

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Colleagues and Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is for me a great honour to intervene in the highest forum of the international community on the issue of transnational organized crime.

I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon and President Treki for attaching such great importance to this Special High Level Meeting of the General Assembly, thus underlining the value of a political debate on the enhancement of international co-operation in combating transnational organized crime.

We live in a global society characterized by systemic and interrelated threats that can not be addressed without an overall vision.

One of the major threats is transnational organized crime.

We need to know more about its dynamics and transformations in order to tackle it effectively. In this regard, we must commend the excellent work of data collection and analysis carried out by the United Nations, which has proven to be valuable in improving our capacity to respond.

Ten years ago, in Palermo United Nations adopted the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, supplemented by Protocols against human trafficking, illegal immigration, and the manufacturing and trafficking of firearms.

This legal tool of global governance has allowed us to take a huge step forward in combating transnational organized crime and represents a milestone in international co-operation against crime.

In fact, it has eliminated national differences in the criminalization of offences and created a common legal framework that facilitates both the action of judicial authorities and law enforcement at the national level, as well as international co-operation.

My country has worked hard to contribute to the universal adoption, full implementation and the updating of the Palermo Convention.

Particular significance is to be attached to the initiatives aimed at creating a strong mechanism for reviewing the implementation of the Palermo Convention and its Protocols, which is essential to guarantee the best overall functionality of these instruments.

This is why we support – together with other States Parties and the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime - the pilot programme to test review mechanisms. We are also willing to provide technical assistance to the States in need, which belong to all U.N. regional groups for their participation in this exercise.

We hope that this effort will help Conference of States Parties- which is scheduled in Vienna in the next autumn – in outlining a

shared review mechanism of the implementation of the Convention.

According to a recent estimate of the UNODC, the total annual value of some illegal flows of goods and services controlled by transnational organized crime totals, worldwide, 125 (one hundred twenty-five) billion dollars, a figure that is five times the amount of the government spending of an advanced industrial State like Italy.

Furthermore, as regards crimes such as the trafficking in human beings – especially women and children – for labour and sexual exploitation, it is simply impossible to estimate the impact on victims, their suffering and outrage upon their personal dignity.

The liberalization of markets and the use of information and communication technology allow criminals to perpetrate new, sophisticated and profitable types of crime, from counterfeiting products and documents to smuggling, from environmental crimes to cyber-crime.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to believe that the emergence of new types of crime has led to the decline of traditional ones. It is quite the opposite. The old and the new crimes coexist, affect the interests of individuals and societies, and contribute to increase the power and wealth of criminal networks.

We know, for example, that drug trafficking remains the single most profitable and the best organized criminal industry

worldwide. We also know that there is a solid alliance between South American drug cartels and the Italian mafias.

Furthermore, the heinous business of human trafficking, the smuggling of migrants and arms trafficking continue to prosper.

Italy is strongly engaged in combating criminals who exploit migrants' needs.

We are developing an advanced co-operation with the countries of origin and transit of migratory flows.

We have had very positive experiences especially in Africa. Co-operation with Libya has allowed us to shut one of the main illegal immigration Mediterranean routes in a very short time.

We should also be aware of the connections between terrorism and crime. It is not unrealistic to consider that terrorist and criminal groups will join forces to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

No State can meet this challenge alone. A response limited to criminal law enforcement would not be enough.

We need to supplement this approach with a new impetus on prevention. This was part of the lucid vision of those who inspired the Palermo Convention, first of all Judge Giovanni Falcone.

The Palermo Convention is intended not only to respond to transnational crime in terms of penal law and criminal sanctions, but also in terms of prevention strategies.

The Convention provides States Parties with many specific measures, from judicial assistance to witness protection, from special investigative techniques to the seizure and confiscation of illegal assets.

This last aspect is crucial.

Transnational organized crime operates as a global business that aims at making big profits.

An attack strategy on its financial power would affect its very *raison d'être*.

Since the liberalization of markets and technology allow moving wealth from one part of the world to another in real time, this strategy must necessarily be shared and implemented by the entire international community in order to be effective.

As long as criminals are able to enjoy the fruits of their illegal activities criminal behaviour at the transnational level will continue to have its main incentive.

If we do not co-operate in attacking criminal assets, multinational criminal groups will be able to invest in countries with more lenient laws. This would result in undesirable forms of

"country shopping" and the criminal contamination of the more vulnerable economic systems.

Italy has made the attack on criminal assets a hallmark of its security policy and the results are patent. Over the last two years, we seized more than 20,000 properties worth over 11 billion dollars. We confiscated more than 4,000 properties worth approximately 2.5 billion dollars. We also set up a National Agency for the Management of Seized and Confiscated Assets to speed up the re-use of these assets for social purposes and to meet the needs of security and justice.

This approach has led to the dismantling of criminal organizations deeply rooted in some Italian areas. These successful operations are of great symbolic value because they affirm both the principle of supremacy of law and the idea that crime does not pay.

We can and must make the attack on the huge illegal assets accumulated by criminals around the world the cutting-edge of international security co-operation.

This should be a common goal for the international community and it is certainly a viable project in the medium term.

The Palermo Convention favours this approach, enabling States Parties to provide mutual assistance in their activities aimed at depriving criminal syndicates of their wealth - on a voluntary basis and to the extent allowed by national legislations.

However, there are differences from country to country; I mean that different legal systems establish dissimilar conditions to allow the attack on criminal assets. Nevertheless, much can be done with the existing legal framework.

My country is well aware of the key importance of the Palermo Convention's full implementation and intends to contribute in a concrete way, by sharing with the United Nations and the States Parties to the said Convention our experience in countering organized crime.

As a contribution to the world-wide diffusion and full application of the Palermo Convention, Italy has promoted – under the aegis of the United Nations – the working out of a Digest on police co-operation envisaging investigation models for the fight against transnational organized crime.

In order to workout the Digest it has been decided to set up a technical working group consisting of several countries, UNODC and INTERPOL. To this aim, Italy confirms its offer to host the next Interpol General Assembly in 2012

The Digest will consist of a general part concerning organized crime and a series of investigation file cards on specific aspects of transnational crime.

This initiative will allow to “export” the Italian strategy to attack criminal assets, and, therefore, will be in line with the actions aimed at re-launching anti-crime international co-operation focused on an asset-based approach, which Italy has been promoting in the various international fora

In conclusion, the Palermo Convention is our best weapon against organized crime.

As policy-makers we must strive to make the Palermo Convention an increasingly sharp and usable tool for our practitioners and law enforcement community. We should make use of all its vast potential applications if we are to promote the rule of law and improve security for all.

Thank you for your attention.