalyst for others to do likewise.

D. Cybercrime and the use of new and emerging technologies for criminal purposes

73.   To prevent and counter the growing cyberthreats, UNICRI is committed to analysing and understanding the latest criminal activities in the dark web and related encrypted platforms, as well as the potential nexus with terrorism and violent extremism in this domain. UNICRI has sought to assess the ability and likelihood of individuals or groups motivated by terrorist and violent extremist ideologies to carry out cyberattacks, utilize the dark web and other encrypted platforms, and interact with cybercriminals on the dark web to augment their cybercapabilities. As part of this effort, in 2023, UNICRI conducted a survey soliciting feedback from 40 participants from law enforcement authorities, security agencies, international organizations and private cybersecurity companies across the globe.

74.   According to that survey, the most common cyberattacks carried out by individuals or groups motivated by terrorist and violent extremist ideologies were distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, ransomware attacks and data theft. A minority of respondents also listed malware, phishing, data manipulation and web

defacement as cyberattacks carried out by the individuals and groups in question. These attacks were carried out to spread propaganda, recruit members to join campaigns (in particular DDoS campaigns) and disrupt online services.

75.   The findings of the survey will contribute to the development of the joint report of UNICRI with the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre entitled "The digital underground of terrorism and violent extremism: exploring the role of the dark web and crime-as-a-service in cyberattacks", which UNICRI plans to release in early 2024.

76.   In 2023, UNICRI launched a new online Master of Laws (LL.M.) programme in Cybercrime, Cybersecurity and International Law to contribute to the Institute's efforts in analysing and understanding cyberthreats.

V. Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization

77.   Working with local communities, civil society and national authorities, UNICRI continued to address threats related to radicalization and violent extremism, and to understand their impacts on societies in general and on vulnerable populations in particular. This included tackling the local drivers of the radicalization of youth and gender dynamics of recruitment and radicalization.

A.   Gender-based discrimination and violent extremism

78.   Through its efforts to strengthen community and institutional resilience, UNICRI has, since 2015, collected evidence of the gendered approach of jihadist groups' propaganda and the roles of women and girls in supporting and preventing violent extremism. This evidence prompted the Institute to further analyse these elements with the aim of mainstreaming gender perspectives across prevention of violent extremism (PVE) efforts in the region.

79.   Consequently, in 2023, UNICRI prepared the research study entitled *Voices of Resilience: A Gender Needs Analysis on Preventing Violent Extremism in the Sahel*, launched in Nouakchott, to present the results of the research to the national authorities of Mauritania and other relevant stakeholders. The research was based on the collection of data from Mali, Mauritania and the Niger to inform guiding principles for future PVE interventions. Through extensive field visits, UNICRI reached out to a wide cross-section of stakeholders, ranging from community members to national and local authorities, religious leaders, security experts, representatives of international organizations and civil society actors.

80.   By gathering the opinions of local communities on issues such as the availability of services, gender roles, insecurity and violence, and PVE interventions, the study provided a unique opportunity to explore how these elements were interlinked and how concerns over the lack of essential services and fundamental rights served as drivers of violence. Based on collected data, a country-specific gender analysis of the concerns and unmet needs of the populations was carried out, with the aim of facilitating the development of strategies that are carefully designed to address context-specific resilience factors and that are rooted in meaningful consultations with women, girls, men and boys from local communities. Indeed, such strategies risk being ineffective or counterproductive if they do not accurately reflect existing relations, priorities and constraints, and how these are experienced differently by women, men, girls and boys.

81.   Based on the research findings, UNICRI prepared a context-specific and gender-sensitive training programme to be implemented in 2024 to develop effective PVE policies and programmes in the target countries. This will help civil society and State institutions to better understand the impact of violent extremism on local communities and vulnerable groups. The capacity-building phase will also train

relevant representatives to address existing grievances, local conditions and needs that could be exploited by violent extremist groups.

B.   Role of sports in the prevention of violent extremism

82.   In partnership with the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the International Centre for Sport Security under the Global Programme on the Security of Major Sporting Events and Promotion of Sport and Its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism, UNICRI continued to strengthen the capacities of Member States to develop comprehensive strategies integrating sports and their values as a tool to prevent violent extremism and radicalization. In particular, UNICRI provided Member States with a compendium of good practices and concrete examples of policies, programmes, tools and international instruments to efficiently integrate sports into national action plans to prevent and counter violent extremism.

83.   Through its support, technical assistance and grants to civil society organizations and engagement with youth-led organizations, UNICRI contributed to strengthening coherent and effective responses for preventing violent extremism through community resilience and promoting peace, justice and human development initiatives. As part of the overall evaluation process, a report was prepared based on findings and lessons learned from monitoring missions, quarterly reports and additional documentation and resources provided by grantees during implementation.

84.   With a view to highlighting the power of sport in PVE and with the intention of further broadening conversations on how sport can positively influence lives – crossing borders, generations and diverse communities – UNICRI attended several events, including the online round-table discussion to commemorate the International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism, organized by the Office of Counter-Terrorism.

85.   In collaboration with the partners of the Global Programme, the *Guide for Policymakers for the Use of Sport for the Prevention of Violent Extremism* was prepared to increase Member States' awareness of terrorism-related threats against vulnerable targets in the context of major sporting events and to promote sport and its values to build resilience to violent extremism, especially among youth. The document is expected to guide senior officials and decision-making authorities in adopting sport-based policies to pursue PVE objectives. This will ensure the effective integration of sport in strategies and action plans that foster resilience to violent extremism. Based on input from the international community, available evidence-based practice and a range of PVE and sport-for-PVE reports and research, the *Guide* will be a resource for leveraging sport and its values to impact behavioural skills and social cohesion, with the goal of preventing violent extremism.

C.   Rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders and foreign terrorist fighters

86.   UNICRI continued to support Member States in translating into national policies the generalized good practices of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, as contained in its Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders, which addresses the rehabilitation needs of incarcerated violent extremists.

87.   In that context, UNICRI worked in collaboration with MINUSCA and the National Prison Administration in the Central African Republic to enhance the country's prisoner classification system by developing a tailored classification tool and building the capacities of prison personnel.

VI. Promoting rule of law and safeguarding access to justice

88.	Working with relevant justice institutions and authorities, such as the judiciary, police, security forces and corrections services, UNICRI continued to promote the rule of law, access to justice and gender equality in all its programmes as the key to enabling the development of just, equitable societies and the protection of human rights.

A. Vulnerable populations in fragile, conflict and climate insecure areas

89.	UNICRI expanded its work to address the aggravating impact of climate change on instability, conflict and security. This included the role of climate insecurity as a threat multiplier capable of exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and producing distinctive and increased risks related to transnational crime and human rights.

90.	UNICRI and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) hosted a two-day virtual expert workshop focusing on climate security policies with a gender-inclusive approach, especially in the context of violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel. Over 30 individuals, mainly from civil society organizations in the region, participated, including national authorities, gender and climate experts and representatives of different organizations.

91.	Moreover, UNICRI co-organized a side session on climate change, peace and security in West and Central Africa at the Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi in partnership with UNOWAS, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the Norwegian Refugee Council. The session underscored the critical need for collective action in addressing the interconnected issues of climate change, peace and security in the region.

92.	Building on these discussions, UNICRI developed a training manual for a comprehensive three-day course that addresses the "triple nexus" of gender, climate change and violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel. The manual aims to equip local practitioners, policymakers and community leaders with in-depth knowledge to analyse the interplay of these factors and to devise integrated, context-specific solutions. These solutions aim to simultaneously achieve climate adaptation, prevent violent extremism and promote gender empowerment.

93.	Scheduled for validation with UNOWAS and other key partners in 2024, the manual aims to capitalize on the momentum from the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) and the subsequent Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace.

B. Criminal law and justice education

94.	In 2023, UNICRI, in cooperation with the University for Peace, delivered the seventeenth edition of the LL.M. in Transnational Crime and Justice programme, comprising distance-learning and residential phases at the United Nations campus in Turin, Italy. The cohort was composed of 33 students seeking to specialize in international criminal law, humanitarian law, human rights law and transnational crime. Within the framework of the LL.M. in Transnational Crime and Justice, the International Criminal Law Defence Seminar was organized in cooperation with the Office of Public Counsel for the Defence of the International Criminal Court. UNICRI delivered the Seminar to the LL.M. students and an additional 21 external participants.

95.	UNICRI launched the first edition of the Master of Laws in Cybercrime, Cybersecurity and International Law, organized in cooperation with the University for Peace and the Centre for Security and Crime Sciences of the University of Trento and the University of Verona, in October 2023. The LL.M. in Cybercrime,

Cybersecurity and International Law is carried out fully online and will be complemented by an optional two-week workshop at the United Nations campus in Turin in July 2024. The new LL.M. aims to train interdisciplinary experts with the necessary skills to analyse, prevent and counter cybercrimes. This first cohort is composed of 46 students seeking to acquire specialized knowledge to become experts in international dimensions of cybercrime and cybersecurity.

96. In addition, UNICRI held several courses for postgraduate students and professionals using dynamic training methodologies. These included four specialized online, hybrid and in-person courses, organized in cooperation with United Nations entities, research and training institutes and international universities, to disseminate knowledge in the areas of illicit trade, migration and human rights, cultural heritage, crime and security, misinformation and disinformation, and environmental crimes. Owing to high demand, several of these courses, featuring updated content, will be included in the Institute's work programme for 2024.

97. UNICRI further contributed to training youth in Italy on crime prevention, justice and security. UNICRI participated in a series of training courses organized by the UNESCO Club in Turin that reached over 500 students. UNICRI introduced 250 young people across Italy to United Nations peace operations in relation to its mandate areas, followed by workshops that focused on case studies on women's rights in conflict zones delivered to 200 youth in Naples and Rome in cooperation with the Italian non-governmental organization "Prime Minister".

VII. Supporting the Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026

98. The extensive portfolio of activities of UNICRI is exclusively funded through voluntary contributions from Member States and other donors. Most voluntary contributions are short-term, earmarked, project-specific funds except for the annual voluntary contribution from the Government of Italy, the host country of UNICRI. The successful implementation of the ambitious Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026 will require continued pivotal support and voluntary contributions from Member States and other donors, to whom UNICRI is grateful.

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