UNCC15

WORLD ANIMAL JUSTICE

WORLD ANIMAL JUSTICE POLICY DECLARATION

Ahead of the 15th United Nations Crime Congress, World Animal Justice and partner NGOs call on States, UN bodies, and international stakeholders to formally recognize animal exploitation as a critical component of transnational organized crime convergence.

1. ANIMALS : THE INVISIBLE VICTIMS OF CRIME CONVERGENCE

For too long, animals have remained the invisible victims of global criminal systems. Today, mounting evidence demonstrates that animal exploitation — including illegal activities as well as certain lawful sectors presenting structural vulnerabilities that may be exploited by organized criminal networks — is increasingly interconnected with drug trafficking, weapons circulation, corruption, money laundering, and other serious transnational crimes.

2. WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING RECOGNITION UNDER UNODC: BEYOND BIODIVERSITY LOSS

Wildlife trafficking is already recognized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as a major form of organized environmental crime linked to broader illicit markets. Yet discussions continue to focus primarily on biodiversity loss and conservation concerns, while billions of sentient animals suffering within these systems remain largely overlooked.

Animals are not merely commodities moved through criminal networks; they are sentient beings directly subjected to serious forms of harm, exploitation, and systemic violence within transnational criminal activities.

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3. EMERGING ISSUE: CRIME CONVERGENCE AND LIVE ANIMAL EXPORT

Our WAJ Expert report, Animals in Crime Convergence highlights how certain operational characteristics and regulatory gap — such as inadequate oversight, weak enforcement mechanisms, conflicts of interest and limited transparency across animal-use industries — which may create opportunities for exploitation by transnational criminal actors. may create opportunities for exploitation by transnational criminal actors. In particular, growing evidence indicates that live animal export vessels transporting livestock from South America are increasingly vulnerable to infiltration by drug trafficking operations.

The extreme conditions onboard these ships — including prolonged confinement, overcrowding, waste accumulation, dead and suffering animals, and limited inspection capacities — create concealment opportunities that can facilitate illicit trafficking. These vulnerabilities compound longstanding concerns regarding animal welfare (and protection), environmental impacts, regulatory oversight, and limited transparency inherent in the live export trade. Therefore, animal exploitation exists along a continuum that includes both unlawful activities and legally authorised practices that cause significant animal suffering and may create opportunities for corruption, illicit trade, and organised crime infiltration.

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4. A STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FOR UNCC15

This convergence between animal exploitation and organized crime can no longer be ignored. The 15th UN Crime Congress provides a unique and timely opportunity to address this critical issue within global crime prevention and criminal justice frameworks, including discussions linked to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO UNCC15 DELEGATES & MEMBER STATES

We therefore call on UNCC15 delegates and Member States to:

- Recognize animal exploitation as a crime convergence issue within organized crime prevention frameworks;
- Acknowledge animals as directly harmed victims within transnational criminal systems;
- Strengthen cross-sector cooperation between wildlife, maritime, customs, anti-drug, anti-corruption, and financial crime authorities;
- Integrate animal-related crimes more fully into organized crime risk analysis, prevention, and enforcement strategies;
- Address the structural vulnerabilities of live animal export systems that facilitate animal harm and illicit trafficking activities.

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6. CONCLUSION: PROTECTING ANIMALS TO STRENGTHEN GLOBAL CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Ignoring animal exploitation weakens the effectiveness of global crime prevention efforts. Protecting animals is therefore not only an ethical imperative — it is also increasingly necessary for strengthening international security, the rule of law, and the fight against transnational organized crime. The international community must no longer leave billions of invisible victims suffering in silence at the core of global criminal systems. We urge governments, international institutions, civil society organizations, academics, and enforcement actors to engage with this issue ahead of UNCC15.

Read WAJ Expert Report Here

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WAJ is a Member of the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

THE Alliance OF NGOs ON CRIME PREVENTION & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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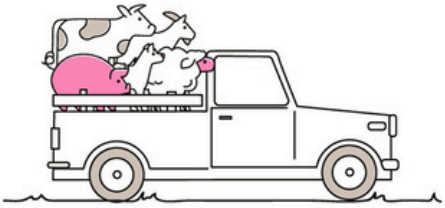

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