

Illegal medications seized in 16 African countries

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An unprecedented crackdown in 16 African countries netted 82 million doses of illegal or counterfeit drugs, including antibiotics, contraceptives and malaria treatments, the World Customs Organisation (WCO) said on Thursday.

The operation, called Vice Grips 2, was carried out by customs inspectors in 16 ports from July 11 to 20, it said.

"It is the biggest operation of its kind," Christophe Zimmermann, in charge of anti-counterfeit operations at the WCO, said at a press conference in Paris.

The street value of the drugs was \$40 million (30 million euros), which points to commerce with an annual turnover of \$5 billion, he said.

The biggest hauls were made in Angola, Cameroon, Ghana and Togo. Most of the [illicit drugs](#) came from East and South Asia—particularly China—and the Middle East, notably Dubai.

Illegal medications are a growing problem in Africa, as they may be toxic or fail to have a sufficient dose of active ingredient to combat a disease, Zimmermann and others said.

Inspectors helped by a French anti-counterfeit agency searched 110 shipping containers, 84 of which were found to have illegal or fake medications.

Some of the merchandise pointed to elaborate or even industrial-scale operations, the two agencies said.

Inspectors found 33 million doses of fake medications, along with pornographic DVDs, that had been stashed deep inside a batch of loudspeakers that were being exported to Angola. None of the "drugs" had any active ingredient.

In Togo, a smuggled batch of expectorant [cough syrup](#), supposed to be kept at a cool, stable temperature of -2 to +4 degrees Celsius (28-39 degrees Fahrenheit), was literally cooking in a container where the temperature was more than 50 C (122 F).

"Africa is now being used as a rubbish tip, and this directly affects consumer health and safety," Zimmermann said.

"We are dealing with structured organisations that specialise in international fraud, which exploit globalisation in operations that span continents and countries, using different forms of transport."

Two further operations would be staged in Africa over the next six months in order to maintain momentum on the [drug](#) fakers, said the WCO's secretary general, Kunio Mikuriya.

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