

Advisory Committee on Enforcement

Eighteenth Session
Geneva, June 2 to 4, 2026

THE UNODC PASSENGER AND CARGO CONTROL PROGRAMME'S WORK ON INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

*Contribution prepared by Mr. Bob Van den Berghe, Deputy Head, Passenger and Cargo Control Programme, Border Management Branch, Division for Operations, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Vienna, Austria**

ABSTRACT

The Passenger and Cargo Control Programme (PCCP) is implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in cooperation with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO) to strengthen border management at key seaports, airports and land borders, delivering intelligence-led interventions to disrupt illicit trafficking and safeguard trade through enhanced law enforcement cooperation. This contribution highlights the work of PCCP focused on intellectual property (IP) rights, including efforts to address violations of those rights through capacity-building, inter-agency collaboration, and support for policy dialogue on IP enforcement.

* The views expressed in this document are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Secretariat or of the Member States of WIPO.

I. THE UNODC PASSENGER AND CARGO CONTROL PROGRAMME (PCCP)

1. The Border Management Branch (BMB) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) offers comprehensive and collaborative technical assistance to Member States in the field of border management. Its main objective is to combat organized crime groups involved in various illicit activities by enhancing border control measures for all commodities. Recognizing that most organized crime groups engage in multiple types of illicit trade, BMB adopts a collective approach to disrupt their operations effectively. It emphasizes a holistic strategy to safeguard borders and the trade supply chain from criminal infiltration. This is accomplished through the establishment of partnerships, capacity development, operational activities and the utilization of innovative technologies.
2. Within BMB, the Passenger and Cargo Control Programme (PCCP) supports the establishment and maintenance of nationally owned inter-agency port control units (PCUs) at seaports, land border control units (LCUs) at dry ports and land-border crossings and airport control units (ACUs) at airports. PCCP equips, trains and mentors customs and other law enforcement officers with a view to achieving improved identification and inspection of high-risk passengers and freight containers, while minimizing disruption to legitimate trade and business. The Programme encourages partnerships between PCCP-supported units and the trade and business community. It promotes closer cooperation between national law enforcement agencies, while ensuring the development of effective information-sharing mechanisms between PCCP participating countries on a regional and international level, as well as with the wider customs and law enforcement community.
3. Twenty years after its inception, PCCP now supports 192 units in 89 countries. They can exchange information with counterparts in other countries using CENComm, a secure communication application developed by WCO. That gives the units access to a wealth of information, allowing users to share information about high-risk passengers and containers in real time.
4. The PCCP strategy has resulted in seizures of a wide range of prohibited goods, such as weapons and ammunition, fauna and flora, hazardous waste, prohibited drugs, strategic goods, falsified medical products, precursors for drugs and explosives, cigarettes, alcohol, and stolen vehicles and goods that are counterfeit or otherwise violate IP rights (IPR).

II. PCCP WORK ON INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

5. Violations of IPR are detrimental to legitimate business interests and national economies. PCCP-supported units are confronted daily with counterfeit goods, ranging from clothing and cosmetics to cigarettes, car parts, toys and electronics. Since the Programme's inception, PCCP units have seized more than a thousand shipments for IPR violations, safeguarding consumers and protecting national markets from the risks associated with counterfeit products.
6. Legal systems, law enforcement and businesses all play a part in ensuring effective enforcement. With more than 20 years of experience in providing expert training and coordination to identify and inspect high-risk passengers and freight containers, PCCP is well placed to address the challenges associated with detecting and disrupting counterfeit trade. Its approach to strengthening IPR enforcement includes:
 - Conducting IP enforcement seminars and training programs: PCCP organizes seminars and training for its units, in which brand owners take part, to build IPR enforcement capacity.

- Facilitating direct engagement with brand owners: PCCP promotes direct collaboration between brand owners and enforcement units through platforms such as the Cross-Industry Working Group. This enables real-time sharing of intelligence to strengthen profiling and risk analysis.
- Developing and updating contact lists of brand owners: PCCP helps units to maintain comprehensive lists of primary contacts for brand owners in each country. This facilitates immediate communication in cases of detained shipments, streamlining the verification process and accelerating enforcement responses.

7. The Programme works closely with the IPR Section of WCO in Brussels, enabling unit members to participate in regional and international operations and specialized workshops. PCCP benefits thereby from longstanding partnerships between WCO and IP owners and its Memorandum of Understanding with the International Trademark Association (INTA). Those connections provide PCCP-supported units with privileged access to technical expertise and operational networks, significantly strengthening their enforcement capacity.

8. Given the frequency of IPR violations, PCCP addresses the issue systematically in all its capacity-building activities, whether through training, practical workshops or mentoring missions. Since 2023, the Programme has delivered a series of specialized activities designed to enhance the ability of customs and other law enforcement officers to detect and address IPR violations. They included specialized IPR training sessions in Kampala, Uganda (February 2023) and Maputo, Mozambique (May–June 2023); a regional IPR training and private sector workshop in Aktau, Kazakhstan (July 2023); an IPR practical training and awareness workshop in Karachi, Pakistan (August 2023); a mentoring session in Panama City, Panama (September–October 2024); and various IPR sessions as part of training conducted in Bolivia, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay (throughout 2025). Those targeted activities not only built technical capacity but also fostered stronger collaboration with the private sector across diverse regions.

9. At the global level, the Programme has strengthened its engagement in policy dialogue and international coordination by participating in events led by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). For instance, in July 2024, it contributed to the Subregional Seminar on the Enforcement of Intellectual Property (IP) Rights for Customs Officials, Police Investigators and Prosecutors, which was held in San José, Costa Rica, to exchange expertise and best practices. In September 2024, it delivered a presentation at the WIPO–Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) Subregional Webinar on Building Respect for Intellectual Property (IP) for Members of the Judiciary and Law Enforcement Officials.

III. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

10. A key challenge facing the Programme is the lack of legislation to target IPR violations in affected regions. One lesson learned is the need to sensitize governments, including through national and regional training activities focused on adapting legislation to allow for containers to be stopped and enable the seizure of goods that infringe IPR.

11. Governments of transit port countries have little incentive to act, given that a significant proportion of containers merely transit through their ports without generating direct revenue. Raising awareness is, again, key. Challenges arise, however, even where there is a willingness to inspect containers. Ports may not have storage space for seized goods or sufficient personnel to conduct inspections and take cases to trial.

12. Another significant challenge concerns the variable level of engagement of the private sector. When a container with goods violating IPR is detained, for instance, the brand owner

has to file a complaint with the national authorities to start a procedure. Often, however, the brand owner does not file a complaint, leaving authorities stuck with a container of goods taking up valuable storage space. In the end, the authorities only lose.

13. Making the private sector aware of its role is crucial. To that end, PCCP invites brand owners to seminars and training sessions each year. It also works directly with those who show interest in cooperating with the Programme.

14. PCCP has found that keeping a list of the main contacts for brand owners in each country is useful for combatting IPR-related violations more effectively. When a container is detained, PCCP-supported unit officers can inform brand owners directly. Otherwise, where officers do not know whom to contact, it can take weeks to obtain a response.

15. Brand owners can facilitate the work of PCCP-supported units by sharing intelligence they have, which may improve risk analysis in container profiling. It would also be helpful if brand owners rented storage space for seized infringing goods and provided machinery to destroy them in a climate-friendly way.

IV. CONCLUSION

16. PCCP strengthens the capacity of Member States and their law enforcement agencies at air, sea and land borders to stop illicit trafficking of goods and movement of high-risk passengers – while facilitating trade, mobility and connectivity and contributing to economic growth and prosperity. Since the Programme's inception, PCCP-supported units have seized more than one thousand shipments related to IPR violations. Over more than 20 years, PCCP has gained practical insight into the intricate nature of IPR violations. Lessons learned include the importance of making governments aware of the need to adapt their IPR legislation to allow the seizure of infringing goods. Governments in countries with transit ports need to be persuaded of their crucial role in stopping IPR-related crime. Also important are training for the private sector and direct cooperation with brand owners.

[End of contribution]