KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
MODEL UNITED NATIONS CLUB

U N O D C

STUDY GUIDE

ILLICIT TRAFFICKING OF HUMANITARIAN SUPPLIES DURING CRISIS

ÖMER FARUK CAN

Board member   **Board member**

Board member

Table of Contents

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to HASMUN 2025 — a journey that goes far beyond a typical Model United Nations conference.

This year, we invite you to become part of an experience built on diplomacy, dialogue, and the determination to create change. HASMUN has long stood as a platform for driven individuals to challenge perspectives, develop leadership, and speak for the world they envision. In every committee room, in every debate, we believe your voice has the power to shape not only resolutions, but real ideas for the future.

Whether this is your first MUN or one of many, we encourage you to approach each session with openness, curiosity, and commitment. The friendships you form, the ideas you exchange, and the challenges you overcome will stay with you long after the final gavel falls.

On behalf of the entire Secretariat, we are thrilled to have you with us. Prepare to question, to collaborate, and to grow.

We look forward to meeting you soon.

Warm regards,
Nazrin Sadigova
Secretary-General
HASMUN2025

Welcoming Letter by Board Member

My name is Ömer Faruk Can, and I will be serving you as a board member of our committee. I'm currently studying at the Istanbul University Faculty of Law as a senior. I hope nothing but the best for all of us participating and organising the HASTRAIN'25 as I aim to help each and every one of you with everything I've got so that we may all improve ourselves and enjoy whilst doing it.

In this train conference, some may be asking why UNODC is present as a committee since it is not one of the GA committees of the UN. The reason why international organs and specific bodies of the United Nations are set as committees in Model UN conferences is that the conference actually carries an aim towards establishing a higher and more unique level of debating and diplomatic experience, rather than being fully committed to the UNGA Committees and limiting the extent of the conference. The UNODC committee is a chance for all delegates to see the world and conference experience a bit differently from the UNGA committees, meanwhile not getting too far to lose focus from the main aim of such conferences, seeing a glimpse of the modern world and steps of politics and diplomacy. Hopefully, raising enough awareness to be able to understand, cope with, and even solve such international problems in the future, as aimed by such organisations.

As your Board Member, we would be expecting you to take up the challenge and become a part of the debates and politics that you will be participating in with your utmost efforts so that you may both improve yourself in the disciplines of MUN conferences and the world and meanwhile enjoy what you are doing to the fullest.

Sincerely Yours,
Ömer Faruk CAN
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I-INTRODUCTION (Committee&Agenda item)

INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA ITEM
Illicit Trafficking of Humanitarian Supplies During Crisis:

Illicit trafficking in humanitarian aid supplies during times of crisis is a multidimensional international problem that is increasingly gaining importance in modern international relations and security studies. Armed conflicts, wars, natural disasters, economic collapses, large-scale migration, or weakened state authority necessitate the urgent and uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need. However, this process also triggers complex economic and political dynamics that pave the way for aid misuse, manipulation, and illicit trafficking. In crisis environments, increasing chaos, the progressive deterioration of social psychology, security vulnerabilities, uncontrolled border crossings and corruption networks turn humanitarian aid supplies into high-value commercial commodities, and crisis areas emerge as areas with high economic opportunities. To summarize, regions which experiencing crisis are being transformed into areas of conflict of interest between states and non-state elements in the relevant regions, in other words, into an economic proxy war zone.

The exploitation of humanitarian aid supplies by illicit economic activities leads to the seizure of essential food products, medicines, medical equipment, fuel and shelter materials that should reach civilians by non-state armed groups, militias, small-scale local criminal organizations or public officials linked to corruption.This situation not only endangers the right to life of civilians but also seriously undermines the credibility and effectiveness of humanitarian operations in the field. Illegal aid trade sometimes becomes a part of the conflict economy and contributes to the income of armed actors by being among their sources; and sometimes it increases social fragility by undermining the trust between humanitarian organizations and local communities, eroding the sense of trust in the region.

Therefore, the issue is a sensitive and important area that must be addressed not only in terms of humanitarian aid logistics or emergency response mechanisms, but also within the framework of international security and human rights. This guide aims to comprehensively examine the structural causes of the illicit trade of humanitarian aid supplies during times of crisis, its mechanisms, and the non-state actors involved in this process.

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME:

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a key agency within the United Nations that helps countries address major global problems such as illegal drug trafficking, organized crime, human trafficking, corruption, and terrorism. Created in 1997, UNODC supports governments by offering expert guidance, legal advice, data analysis, and training programs that strengthen security and justice systems.

One of the important roles of UNODC is to collect reliable global data and publish widely used reports, including the World Drug Report, the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, and other studies on crime and security. These publications help policymakers understand crime patterns, identify risks, and design better strategies to protect societies.

UNODC also works directly in many countries through field offices. In regions affected by conflict, weak state institutions, or high crime rates, the organization provides practical assistance—such as training law enforcement officers, improving border controls, helping courts operate more effectively, and supporting victims of trafficking and exploitation. This hands-on work helps countries build long-term resilience and improve their ability to fight crime.

In addition, UNODC coordinates international cooperation by supporting major UN conventions on drugs, crime, and corruption. It helps countries work together, share information, and develop unified responses to global threats.

Overall, UNODC plays a crucial role in making the world safer by promoting justice, reducing crime, and strengthening international security. Its work combines research, policy support, and field operations to help countries protect their citizens and uphold the rule of law.

II- KEY TERMINOLOGY

1. Illicit Trafficking: The illegal acquisition, movement, sale, diversion, or distribution of goods prohibited by national or international law. In the context of humanitarian crises, this primarily refers to the theft, resale, or obstruction of relief materials by criminal networks, corrupt actors, or armed groups.

2. Humanitarian Corridors: Created routes or zones that allow the safe passage of humanitarian aid and civilians. These corridors or zones can be established through agreements between governments or UN resolutions. Their vulnerability to attacks and exploitation makes them central targets for illegal trafficking activities.

3. Diversion of Aid: A form of illicit trafficking in which humanitarian supplies are intentionally redirected from official distribution channels for misuse, political manipulation, or resale. Diversion can occur at checkpoints, warehouses, ports, or during last-mile distribution.

4. Counterfeit Humanitarian Supplies: Fake or substandard relief items—such as medicines, PPE, or food—introduced into crisis regions, often through black markets. These can have lethal consequences and undermine trust in humanitarian operations.

5. Last-Mile Delivery: The final stage of aid distribution to affected populations. This point is especially vulnerable to theft or manipulation, particularly in conflict zones or areas controlled by non-state armed groups.

6. Logistical Bottlenecks: Points in the supply chain where delays or vulnerabilities increase the risk of trafficking—such as congested ports, destroyed roads, or politically controlled checkpoints.

7. Transnational Organized Crime (TOC): Networked criminal groups that operate across borders, often involved in drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, and increasingly diversion of humanitarian goods.

8. Humanitarian Access Negotiation:
Diplomatic and logistical negotiations between humanitarian actors and local authorities or armed groups to secure safe delivery of aid. These negotiations can be exploited by actors demanding bribes or political concessions.

9. Corruption in Humanitarian Supply Chains:
Any misuse of power for private gain during the procurement, transportation, or distribution of humanitarian supplies. Corruption is often the enabling factor that allows aid diversion to occur.

10. Emergency Procurement:
Accelerated purchasing procedures used during crises. While necessary for rapid response, the speed and urgency make procurement processes vulnerable to fraud, kickbacks, and infiltration by criminal actors.

III- CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

1990s – Post–Post-Cold War Humanitarian Surge
· Increasednumber of civilwars and humanitarian emergencies led to unprecedented volumes of aid shipments.
· Reports emerged of armed groups stealing or taxing humanitarian convoys in conflict zones (e.g., Balkan and African conflicts).
· The international community began recognizing aid diversion as a threat to civilian welfare.

2000 – Adoption of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)
The UNTOC established global legal frameworks for combating transnational criminal networks—later applied to trafficking of humanitarian goods.

2003–2010 – Expansion of UNODC Field Operations
UNODC developed programs focusing on border management, container control, and anti-corruption—key tools later repurposed to protect humanitarian supply chains.

2010–2015 – Major Natural Disasters Expose Supply Chain Vulnerabilities
· Earthquakes, hurricanes, andmass-displacement crises highlighted the theft of food and medical supplies.
· Fraudulent procurement contracts and aid resale became widespread in several disaster zones.

2014–2020 – Rise in Armed Non-State Group Interference

- Non-stateactorsincreasinglydiverted aidfor politicalleverage.
- Humanitarian organizations reported systematic checkpoints where convoys paid "fees," effectively enabling trafficking networks.

2020 – Global COVID-19 Pandemic

- WorldwideshortagesofPPE and medicine triggered a surge in counterfeit supplies.
- Criminal networks infiltrated procurement systems, mislabelled shipments, and sold stolen medical items at inflated prices.
- UNODC launched multiple alerts and guidance notes on preventing trafficking of medical equipment.

2021–Present – Intensification of Complex Crises

- Growing numberofoverlappingcrises (conflict, climate disasters, displacement) increased opportunities for trafficking.
- Increase in cyber-facilitated trafficking, including the sale of stolen aid on online marketplaces and encrypted channels.
- UNODC scaled up cooperation with WFP, WHO, INTERPOL, and WCO to secure humanitarian logistics.

IV- MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

1. UNODC
• Leads global efforts to prevent trafficking, corruption, and organized crime.
• Provides guidance, monitoring tools, and capacity-building for Member States.

2. United Nations Humanitarian Agencies
• WorldFoodProgramme(WFP):Runs the largest global humanitarian logistics system; frequently targeted due to food aid's high value.
• UNICEF: Vulnerable due to widespread trafficking of medicine, nutritional supplements, and sanitation kits.
• World Health Organization (WHO): Primarily affected through the diversion of medical items and counterfeit health supplies.

3. National Governments and Emergency Authorities
• Control customs,law enforcement, and border processes.
• Strong governance leads to safer supply chains; weak governance creates opportunities for trafficking networks.

4. Customs and Border Control Agencies
• Firstline of defenseagainst illicitexport and import of humanitarian items.
• Collaborate with WCO and UNODC in container control and risk profiling.

5. Transnational Organized Crime Groups
• Exploitcrisesto steal, hijack,orredirect aid shipments.
• Use corruption, threats, or violence to gain access to logistical hubs.
• Resell goods via informal markets or smuggling routes.

6. Armed Non-State Actors (ANSA)
• In conflict zones,these groups may demand "taxes," seize supplies, or use aid to legitimize their authority.

7. Corrupt Public Officials

  • Can facilitate diversion through fraudulent paperwork, manipulated customs processes, or acceptance of bribes.

8. PrivateSectorLogisticsCompanies
  • Play key roles in warehousing, transport, and procurement.
  • Vulnerabilities in private logistics chains can lead to large-scale diversion.

9. Local Communities
  • Sometimes exploited by traffickers or pressured into black-market participation.
  • More importantly, they can also serve as monitors or whistleblowers when given proper protection.

V- PAST TREATIES AND SOLUTION ATTEMPTS

1. United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), 2000
The primary international framework addressing transnational crime,

including traffickingnetworksthattargethumanitariangoods.
  • Encourages cross-border cooperation
  • Enhances criminalization of trafficking-related offenses
  • Strengthens law enforcement collaboration

2. Protocol against Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking (Supplementary Protocols to UNTOC)
While focused on weapons and persons, these protocols established legal precedents and investigative tools applicable to the trafficking of goods.

3. UNODC–WCO Container Control Programme (CCP), 2004–Present

Helps states secure ports andborder facilities.
  • Trains customs officials
  • Develops risk-assessment systems
  • Detects illicit shipments mixed with humanitarian cargo

4. UNODC Anti-Corruption Initiatives

Based on the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC, 2003).

- Promotes transparentprocurement
- Strengthens anti-bribery measures
- Supports national anti-corruption agencies that oversee humanitarian operations

5. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Logistics Guidelines

Provide best practices for secure and accountable aid delivery.
While not legally binding, these guidelines inform operational standards used by WFP, UNICEF, WHO, and NGOs.

6. WHO and UNODC Joint Guidance on Preventing Counterfeit Medical Products

Developed during global health emergencies, especially COVID-19.

- Tracks irregular medical supplychains
- Issues alerts on fake medicines/PPE
- Supports investigations into pharmaceutical trafficking

7. Regional Frameworks

Although varied, many regional bodies (African Union, ASEAN, OAS, EU) adopted mechanisms to coordinate customs and emergency response.
Theseframeworks often include:

- Jointbordertaskforces
- Information-sharing mechanisms
- Regional anti-trafficking agreements

8. Bilateral and Multilateral Humanitarian Access Agreements

Negotiated in conflict zones to secure the movement of aid through hostile territories.
Although effective in allowing operations, they often lack enforcement mechanisms and do not deter trafficking.

VI- POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- By 2025, many tracking systems will be digital and autonomous. The development of tracking chips for aid supplies will greatly simplify the process of finding and tracking their traces. In fact, digitizing these chips rather than physical ones, that is, linking them with barcodes or blockchain technology, creates a security circle that is difficult to bypass for tracking products.

- Developing strategies related to the supervision and control of distribution areas of humanitarian aid supplies in crisis areas and creating a system to implement them.

- Strengthening inter-state cooperation to identify groups targeting aid supplies.

- Organising public awareness campaigns about the importance of preserving relief materials.

- Establishing safe storage areas for humanitarian aid supplies in crisis areas

- Training local staff and volunteers to identify and report suspicious activities, and creating international teams if necessary.

VII- OVERVIEW

Illicit trafficking in humanitarian aid supplies constitutes a serious violation of both national and international law and represents one of the most pressing challenges faced in crisis-affected regions. Beyond its legal implications, such trafficking severely undermines security, stability, and social cohesion in areas already experiencing extreme vulnerability. These illicit activities are often carried out by organized crime networks, armed groups, corrupt officials, and opportunistic intermediaries, who exploit crises for personal gain. As a result, essential aid (including food,
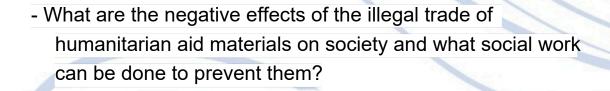
medical equipment, water, shelter materials, and other basic necessities) fails to reach the civilians who depend on it, transforming already dire humanitarian situations into tragedies.

The theft, diversion, or illegal sale of aid not only diminishes the credibility and operational capacity of humanitarian organizations but also fosters distrust and social unrest within affected communities. Civilians may begin to question the fairness and reliability of aid distribution, further exacerbating tensions and potentially fueling conflict dynamics. Therefore, addressing this issue cannot rely solely on legal or punitive measures. A comprehensive, multifaceted approach is required, combining the strengthening of supply chain security, the implementation of transparent storage and distribution processes, continuous monitoring and auditing of logistics and field operations, enhanced international collaboration, and the active engagement of local communities in protecting and supervising aid programs.

An effective solution ensures that humanitarian assistance is protected and distributed equitably at every stage, while simultaneously preventing criminal groups and illegal actors from manipulating these systems for personal gain. Moreover, such measures reinforce international norms and uphold humanitarian principles, safeguarding the right to life and ensuring access to basic human needs for civilians living in crisis zones. Holistic and coordinated strategies of this nature not only improve the effectiveness and reliability of humanitarian aid in the short term but also play a critical role in long-term crisis management, the strengthening of social solidarity, and the promotion of regional stability and resilience.

VIII- KEY POINT TO BE ADDRESSED

- What measures can be taken to prevent the illicit trade of humanitarian aid supplies, other than the current ones?

- How can the impact of illicit trade on a state's economy be minimised?

- What are the negative effects of the illegal trade of humanitarian aid materials on society and what social work can be done to prevent them?

- What security measures can be taken to prevent illegal trade in humanitarian aid materials, and what are the points that need to be regulated in terms of international law?

WORKS CITED AND USEFUL LINKS

https://acleddata.com/ (to reach the data sets)

https://www.crisisgroup.org/

https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker

https://www.unocha.org/

https://reliefweb.int/

https://dataunodc.un.org/home

https://globaltrafficking.org/

https://www.havocscope.com/black-market-resources/