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UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME (UNODC)

AGENDA

Addressing the Rise of Human Trafficking for Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia: Examining the Expansion of Scam-Centre Networks and Strengthening International Mechanisms to Combat Transnational Organised Crime, Protect Victims and Enhance Cross-Border Law Enforcement Cooperation

Executive Board:

Samiksha V B, Chairperson

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Letter from the Executive Board

Dear Delegates,

It is our privilege to welcome you to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Over the course of this conference, you will take on one of the most urgent and least understood crises in international crime.

Across Southeast Asia, hundreds of thousands of people have been lured by fake job offers into heavily guarded compounds. Once inside, their passports are confiscated, their "recruitment debts" multiply, and they are forced, under threat of beatings, electric shocks, and resale, to defraud strangers online. Many of the people they deceive lose their life savings. The people forced to deceive them are victims as well, yet they are frequently arrested, deported, or prosecuted as criminals.

This duality makes the agenda demanding. You are not debating a single crime but a chain of them: trafficking in persons, forced labour, cyber-enabled fraud, money laundering, corruption, and the capture of territory by armed groups. The problem sits at the intersection of criminal law, human rights law, financial regulation, technology governance, and geopolitics. A strong resolution must protect victims while dismantling the business model that profits from them.

We ask you to go beyond restating that trafficking is wrong. Study the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and the non-punishment principle until you can apply them to a real compound in Myawaddy or Sihanoukville. Understand why a crackdown that releases thousands of people can still fail if the syndicate simply relocates across the next border. Ask who controls the land, who supplies the electricity and internet, who moves the money, and who benefits from looking away.

This guide provides the foundations. It is neither exhaustive nor citable in committee. Your country's policy, laws, and regional relationships must come from your own research.

We look forward to rigorous debate, principled diplomacy, and solutions that would work on the ground. Please contact us with any questions before the conference.

Warm regards,

Samiksha V B, Chairperson

Shreyansh Jain, Vice-Chairperson

Saniha Samarth, Moderator

Executive Board, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

1. Expectations from Delegates

The Executive Board will assess delegates on substance, diplomacy, and fidelity to national policy, in that order. Eloquence without research will not carry a delegate far.

Research. Know your country's laws on trafficking, fraud, and cybercrime; its ratification status for the key treaties; and its record in recent crackdowns. Establish whether your country is a source of victims, a host of compounds, a transit route, a financial hub, or a target of the fraud. Most countries occupy more than one of these positions.

Accuracy. Every statistic you cite should come from a credible source: UN bodies (UNODC, OHCHR, IOM, and ILO), INTERPOL, official government statements, or established news agencies. The Executive Board may request your source at any point. Wikipedia and this guide are not acceptable evidence in committee.

Foreign policy. Remain in character. A delegate whose government faces accusations of tolerating scam compounds should not condemn that government. Defend your position credibly, and seek compromise where your government plausibly would.

Solutions. Resolutions should be specific, practical, and within UNODC's mandate. A clause that merely "calls upon states to cooperate" achieves little. A clause that establishes a mechanism, assigns responsibility for it, and identifies its funding achieves a great deal.

Victim-centred analysis. Debate should consistently distinguish between those who organise and profit from scam centres and those trafficked into them. The Executive Board will scrutinise any clause that blurs this distinction.

Conduct. Use diplomatic language at all times, respect the Rules of Procedure, and collaborate genuinely during unmoderated caucuses. The Executive Board will not tolerate plagiarism or pre-written resolutions.

2. Rules of Procedure (UNA-USA)

This committee follows UNA-USA Rules of Procedure. The summary below covers the rules delegates will use most frequently. The Executive Board may adapt or clarify any rule at its discretion, and its rulings are final.

2.1. Flow of Committee

1. **Roll call.** Delegates respond "Present" or "Present and voting". A delegate who is present and voting may not abstain on substantive votes.
2. **Opening the speakers' list.** The Chair opens the General Speakers' List (GSL), with speaking time set by motion or by the Chair.

3. **Debate.** Formal debate on the GSL alternates with moderated and unmoderated caucuses.
4. **Working papers.** Blocs draft working papers to set out their proposals.
5. **Draft resolutions.** Working papers that meet the sponsor and signatory requirements are introduced as draft resolutions.
6. **Amendments.** Delegates propose changes to draft resolutions.
7. **Closure of debate and voting.** The committee enters voting procedure and votes on each draft resolution.

2.2. Points

Point	Purpose	May Interrupt a Speaker
Point of Personal Privilege	Raises a personal discomfort that impairs participation, such as audibility	Yes, for audibility only
Point of Order	Identifies a procedural error by the Chair or a delegate	No
Point of Parliamentary Inquiry	Asks the Chair a question about procedure	No
Point of Information	Asks a speaker a question about their speech, where the Chair permits	No

2.3. Motions

Motion	Purpose	Vote Required
Set the speaking time	Fixes or changes the time per speaker on the GSL	Simple majority
Moderated caucus	Focused debate on a sub-topic; the motion specifies total time, speaking time, and topic	Simple majority
Unmoderated caucus	Informal time for negotiation and drafting; the motion specifies total time	Simple majority
Introduce a working paper or draft resolution	Brings a document formally before the committee	Simple majority, or approval of the Chair
Suspend debate	Suspends the session, for example for a break	Simple majority
Adjourn debate	Ends the session for the remainder of the conference	Two-thirds majority
Close debate	Ends debate and moves the committee into voting procedure	Two-thirds majority
Divide the question	Votes on operative clauses separately	Simple majority
Roll call vote	Each delegate votes aloud in alphabetical order	Chair's discretion

When several motions are on the floor, the Chair considers them in order from most disruptive to least disruptive. Among caucus motions, the Chair generally considers the longest total time first.

2.4. Right of Reply

A delegate whose national integrity has been directly impugned by another delegate may request a right of reply, in writing, from the Chair. The Chair decides whether to grant the request.

2.5. Documents

- **Working paper.** An informal document setting out proposals. It requires no formal structure and is not put to a vote.
- **Draft resolution.** A formal document comprising preambulatory clauses, which provide context and cite past action, and operative clauses, which set out the measures proposed. It requires the number of sponsors and signatories announced by the Executive Board.
- **Sponsors and signatories.** Sponsors are the principal authors of a draft resolution. Signatories wish to see it debated but need not support it.
- **Friendly amendment.** A change agreed by all sponsors and incorporated without a vote.
- **Unfriendly amendment.** A change that lacks the support of all sponsors; it requires the specified number of signatories and is voted on before the draft resolution.

2.6. Voting

- **Procedural votes** (on motions) require every delegate present to vote; abstentions are not permitted.
- **Substantive votes** (on draft resolutions and unfriendly amendments) pass by a simple majority of delegates voting in favour or against. Delegates who answered "Present" at roll call may abstain.
- **During voting procedure,** the chamber is sealed, and no note-passing or speeches are permitted other than points related to the vote.

3. Introduction to the Committee and its Mandate

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is the UN entity responsible for helping states confront illicit drugs, organised crime, corruption, and terrorism. It was formed in 1997 through the merger of the UN International Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention, and adopted its current name in 2002. UNODC is

headquartered in Vienna and led by an Executive Director, currently Monica Juma of Kenya, who took office in May 2026.

3.1. Functions

UNODC works through three principal channels:

- **Normative work.** UNODC is the guardian of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its three Protocols, including the Trafficking in Persons Protocol. It also services the UN Convention against Corruption and the UN Convention against Cybercrime.
- **Research and analysis.** UNODC publishes the biennial Global Report on Trafficking in Persons and regional threat assessments, including its reports on scam centres in Southeast Asia.
- **Technical assistance.** UNODC helps states draft legislation, train police, prosecutors, and judges, build financial investigation capacity, and strengthen border cooperation.

3.2. Governance

UNODC reports to two functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. The **Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)** sets policy on crime, including trafficking and fraud, while the **Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)** addresses drug control. UNODC also serves as secretariat to the **Conference of the Parties to UNTOC**, which reviews how states implement the Convention and its Protocols.

3.3. Relevance to the Agenda

Trafficking into scam centres falls squarely within UNODC's mandate. It combines trafficking in persons, organised crime, money laundering, corruption, and cybercrime, each governed by treaties that UNODC administers. The UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, based in Bangkok, has produced much of the UN's research on scam compounds. UNODC also coordinates the **Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT)** and manages the **UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons**.

3.4. Scope of this Committee

For this simulation, the committee will operate as a body of member states drafting resolutions on the agenda. Like the CCPCJ, it may recommend action to states, call for technical assistance, request reports, and propose new mechanisms. It cannot impose sanctions, authorise the use of force, or bind states to new legal obligations. Delegates should draft clauses that respect these limits or that recommend action to bodies holding such powers.

4. Introduction to the Agenda

Trafficking for forced criminality has become one of the fastest-growing forms of human trafficking worldwide, and Southeast Asia is its epicentre. Traffickers confine victims in fortified compounds and force them to conduct online fraud at industrial scale. The proceeds finance organised crime groups, armed factions, and corrupt officials across the region.

4.1. Scale of the Problem

Indicator	Figure	Source
People held in scam operations, Myanmar	At least 120,000 (credible estimate, 2023)	OHCHR, August 2023
People held in scam operations, Cambodia	Approximately 100,000 (credible estimate, 2023)	OHCHR, August 2023
Share of detected trafficking victims exploited for forced criminality	1% in 2016; 8% in 2022	UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024
Countries whose nationals were trafficked into scam centres	66 (as of March 2025)	INTERPOL, June 2025
Scam losses, East and Southeast Asia	US\$18 billion to US\$37 billion (2023)	UNODC, 2024
Scam losses, East and Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand	US\$88.3 billion to US\$114.1 billion (2025)	UNODC, July 2026
Countries and territories of origin of people found in compounds	At least 80 (2025)	UNODC, July 2026

Two trends stand out. First, the business is expanding rapidly: estimated regional losses roughly tripled between 2023 and 2025, although the two UNODC estimates cover slightly different geographies. Second, the problem is globalising. Victims now come from Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and Europe, and INTERPOL has identified emerging hubs in West Africa, the Middle East, and Central America.

4.2. The Trafficking Cycle

- 1. Recruitment.** A job advertisement on social media or a messaging application offers a well-paid position in customer service, information technology, translation, or marketing. Recruiters frequently target young graduates with computer skills or foreign languages.
- 2. Transport.** The recruit flies to a regional hub, often Bangkok, and is then driven, or ferried by river, across a land border into Myanmar, Cambodia, or Laos.
- 3. Confinement.** On arrival, handlers confiscate passports and phones and inform the recruit of a "debt" for travel and placement that can only be repaid through work.

4. **Forced criminality.** Workers receive scripts, fake profiles, and daily revenue quotas. They conduct romance, investment, and cryptocurrency fraud against victims worldwide, increasingly with AI-generated images and deepfakes.
5. **Coercion.** Failure to meet quotas brings fines, beatings, electric shocks, sexual violence, or sale to another compound. OHCHR has documented abuse amounting to torture.
6. **Release or resale.** Some workers secure release by paying a ransom or during raids. Authorities then frequently detain, deport, or prosecute them instead of identifying them as victims.

4.3. Why the Crisis Took Root in Southeast Asia

Several conditions converged. When Cambodia banned online gambling in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic closed casinos in 2020, operators that had served customers in mainland China repurposed their buildings, staff, and payment channels for fraud. The February 2021 military coup in Myanmar weakened state control over border regions, where armed groups offered protection in exchange for revenue. Lightly regulated special economic zones, weak rule of law, corruption, and easy access to cryptocurrency and underground banking completed the model.

4.4. Global Significance

The fraud reaches victims on every continent, and its proceeds move through the global financial system. Traffickers use the same routes to move drugs, weapons, and wildlife. The committee must therefore address both dimensions of the problem: dismantling the criminal economy and protecting the people forced to sustain it.

5. Key Terminologies and Legal Framework

Precise terminology matters in this committee. Whether a person in a compound is labelled a "scammer", a "worker", or a "victim" determines whether that person receives protection or punishment.

5.1. Defining Trafficking in Persons

Article 3(a) of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol defines trafficking through three elements, all of which must be present for adult victims:

Element	Meaning	Application in a Scam Centre
Act	Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons	A recruiter hires a graduate for a fictitious IT position and arranges travel

Element	Meaning	Application in a Scam Centre
Means	Threat, use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or payments to a person in control	The job offer is false, passports are seized, and violence enforces quotas
Purpose	Exploitation, including forced labour, slavery, servitude, and sexual exploitation	The victim is forced to commit online fraud

Under Article 3(b), a victim's consent is irrelevant once any of the listed means has been used. Under Article 3(c), only the act and purpose need be established where the victim is a child.

5.2. Key Terminologies

Trafficking for forced criminality. Trafficking in which exploitation consists of compelling victims to commit crimes such as fraud, drug trafficking, or theft. Article 3 does not name it explicitly, but its list of exploitative purposes is a minimum, not an exhaustive list. UNODC has recorded forced criminality as a distinct category of exploitation in its Global Reports.

Forced labour. Under ILO Convention No. 29 (1930), all work or service exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the person has not offered themselves voluntarily. A person who accepted a job but cannot leave it remains in forced labour.

Debt bondage. A condition in which a person's labour is pledged against a debt whose value is not reasonably applied towards its repayment, as defined in the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery. Scam centres use inflated recruitment and transport debts to retain workers.

Non-punishment principle. Victims of trafficking should not be punished for unlawful acts they were compelled to commit as a direct consequence of having been trafficked. This principle is central to the agenda.

Smuggling of migrants. The facilitation of irregular border crossing for profit, with the migrant's consent, which ends on arrival. Trafficking, by contrast, involves exploitation that continues after arrival. Authorities often misclassify scam-centre victims as smuggled or irregular migrants.

Scam centre (scam compound). A guarded site, often a converted casino, hotel, or office complex, where large numbers of people are forced to conduct online fraud.

Pig butchering (sha zhu pan). A long-con fraud in which the perpetrator builds a romantic or personal relationship online, then persuades the target to invest in a fraudulent cryptocurrency or trading platform before taking the funds. The term refers to "fattening the pig before slaughter".

Underground banking. Informal value-transfer systems that move money across borders outside the regulated financial system, frequently through cryptocurrency, casinos, and money mules.

Mutual legal assistance (MLA). Formal cooperation between states to gather and share evidence in criminal matters.

Special economic zone (SEZ). A designated area with tax, customs, or regulatory privileges. Several scam hubs operate within or near SEZs in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar.

5.3. International Legal Framework

Instrument	Adopted (In Force)	Relevance to the Agenda
UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)	2000 (2003)	Criminalises participation in organised criminal groups (Art. 5), money laundering (Art. 6), and corruption (Art. 8); provides for confiscation (Arts. 12 to 14), extradition (Art. 16), mutual legal assistance (Art. 18), joint investigations (Art. 19), and law enforcement cooperation (Art. 27)
Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children	2000 (2003)	Defines trafficking (Art. 3); requires criminalisation (Art. 5), victim assistance and protection (Art. 6), and safe repatriation (Art. 8)
Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air	2000 (2004)	Distinguishes smuggling from trafficking and protects the rights of smuggled migrants
ILO Forced Labour Convention No. 29 and its Protocol	1930 (1932); 2014 (2016)	Defines forced labour; the Protocol requires prevention, protection, remedies, and non-prosecution of victims
UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)	2003 (2005)	Addresses the bribery and complicity of officials that allow compounds to operate
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1966 (1976)	Article 8 prohibits slavery, servitude, and forced labour
Convention against Torture	1984 (1987)	Prohibits torture; Article 3 prohibits returning persons to states where they face torture
ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP)	2015 (2017)	Binding regional treaty; Article 14(7) contains a non-punishment provision
UN Convention against Cybercrime	2024 (opened for signature October 2025)	First global cybercrime treaty, covering computer-related fraud and cross-border access to electronic evidence

5.4. Soft Law and Guidance

- **OHCHR Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking (2002).** Principle 7 establishes the non-punishment and non-detention of trafficked persons.

- **FATF Recommendations.** The global anti-money laundering standards governing how banks, virtual asset service providers, and payment firms detect criminal proceeds.
- **ICAT guidance.** Issue briefs from UN agencies on applying the non-punishment principle in practice.

5.5. Legal Gaps for Delegates to Consider

1. **No explicit non-punishment clause in the Trafficking in Persons Protocol.** The principle rests on soft law and regional treaties, so national practice varies widely.
2. **Victim identification.** Officials often treat released workers as irregular migrants or fraud suspects. Some workers were only partly deceived or were later coerced into supervisory roles, which complicates their legal status.
3. **Jurisdiction and territorial control.** Many compounds operate in areas controlled by armed groups rather than recognised governments, so conventional cooperation channels fail.
4. **Digital evidence and cryptocurrency.** Evidence is stored on servers and blockchains across multiple jurisdictions, and mutual legal assistance requests can take months.
5. **Ratification and implementation gaps.** Not every regional state is party to every instrument, and several have not aligned domestic law with their treaty obligations.

6. Historical Context and Timeline

The scam-centre crisis developed in three phases: a legal architecture built in the 2000s, a casino and online gambling boom in the 2010s, and a rapid shift into forced criminality after 2020.

Phase 1: Building the framework (2000 to 2015). The Palermo instruments of 2000 established the first internationally agreed definition of trafficking. Regional processes followed, including the Bali Process in 2002 and the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) in 2004. ASEAN adopted ACTIP in 2015. These frameworks were designed principally for sexual exploitation and labour trafficking, not for compounds conducting online fraud.

Phase 2: The gambling boom (2015 to 2020). Online gambling operators, many serving customers in mainland China, expanded into Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and the Philippines, often within special economic zones and casino towns. When Cambodia banned online gambling in 2019 and the pandemic emptied casinos in 2020, operators retained their premises, payment networks, and personnel, and redirected them towards fraud.

Phase 3: Industrial forced criminality (2021 onwards). The 2021 coup in Myanmar eroded what limited state control remained along its borders. Compounds multiplied, recruitment

became global, and the business moved into cryptocurrency and AI-enabled fraud. Since 2023, crackdowns, sanctions, and new treaties have intensified, yet syndicates have repeatedly relocated rather than collapsed.

6.1. Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
December 2000	UNTOC and its Protocols, including the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, adopted and opened for signature in Palermo
February 2002	Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime launched
December 2003	Trafficking in Persons Protocol enters into force
October 2004	Six Mekong countries sign the COMMIT Memorandum of Understanding against trafficking
July 2010	UN General Assembly adopts the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons and establishes the Voluntary Trust Fund for victims
November 2015	ASEAN adopts ACTIP, which enters into force in March 2017
August 2019	Cambodia announces a ban on online gambling
2020	COVID-19 closes casinos across the region; operators pivot to online fraud
February 2021	Military coup in Myanmar; border regions fall further under armed-group control
May 2023	ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Combating Trafficking in Persons Caused by the Abuse of Technology
June 2023	INTERPOL issues an Orange Notice on trafficking-fuelled fraud
August 2023	OHCHR estimates that at least 120,000 people in Myanmar and approximately 100,000 in Cambodia are held in scam operations
October to November 2023	Operation 1027 offensive in northern Shan State; Myanmar hands approximately 31,000 telecom fraud suspects to China
March 2024	Raid on a scam compound in Bamban, Philippines, exposes links to the town's mayor
July 2024	President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. announces a ban on all Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGOs)
December 2024	UNODC reports that forced criminality reached 8% of detected trafficking victims; UN General Assembly adopts the Convention against Cybercrime
February 2025	Thailand cuts electricity, fuel, and internet supplies to Myanmar border areas hosting compounds; thousands of foreigners are released
April 2025	UNODC report "Inflection Point" warns that scam centres are spreading to other continents
June 2025	INTERPOL reports that nationals of 66 countries have been trafficked into scam centres

Date	Event
October 2025	United States and United Kingdom sanction the Prince Group; US authorities seek forfeiture of approximately 127,271 bitcoin; FinCEN severs the Huione Group from the US financial system
October 2025	Myanmar military raids KK Park, detaining more than 2,000 people and seizing Starlink terminals
October 2025	UN Convention against Cybercrime opens for signature in Hanoi; 72 states sign
November 2025	Former Bamban mayor Alice Guo sentenced to life imprisonment for qualified trafficking
January 2026	Prince Group chairman Chen Zhi arrested in Cambodia and extradited to China
February 2026	OHCHR report "A Wicked Problem" documents torture and calls for full respect of the non-punishment principle
June 2026	CCPCJ adopts its first resolution explicitly addressing cyber scam centres
July 2026	UNODC estimates 2025 scam losses at US\$88.3 billion to US\$114.1 billion across East and Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand

7. Case Studies

Each case below illustrates a different response to scam centres: infrastructure cut-offs and raids, cross-border handovers, financial sanctions, domestic regulatory reform, and the limits of special economic zones. Delegates should assess what succeeded, what failed, and who bore the cost.

7.1. Case Study 1: Myawaddy and KK Park, Myanmar

Myawaddy Township in Myanmar's Kayin State lies across the Moei River from Mae Sot, Thailand. From 2019 onwards, compounds such as KK Park and Shwe Kokko expanded along the river under the protection of local armed groups, drawing electricity, fuel, and internet connectivity from Thailand. Thousands of foreign nationals recruited through fraudulent job offers were transported across the border to work in them.

In February 2025, Thailand cut electricity, fuel, and internet supplies to border areas hosting compounds. Armed groups released thousands of workers, and approximately 7,000 people were reported stranded in poor conditions awaiting repatriation. The compounds responded by switching to generators and satellite internet, including Starlink terminals. On 20 and 21 October 2025, the Myanmar military raided KK Park, detaining more than 2,000 people and seizing approximately 30 Starlink terminals. Hundreds fled across the river into Thailand, and India alone arranged the return of approximately 500 of its nationals.

7.2. Case Study 2: Kokang and Operation 1027, Myanmar

In the Kokang region of northern Shan State, on the border with China, a small number of families operated compounds in the town of Laukkai under the protection of a junta-aligned militia. Many of the workers, and many of the fraud victims, were Chinese nationals.

In October 2023, an alliance of ethnic armed organisations launched Operation 1027, citing the scam centres among its justifications. Under sustained pressure from Beijing, approximately 31,000 telecom fraud suspects had been transferred to China by November 2023. China issued arrest warrants for leaders of the Kokang crime families, several of whom were later transferred to China and received severe sentences.

7.3. Case Study 3: The Prince Group, Cambodia

The Prince Group presented itself as one of Cambodia's leading conglomerates, with interests in real estate, banking, and hospitality. Its chairman, Chen Zhi, held senior advisory positions in Cambodia. On 14 October 2025, the US Treasury sanctioned 146 individuals and entities linked to the Prince Group, which it designated a transnational criminal organisation. The United Kingdom imposed parallel sanctions. US prosecutors unsealed an indictment accusing Chen Zhi of operating forced-labour scam compounds and sought forfeiture of approximately 127,271 bitcoin, valued at about US\$15 billion. The same day, the US Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) severed the Cambodia-based Huione Group from the US financial system as a primary money laundering concern. On 6 January 2026, Cambodian authorities arrested Chen Zhi and extradited him to China.

7.4. Case Study 4: Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators

The Philippines licensed offshore gaming operators from 2016, primarily to serve customers in China. Some licensed operators became fronts for scam compounds and trafficking.

In March 2024, police raided a compound in Bamban, Tarlac, and rescued hundreds of foreign workers. Investigators linked the site to the town's mayor, Alice Guo, whose identity and nationality were subsequently called into question. In his State of the Nation Address in July 2024, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. announced a total ban on POGOs. Guo fled the country, was arrested in Indonesia and returned, and in November 2025 received a life sentence for qualified trafficking.

7.5. Case Study 5: The Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone, Laos

The Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Bokeo Province, where Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand meet, centres on the Kings Romans casino. In 2018, the US Treasury sanctioned the casino's owner, Zhao Wei, and the Kings Romans network as a transnational criminal organisation involved in drug trafficking, money laundering, and human trafficking.

Despite repeated warnings, the zone became a hub for scam operations. Lao authorities have conducted periodic crackdowns, detaining hundreds of people and deporting foreign workers, but the zone's special status and private administration have constrained sustained enforcement.

8. Existing Reforms and Responses

Responses to scam centres now operate at five levels: the United Nations, regional organisations, groups of neighbouring states, national governments, and the private sector. Each has produced results, and each faces clear limitations.

8.1. United Nations

- **UNTOC Review Mechanism.** The Conference of the Parties reviews how states implement UNTOC and its Protocols, including the trafficking provisions.
- **Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2010).** Established a UN-wide strategy and created the Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, managed by UNODC.
- **UN Convention against Cybercrime.** Adopted in December 2024 and opened for signature in Hanoi in October 2025, the Convention establishes common offences and procedures for sharing electronic evidence. Critics warn that its broad investigative powers could be misused against journalists and activists.
- **CCPCJ resolutions (June 2026).** At its thirty-fifth session, the Commission adopted its first resolution explicitly addressing cyber scam centres. The Japan-led text promotes a whole-of-society approach that includes the private sector and support for victims. A separate resolution on trafficking in persons reaffirmed the non-punishment principle.
- **Research and technical assistance.** The UNODC regional office in Bangkok publishes threat assessments and trains police, prosecutors, and financial investigators. OHCHR reports in 2023 and 2026 set out a human rights-based response.
- **ICAT.** The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons has issued recommendations on the links between trafficking and organised crime and on protecting people forced into crime.

8.2. Regional

- **ACTIP and the ASEAN Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons (2015).** The binding regional framework, including the non-punishment provision in Article 14(7).
- **ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Combating Trafficking in Persons Caused by the Abuse of Technology (2023).** The first regional commitment focused on online scam

trafficking, calling for improved victim identification, cooperation, and public awareness.

- **Bali Process.** A forum of more than 45 member states and organisations, co-chaired by Australia and Indonesia, that addresses trafficking, smuggling, and related crime, including scam-centre recruitment.
- **COMMIT.** The ministerial process of the six Mekong countries, focused on cross-border case referral and repatriation.

8.3. Minilateral and Bilateral

- **China, Myanmar, and Thailand.** Joint operations, information sharing, and repatriation flights, including the large transfers from Myanmar to China in 2023 and the coordinated returns through Thailand in 2025.
- **Mekong-Lancang law enforcement cooperation.** A China-led framework for joint patrols and operations along the Mekong River.
- **Coordinated sanctions.** The October 2025 US and UK actions against the Prince Group demonstrated how financial centres can act in concert.

8.4. National

Country	Measure
China	Anti-Telecom and Online Fraud Law (2022); large-scale repatriation and prosecution of suspects from Myanmar and Cambodia
Thailand	Cut electricity, fuel, and internet supplies to border compounds (2025); emergency decree requiring banks and telecom operators to share responsibility for scam losses (2025)
Philippines	Total ban on POGOs (2024); prosecution of complicit officials
Cambodia	Periodic crackdowns and deportations; arrest and extradition of Chen Zhi (2026)
Singapore	Protection from Scams Act (2025), enabling police to restrict the bank accounts of individuals being defrauded
United States	Sanctions, indictments, and asset forfeiture against scam networks and their financiers

8.5. Private Sector and Technology

- **Social media platforms** have removed millions of accounts linked to scam centres and fraudulent job advertisements.
- **Satellite internet providers** have intervened: in October 2025, SpaceX stated that it had disabled more than 2,500 Starlink terminals at Myanmar scam compounds.
- **Cryptocurrency issuers and exchanges** have frozen wallets linked to fraud at the request of law enforcement agencies.

- **Banks** are adopting real-time fraud detection and account-freezing tools.

8.6. Shortcomings of the Current Response

1. **Displacement.** Raids and bans relocate operations within the region and beyond it.
2. **Criminalisation of victims.** Authorities frequently detain, fine, or deport released workers without adequate screening.
3. **Corruption and complicity.** Compounds rarely survive without protection from officials or armed groups.
4. **Slow cooperation.** Mutual legal assistance and extradition can take months or years, while illicit funds move in minutes.
5. **Ungoverned territory.** No ordinary legal channel reaches compounds in areas controlled by non-state armed groups.
6. **Insufficient funding and capacity.** Shelter, psychological support, and reintegration services remain underfunded in both source and host countries.

9. Stakeholders and Perspectives

Nearly every state has a stake in this agenda, because its citizens are either trafficked into compounds or defrauded by them. States differ in how they experience the problem and in what they are willing to concede.

9.1. State Actors

Stakeholder	Role in the Problem	Likely Priorities
Myanmar	Hosts major compounds in border regions, many outside effective government control	Attributes the problem to armed groups; emphasises sovereignty; seeks recognition for recent raids
Cambodia	Hosts large compounds, including in Sihanoukville and border towns	Rejects characterisations of state complicity (it publicly disputed the 2023 OHCHR report); highlights its crackdowns and arrests
Laos	Hosts the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone	Emphasises sovereignty and periodic enforcement; relies on investment linked to the zone
Thailand	Principal transit route and neighbour of the Myanmar compounds	Border security, its tourism reputation, and the handling of released workers; has used infrastructure cut-offs
Philippines	Former host of POGO-linked compounds	Promotes its POGO ban and prosecutions as a model; seeks assistance in tracing fugitives and assets
China	Early source of many trafficked workers and fraud victims; major enforcement actor	Extradition, handover, and prosecution of syndicate leaders; wary of external interference in the region

Stakeholder	Role in the Problem	Likely Priorities
Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia	Sources of victims and, in some cases, of recruiters	Repatriation, consular access, and regional cooperation through ASEAN
India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan	Growing sources of trafficked workers	Rescue and repatriation of nationals; action against recruitment agents and fraudulent job advertisements
Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Nigeria, and other African states	Growing sources of trafficked workers and potential locations for new hubs	Protection of nationals, capacity building, and preventing the spread of compounds to Africa
United States, United Kingdom, European Union, Canada	Home to fraud victims and major financial centres	Sanctions, asset forfeiture, anti-money laundering standards, and accountability for complicit officials
Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand	Home to fraud victims and major donors	Funding for UNODC programmes, regional law enforcement cooperation, and victim support

9.2. Non-State and Institutional Actors

- **UN entities.** UNODC (crime and criminal justice), OHCHR (human rights), IOM (migration and return), ILO (forced labour), and UNICEF (children) each hold part of the response.
- **INTERPOL.** Issues notices, shares intelligence, and coordinates multinational operations.
- **ASEAN, the Bali Process, and COMMIT.** The regional platforms through which most cooperation is negotiated.
- **Non-state armed groups.** Some armed factions in Myanmar have protected compounds in return for revenue, while others have attacked them. None is party to any treaty.
- **Technology and financial companies.** Social media platforms, messaging services, satellite internet providers, cryptocurrency issuers and exchanges, and banks control the infrastructure on which the fraud depends.
- **Civil society.** NGOs, journalists, and survivor networks often identify victims first, document abuses, and support reintegration.
- **Survivors.** People who have escaped compounds; their testimony is essential to prosecutions, and their protection is the ultimate test of any solution.

9.3. Underlying Tensions

- **Sovereignty and intervention.** Host states resist external scrutiny, while victims' states seek access and accountability.

- **Enforcement and protection.** Mass arrests deliver headline figures but risk punishing victims.
- **Speed and due process.** Rapid handovers and deportations conflict with screening and fair-trial standards.
- **Regulation and privacy.** Tighter controls on platforms, telecommunications, and cryptocurrency affect the rights of ordinary users.

10. Questions a Resolution Must Answer

- How can states regulate online recruitment, job advertisements, and recruitment agencies without restricting legitimate labour migration?
- How should states screen released persons to distinguish victims from organisers, and who should conduct that screening?
- How can the region apply the non-punishment principle consistently, including to people coerced into supervisory roles?
- How can states accelerate mutual legal assistance and extradition for cyber-enabled crime while upholding fair-trial standards?
- How should states trace, freeze, and recover proceeds held in cryptocurrency and underground banking, and should recovered assets compensate victims?
- How can the international community act against compounds located in territory outside the control of a recognised government?
- How can states address corruption and official complicity without undermining regional cooperation?
- Which monitoring or reporting mechanism should track progress, and what role should UNODC play within it?

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