United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime

Regional Office for
Southeast Asia and the Pacific

UNODC Opening Speech
International Conference on Combating Online Scams
Ms. Delphine Schantz, Regional Representative
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
23 September 2026

Your Excellency,
Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia,

Your Excellency,
Santibindit Chhay Sinarith, Senior Minister and Head of the Secretariat of the Commission on Combating Online Scams, Cambodia

Excellencies, distinguished colleagues and guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great honour to represent the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime at this International Conference on Combating Online Scams. UNODC is pleased to support this initiative of the Royal Government of Cambodia, and I wish to thank and commend His Excellency Prime Minister Hun Manet for his personal leadership in convening us here today.

This conference demonstrates Cambodia's commitment to international cooperation and to the shared priority of all countries and partners gathered here today – a more effective response to online scams and cyber-enabled crime.

Online scams and fraud is a crime that affects people everywhere, and all parts of society. People may lose a few Dollars to a low-profile e-commerce fraud, or they may lose their entire life's savings to a romance scam. It also undermines economic activity, and people's trust in institutions.

In addition to that, they have become a key income-generating stream for organised crime. In our latest Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment for Southeast Asia, we estimate that scam losses in East Asia, South-East Asia, Australia and New Zealand now amount to up to US$114 billion per year. And this number is growing rapidly. It also does not include the substantial losses in other parts of the world. For example, the United States has estimated losses of US$10 billion per year. EUROPOL has highlighted fraud schemes as the most rapidly expanding sector in organized crime. These vast proceeds not only directly undermine the rule of law and good governance, but are re-invested to further grow the industry.

Online fraud also transcends national borders, almost like no other crime. It can be committed in one place while the victim sits halfway around the world, as criminals use the internet to target people everywhere. While this in itself is not a new phenomenon, the scale and speed at which it happens, is. We need to recognize that we are in the midst of a revolution in how organized crime operates, and how they target our citizens, our economies, and our institutions. And whatever we do, we will only stand a chance if we do it together.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Southeast Asia's scam industry is very much undergoing a fundamental shift. Fragmented, locally rooted syndicates have merged into a single transnational, tech-driven criminal economy. It is sophisticated enough to outpace conventional law enforcement and threaten governance, economic stability, and development in the region and beyond. Their operating model looks like corporate franchising: specialized departments for laundering money, trafficking people, smuggling migrants, and harvesting data—all plugged into the same, service-based interconnected network. This makes it even more difficult for law enforcement to separate victims from perpetrators — and to provide adequate medical, psychological and logistical support to victims, while ensuring that dismantled compounds do not regroup elsewhere.

The rapid adoption of technology is a key driver. Criminals have always used new technologies to their advantage, and crime has always adapted to avoid law enforcement. But what is different now, is the speed at which crime is changing, and the complexity it has reached. Technology is now more and more easily available, lowering the access barriers for criminal groups moving into new crime types. Cryptocurrencies and virtual asset service providers have supercharged existing money-laundering infrastructure in the region. And increasingly, organized crime groups are not just leveraging new technologies, but they are actively developing new ones.

And obviously, the online space has created the environment for this to flourish. Southeast Asia is a region of rapid digitalization, but even here, criminals have outpaced most other sectors of society. We see this in the growing global reach of scam centres. But we also see this in the rapid expansion of other online-based crime types, like illegal online gambling and the distribution of malware.

Excellencies,

What is encouraging is that we see the response grow in strength. Across the region, we see new anti-scam centres and taskforces taking up their work.

Law enforcement operations are stepped up, and many large-scale compounds are being shut down. Cambodia is a good example of this. Over the past months, we have seen an increase in law enforcement operations to shut down scam operations. The creation of the Ad-hoc Commission on Combating Online Scams sent an important signal, and today's conference is another step in showing openness to cooperate. But it is clear that more can and needs to be done, both at national levels, and in terms of international cooperation. More than ever, the saying is true, that this is not a matter any country can resolve on its own.

I would therefore like to highlight five areas where we see need for immediate focus:

First, we need to ensure a joint understanding of the key trends and how this fast-moving crime is changing – in order to better understand markets, protect those most affected, and ideally predict shifts before they happen.

Second, we need more coherent regulatory frameworks, and capacities to enforce them. In particular, we need investments in digital evidence collection, handling and analysis, building on frameworks like the UN Convention against Cybercrime, signed not far from here, in Hanoi last year.

We also need more emphasis on tackling the financial flows associated with this, including the misuse of cryptocurrencies, and online gambling operations.

Third, we need better inter-agency cooperation and shared information analysis. Anti-Scam Centres have been an effective framework for this, and we need more such structures in the region. They are also an important entry point for regional and international cooperation.

However, just law enforcement cooperation is not enough – so **fourth**, we need to better integrate the private sector, especially FinTech and social media. We see progress in some areas, and we need to share and build on these experiences.

And finally, **fifth**, we need a better understanding of how profits are being used to further develop the ecosystem, how it feeds into criminal infrastructure and undermines good governance, and how to prevent this.

Excellencies,

Today's conference does not take place in a vacuum. It builds on prior discussions and forums, at national, regional and global levels.

We need to make better efforts to ensure these are complementary, to build on each other, rather than just creating separate lines of engagement. . As the criminal landscape evolves and reacts to the growing response, it is more important than ever to make sure our efforts have a sustained impact. That we do not just see the problem moving from one place to another, or to continue in a slightly different shape or form. This will require continued commitment, from the top leadership and across the criminal justice chain and beyond that. It will also require continued readiness to work together, and to deepen cooperation. UNODC's commitment to support the region, and its many partners, in this is very clear.

Let me close by once again thanking the Royal Government of Cambodia for hosting this conference and bringing us together here in Phnom Penh. Let us use this opportunity to not just reflect on the progress made, and the challenges ahead, but to define clear, actionable steps toward more effective responses at the national, regional and global levels.
Thank you.