



6 June 2008

## **The Threat to the UK from Serious Organised Crime**

### ***Unrestricted UK Threat Assessment Published***

The Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) has today published an unrestricted version of the UK Threat Assessment of Serious Organised Crime 2008/9. The document describes and assesses the threats posed to the UK by serious organised criminals. The assessment is drawn from a fuller, restricted version which is produced annually for law enforcement and wider government use.

SOCA Director General Bill Hughes said: "The UK Threat Assessment describes the complex picture of criminal activity that harms the UK and guides the law enforcement response to those threats."

Key findings from the unrestricted UK Threat Assessment are:

**Criminal Business Structures** - many of those involved in serious organised criminal activity in, and directly affecting, the UK are British nationals. Most serious organised criminals are involved in more than one area of criminal activity directly or indirectly concerned with making money. Most activities require some measure of criminal collaboration and infrastructure, and this lies behind the formation of organised crime groups and networks.

**Firearms** - the vast majority of recorded firearms offences in England and Wales are linked to street-gangs. Since 2006 seizures of live firing weapons being brought into the UK have been in larger quantities, in batches of up to 30. Previously there were relatively small numbers seized, often less than five at a time. There has been an increased trend of Baikal gas pistols converted to fire 9mm ammunition entering the UK from Lithuania.

**Cocaine** - most cocaine destined for Europe is concealed in large vessels crossing the Atlantic. Possibly in response to successful law enforcement action against these transatlantic shipments there is increasing evidence of shipments by air to West Africa from where the cocaine is transported to Europe.

There is evidence of a two-tier market for cocaine in the UK both at wholesale and street level. Dealers are selling cheaper, more heavily adulterated cocaine to some customers while selling higher purity cocaine to more affluent buyers.

**Heroin** - At least 90% of the UK's heroin supply is manufactured from opiates originating in Afghanistan. Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan continues to rise. There are indications that some opiates are being stockpiled, although it is not known whether this is to regulate the price worldwide or because of over-production.

**Organised Immigration Crime** - the scale of people smuggling far exceeds that of human trafficking. Eastern European traffickers, who trade mainly in Eastern European victims, routinely purchase victims from criminal associates who have trafficked them from source countries, either directly or through agents. The groups are relatively small in size and unsophisticated and rarely engage in end-to-end trafficking, unlike some South East Asian groups who may control the movement of their victims at all stages.

Many victims of trafficking work in the sex industry (mainly 'off-street') across the UK and not just in metropolitan areas. Based on those identified and recovered, most come from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, China, South East Asia and Africa and this largely reflects the nationality of traffickers involved.

**Non Fiscal Fraud** - fraud against large companies may appear to be a 'victimless crime', in practice, everyone is affected, since the income lost to fraud and the costs of measures to combat it are reflected in higher prices. Serious organised criminals are actively involved in many forms of fraud, especially those calling for an effective criminal infrastructure, such as payment card crime, 'boiler room' fraud (telesales centres that persuade investors into purchasing worthless or over-priced stock in companies with little or no value) and mortgage fraud. Frauds that offer high profits at lower risk than other forms of criminality are obviously attractive. Some of the profits made from these frauds are used to fund other serious criminal activity.

SOCA activity in response to these threats includes:

**Firearms** - in the past year SOCA has been involved in operations which have, worldwide, led to the seizure of over 400 illicit firearms and over 23,000 rounds of ammunition. Last week, two Lithuanian men were sentenced to six years and eight months each as part of a joint investigation by SOCA and the Metropolitan Police, which saw 13 firearms and over 900 rounds of ammunition seized in London.

**Class A drugs** - SOCA, with national and international partners, seized almost 90 tonnes of class A drugs and over 60 tonnes of precursor chemicals in 2007/08. Recent activity in West Africa by the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre (Narcotics) include a prosecution mounted by Liberia and operations with support from Benin and Cote D'Ivoire. 2007 saw an increase in the number of SOCA staff posted to Afghanistan coupled with tactical

successes in the country that included the seizure of 2,900kg of opium and opiates, 6,500kg and 1,300 litres of pre-cursor chemicals and 1,100kg of heroin.

**Organised Immigration Crime** – successful action at home and abroad in Operation HORNBLOWER against a gang trafficking and exploiting illegal immigrants from Afghanistan and Pakistan into the UK and in Operation GIRDER against an Organised Crime Group involved in the facilitated immigration of children and adults from Romania into the UK.

**Fraud** – SOCA activity against fraud in the last year has included the seizure of thousands of fake financial instruments destined for the UK and with a potential value of nearly £8 million in a month long operation in Nigeria as part of an international initiative against mass marketing fraud. Operation AJOWAN led to the arrest, prosecution and conviction of UK-based criminals who traded stolen bank, credit card and identity information on the internet.

While produced by SOCA, the UK Threat Assessment is very much a collaborative effort. It is based on information and intelligence drawn from a wide range of sources, both in the UK and abroad.

Improving overall awareness of serious organised crime is critical to combating the various threats and mitigating the harm they cause. SOCA makes information available to public and private sector organisations in order to develop 'target hardening' measures, and the public also needs this information in order to protect themselves against becoming victims of serious organised crime.

### **Notes to Editors**

1. The unrestricted UK Threat Assessment is available at [www.soca.gov.uk](http://www.soca.gov.uk)
2. The Serious Organised Crime Agency is an intelligence-led agency formed in April 2006 to tackle Class A drugs and organised immigration crime as top priorities. Other priorities are fraud against individuals and the private sector, hi tech crime, counterfeiting, the use of firearms, serious robbery and recovery of the proceeds of crime. SOCA is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by, but operationally independent from, the Home Office. On 1 April 2008 the Assets Recovery Agency merged with SOCA.

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