Aaron Sisser
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
Topic 2: Counterfeit Medicines
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Counterfeit medicines and falsified medical product-related crime are important issues that UNODC must contend with.[1] This issue arises when organized criminal groups manufacture, distribute, and sell fraudulent medicines, undermining the legal healthcare system, disrupting supply chains, and causing dangers to public health.

Medicines, especially in recent years, have taken many forms and serve many purposes. Whether as pills, liquids, vaccines, or other treatments, millions of people worldwide use medicines to treat disease and improve their quality of life. It is this high demand that makes counterfeit medicines a great tool for criminal organizations. Illegal traders have a potential set of customers who are heavily dependent on the medicines through no fault of their own and are willing to go to extremes for the potential to receive a supply.

There has been an increased prevalence of counterfeit medicines since the COVID-19 pandemic.[2,3] From December 2024 to May 2025, Interpol seized $65 million in illegal pharmaceuticals,[4] further demonstrating this issue's pervasiveness. Therefore, the UNODC must make a concerted effort to decrease the trade of counterfeit medicines and all falsified medical products, and focus on "the protection of public health through a criminal justice response."[5]

Many problems arise when dealing with counterfeit medicines. When illicit organizations sell these medicines, they may contain incorrect ingredients, insufficient quantities (or none) of important ingredients, or actively harmful ingredients, all of which deceive the recipient into ingesting something that does not help, and may even harm them. In addition to these immediate

[1] https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/organized-crime/module-3/key-issues/falsified-medical-products.html
[2] https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/falsified-medical-products.html
[3] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9277998
[4] https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2025/Record-769-arrests-and-USD-65-million-in-illicit-pharmaceuticals-seized-in-global-bust
[5] https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/gpcd/fraudulentmedicines/introduction.html

public health risks, this also leads to these patients' symptoms worsening[6] and can contribute to a loss of trust in the healthcare system, which can lead to more risks down the line.

To manufacture these medicines, criminal organizations may use unauthorized facilities, forged labeling, and ingredients obtained through illegal channels. Transportation and sale of these illegal products often cross borders and utilize other gaps in regulatory oversight that allow these products to make their way onto the black market.[7] Online sales and falsified labels make these practices harder to detect and stop.

The demand for affordable healthcare allows these criminals to profit from their efforts. Criminals can use many techniques to conceal these profits from regulatory organizations and governments, and those profits allow them to invest more in these practices. At the same time, the outcomes only worsen for those who need medicine, legal pharmaceutical companies, and governments trying to regulate supply chains.

The UNODC has thus far worked with other organizations such as WHO in relation to these topics, focusing on the organized crime aspects of these issues, including making a 77-page guide.[8] As delegates, here are some important ideas to keep in mind:

- The direct harm to public health that these illicit activities cause, including worsening of diseases, lack of care, and preventable death.
- The lack of trust in the healthcare system that these activities sow among the consuming public.
- The negative effects these activities have on the legal pharmaceutical industry and the legitimacy of the supply chain.
- The many ways this issue can manifest, from illegal acquisition of ingredients to misrepresentation of a medicine's contents to the inclusion of harmful substances.
- The approaches governmental and international regulatory agencies can take to try to put a stop to these issues.

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[6] https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTAWestAfrica/West_Africa_TOC_FRAUD_MEDICINES.pdf
[7] https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/organized-crime/module-3/key-issues/falsified-medical-products.html
[8] https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/publications/19-00741_Guide_Falsified_Medical_Products_ebook.pdf (no need to read the whole thing, but there is lots of background information to the topic if you desire)

- The dependence on affordable medicines that improve quality of life in the public, and how that relates to these activities.

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

- What history of these activities and current border regulations does your country have that may contribute to this area of criminal activity?
- 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 the prevalent issue of counterfeit medicines?
- 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.[9]

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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[9] 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.