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**Follow-up to the Fourteenth United Nations
Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal
Justice and preparations for the Fifteenth United
Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and
Criminal Justice**

Statement submitted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC), a non- governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following paper, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* [E/CN.15/2025/1](#).

** Issued without formal editing.



Resilience in action: civil society's role in preventing and combating organized crime

A GI-TOC Contribution to the 34th CCPCJ, ahead of the 15th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Executive summary

This written submission, which draws on the five-year experience of the Resilience Fund between 2019 and 2024, is an urgent call to action to recognize and empower civil society as a critical frontline actor in the fight against organized crime. At a time when transnational organized crime is growing in complexity and reach, and when civic space is shrinking globally, the brief reflects on the tangible impact of community-based responses and outlines a forward-looking agenda for policy, funding and institutional reform.

This brief is published one year ahead of the 15th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (henceforth referred to as the Crime Congress), which will take place in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in April 2026. The theme of the Congress will be 'Accelerating crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law: protecting people and planet and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the digital age'.

This submission is an abridged version of a policy brief, which is available at the following link: <https://globalinitiative.net/>

Introduction

Since its launch in 2019, the Resilience Fund has supported over 360 projects from 285 individuals and organizations in 67 countries working to protect their communities from the harms of organized crime. The Fund was created with a bold vision: to place trust in local actors, to recognize civil society actors as frontline defenders against organized crime, and to shift the global narrative from one of vulnerability to one of strength and agency.

This reflection comes at a crucial time. Transnational organized crime is evolving and expanding at an alarming rate, and its impacts are far-reaching. It undermines governance, erodes trust in institutions, weakens the rule of law, and impedes progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is a common interest – among civil society, governments and the private sector – in tackling organized crime. Collaboration, when rooted in mutual respect and informed by evidence, can be a powerful force for resilience.

Against this backdrop, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) provides a unique and vital platform to reaffirm the importance of international cooperation. As the principal policymaking body of the United Nations in this field, the CCPCJ plays a central role in shaping the global response to organized crime. It is therefore the ideal forum to highlight the experiences of civil society actors on the ground, to advocate for community-centred approaches, and to promote resilient, rules-based systems that serve the public good. The CCPCJ is also the preparatory body for the Crime Congress. The Congress sets the political agenda at the UN for the coming years and therefore needs to take into account the latest experiences of civil society.

By learning from those most affected and supporting those on the frontlines, we can help build a more resilient, just and secure future for all.

Evolution of the Resilience Fund

When the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) was established in 2013, it was clear that tackling organized crime would entail more than mapping illicit networks; it would also require an understanding of how communities resist and respond. The notion that those affected by organized crime are simply passive victims is misleading. Even in the most violent and fragmented environments, civil society actors work with courage and creativity to protect their communities, hold authorities to account and challenge the power of criminal groups.

The GI-TOC launched the Resilience Fund in May 2019, on the sidelines of the 28th CCPCJ, with support from the Government of Norway. Designed through a stakeholder consultation in Vienna, with input from civil society, academia, media and diplomacy, the Fund was envisioned as an innovative, non-duplicative mechanism to support frontline actors working in complex, high-risk environments.

Lessons learned

Over the past five years, several important lessons have shaped the evolution and deepened the impact of the Resilience Fund, including:

- Equitable partnerships are essential and must be intentionally cultivated.
- Support must be holistic, not just financial.
- Centring affected communities transforms narratives and strategies.
- Solidarity fosters resilience.

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on these lessons, GI-TOC has developed this submission as a call to action for the delegates who will represent their countries at the 15th Crime Congress in the UAE in 2026. It is a call to recognize that civil society is not a peripheral actor – it is essential. Around the world, community leaders, journalists, youth organizers and grassroots movements are filling gaps in governance, countering the narratives of criminal groups, and providing safety and solidarity where formal institutions have faltered. The Kyoto Declaration fell short of recognizing the role of civil society in its outcome declaration.¹ There is therefore an opportunity for the Abu Dhabi Declaration to take a more supportive stance on civil society engagement.

To build a world where organized crime does not operate with impunity, we must commit to better organizing, protecting and supporting civil society. This requires a new approach, rooted in resilience, solidarity and shared responsibility. The future of the global response to organized crime depends on more than military or law enforcement interventions, it rests on strengthening the social fabric from the ground up.

The Resilience Fund offers a tested model for this approach: flexible, trust-based, and globally networked. Its lessons must inform future policy directions. Our vision is of a world in which civil society is not an afterthought, but a core actor and partner in efforts to counter transnational organized crime, and where local resilience is seen as an essential part of global security.

¹ *Advancing the Kyoto Declaration: How civil society can drive progress on the rule of law and the Sustainable Development Goals*, GI-TOC, March 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/kyoto-declaration>.

Policy recommendations

- 1. For member states: enable and invest in civil society as a strategic security and development priority**
 - **Position civil society as a frontline actor in national security strategies** related to organized crime. Recognize its role in early warning, community protection, reintegration and prevention.
 - **Institutionalize funding streams for grassroots initiatives**, especially in regions where state legitimacy is contested. This includes dedicated budget lines in national crime prevention or public safety programmes.
 - **Protect civic space and human rights defenders**. Governments that undermine civil society erode their own stability and long-term governance capacity. Legislative frameworks must safeguard freedom of association and expression, particularly in fragile contexts.
 - **Adopt a whole-of-government approach** that integrates civil society into the design and delivery of crime prevention strategies, justice reform and social reintegration policies.
- 2. For donors and international development actors: prioritize resilience-based, community-led interventions**
 - **Shift from short-term, project-based funding to long-term, flexible support** that allows civil society to build institutional resilience and adapt to evolving threats.
 - **Fund transversal work that connects organized crime to broader development agendas**, including gender equality, environmental protection, youth empowerment and urban resilience.
 - **Encourage South–South cooperation and horizontal learning** by investing in platforms for peer exchange and coalition-building among civil society actors.
 - **Embed civil society engagement in multilateral frameworks**, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) implementation reviews, SDG reporting mechanisms and regional security platforms.
- 3. For the private sector: recognize your stake and align with peacebuilding and anti-crime goals**
 - **Support inclusive local economies and formal livelihoods** that offer alternatives to criminal recruitment, especially in marginalized or post-conflict areas.
 - **Develop responsible investment practices** that include due diligence on organized crime risks in supply chains, infrastructure projects and technological platforms.
 - **Engage with civil society and local actors to enhance context-specific risk analysis**, especially in regions with criminal governance or state capture.
 - **Leverage technology ethically**, ensuring tools like fintech, AI and surveillance mechanisms are not co-opted by criminal actors and are aligned with human rights protections.
- 4. For multilateral and international organizations: reinforce civil society's role in global governance against transnational organized crime**
 - **Ensure civil society has institutionalized access to policymaking processes** in the CCPCJ, UNTOC Conference of Parties, UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and regional bodies. Space must be guaranteed, not merely invited and reflected in political statements and declarations.

- **Support the creation of protective mechanisms** for at-risk civil society actors working in high-risk environments, in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.
- **Use your convening power to connect civil society across regions**, facilitating dialogue between the Global North and South to promote mutual learning and strategy alignment.
- **Integrate organized crime concerns into peacebuilding, humanitarian and climate resilience programmes**, recognizing the intersectional impacts of criminal governance on displacement, resource extraction and ecological degradation.

5. For civil society actors: stand firm, build together

- **Continue to leverage your networks** for protection, amplification and collective advocacy. The strength of civil society lies in its connectivity and courage.
 - **Articulate a shared narrative** that counters the normalization of criminal governance and asserts alternatives rooted in dignity, justice and solidarity.
 - **Document and communicate your impact** – from community safety initiatives to advocacy successes – so that the value of your work is visible and undeniable to policymakers and donors.
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