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Topic 1: Illicit Trade in Precious Metals
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The role of the UNODC is to make the world safer through the promotion of justice and security.[1] One prevalent issue the committee addresses is the illicit trade in precious metals, in which transnational organized criminal networks illegally mine, smuggle, and trade these valuables to the detriment of many aspects of society.

Precious metals, such as gold, silver, platinum, and palladium, are immensely valuable as monetary assets, especially for organized criminal networks. Even a small amount of these metals is worth a lot – gold is currently worth more than $4000 an ounce[2] – and they are commonly accepted as valuable commodities worldwide. This makes precious metals prime targets for illicit trade by criminal organizations, as they allow large amounts of value to be moved with relatively little notice.

Many crimes overlap during the illicit trade of precious metals. In order to harvest the metals, many criminal networks utilize illegal mining tactics in order to gain an upper hand.[3] This includes illegal deforestation, pollution, and the use of dangerous chemicals, as well as the forgery of licenses, permits, and other documents. This harms the environment and societal infrastructure, and wastes resources that could be used for more positive causes. Furthermore, these conditions lend themselves to the prevalence of other dangerous crimes, including human rights abuses and dangers to public health and livelihood in proximity to the crimes.

After the illegal harvesting, the metals must be processed and transported, commonly across borders. Gold and other precious metals are commonly transferred in chemical states that are not completely refined, thus making it difficult to detect in transit.[4] These disguises make it

[1] https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/UNODC-making-the-world-safer-Oct-2025-WEB.pdf
[2] https://www.apmex.com/gold-price
[3] https://www.unodc.org/documents/Wildlife/UNODC_Response_Framework_Minerals.pdf
[4] https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/pccp/trafficking-of-minerals.html

easier for criminal groups to move the materials and effectively erase the ability to determine the goods' source.

Finally, these metals are traded for profit. Criminal groups commonly use techniques such as corruption and fraud to enable the laundering necessary to profit from the materials. Forged paperwork and misrepresented activities allow criminals to amass value, circumventing the rule of law necessary for a just society.

This is a self-perpetuating cycle: the more ways criminals can benefit from the illicit trade in precious metals, the more resources and power they accrue and devote to improving these harmful activities. The issue will only continue to grow unless active steps are taken to change the approach.

Thus far, UNODC has been active in its approach towards this and related issues,[5] including developing a response framework[6] to help understand the issues at play, and attempting to strengthen law enforcement capabilities to detect and prevent these crimes.

As delegates, there are many related issues you should keep in mind while researching this topic:

- The harmful environmental effects of illegal precious-metal mining, including pollution, deforestation, and habitat destruction.
- The utilization of illegal mining of precious metals by criminal organizations to allow for human rights abuses and labor violations.
- The widespread money laundering and fraud that these networks use to profit, and the things that enable this, such as forgery, corruption, and bribery.
- The difficulty of detecting the transportation of precious metals because of their small size, chemical disguises, and widespread prevalence (both as material and currency) around the globe.
- The danger to the lives affected by these crimes, including those related to mining, transport, and trade.

[5] https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/environment-climate/minerals.html
[6] UNODC_Response_Framework_Minerals.pdf

While researching your country's approach to the topic, please think about the following:

- What natural resources does your country have that may lend themselves to this area of criminal activities?
- What has your country done in the past to combat and address these or related crimes?
- What new ideas can be implemented to help fight illicit trade in precious metals?
- How can the international community improve its response to these wide-ranging issues, and what role can your country play in helping these resolutions come to fruition?

As you conduct your research and write your position papers, please keep in mind:

- Your views should be that of your country, not your own.
- Your papers should include citations and should not be plagiarized from other media or taken from artificial intelligence.[7]

Please reach out to me at asisser@mail.yu.edu with any questions, and I look forward to learning a lot from all of you through your position papers and our in-depth discussions of this issue. I look forward to a wonderful YUNMUN XXXVII conference!!

All the best,

Aaron Sisser

Chair, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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[7] YUNMUN follows the YU Level 1 AI policy: "Polish, with disclosure. You may use AI to check and correct the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and mechanics of text you have already written. AI may not generate, rewrite, or restructure your content." Please find the full AI policy guidelines in the delegate handbook.