

Interpol call for roadmap to tackle fake drugs

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Interpol on Wednesday called for a greater global response to pharmaceutical crime as it warned criminal gangs were capitalising on weaknesses in legislation and border controls.

At a conference in Dublin, the global crime agency said the growth in crime involving fake or tampered-with medicines threatens the lives of millions of people and undermines health systems worldwide.

"We are talking about hundreds of tonnes of medicines and millions and millions of pills that are counterfeit, that are floating over the markets through illicit and licit channels," Aline Plancon, head of Interpol's pharmaceutical crime unit told AFP.

Over 200 participants from 50 countries, including UN representatives and senior police officers, are gathering in Dublin for a two-day conference on combating pharmaceutical crime.

Interpol's largest operation targeting fake medicines in 111 countries led to the seizure last May of more than 9.6 million illicit tablets worth \$32 million (25.4 million euros), the closure of 12,000 web sites and 434 arrests.

A similar operation in seven western African countries in June led to the seizure of over one hundred tones of illicit and fake medicines, including anti-malaria treatments, Plancon said.

Many of Interpol's recent successes involved the importation of illegal pharmaceuticals such as the seizure of 9,800 painkillers worth \$4.5 million in Colombia in August.

An investigation discovered the German-manufactured Buscapina Plus pills were arriving from Brazil with modified expiry dates.

30 percent of drugs fake

Interpol estimates 30 percent of all medicines in some regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America are counterfeit.

Interpol executive director of police services Jean-Michel Louboutin called for stronger legislation combined with further training for customs, police and health regulators.

"Each time you have a piece of the world that's not well protected, this part will contaminate the rest of the world," he told reporters.

While much of Interpol's focus is on black-market medicines, investigations are on-going into cases where legitimate medicines were suspected to have been stolen by the Italian Mafia before re-emerging in other EU countries.

A number of drugs, including cancer treatments, were stolen in Italy and were later discovered in Britain, Germany and Finland, sparking an alert by the European Medicines Agency in April.

Plancon said it was a "major problem" that highlighted the "weakness of some [border controls](#)."

"You can see the Mafia people saw the opportunity to make money and they know that pharmaceutical crime is one of the good havens for them

right now because of lack of legislation and the complexities of coordination in countries," she added.

The director of compliance with Ireland's Health Products Regulatory Authority said [illicit drugs](#) reaching the legal supply chain was "the biggest nightmare" of regulators.

"There are networks of illegal wholesalers in various countries within the EU providing false paper trails for these products," John Lynch said.

"It's where the police, the customs and medicine regulators really have to work very, very closely together to shut down the potential for entry to the legal supply chain," he added.

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