

## **“States need to fight financial crimes first to succeed in protecting the environment”**

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There is a close connection between financial crimes and environmental degradation. The environment is the embodiment of human, animal and plant life that messing up with it, messes up with good health, food security, clean water, clean air, physical and mental wellbeing, creation of jobs, government revenue and many more. Therefore, protecting the environment is not only of utmost priority by governments but an imperative.

The global market system has precipitated conditions for economic development of countries, we must give credit where it is due. However, the downside is that criminals have also tapped benefits of the global market system to perpetuate tax avoidance, corruption, money laundering, financing of terrorism, illegal trade in wildlife, illicit trade of hazardous waste; illegal fishing, illegal logging, timber smuggling and the list goes on. Environmental crimes undermine quality of life, quality of water, pollution, of animals, plants and human health, the list goes on. Criminals thrive by exploiting gaps in the regulatory system of countries to advance their criminal agenda globally. Criminals have also gained access to the instrumentalities of the current global market system such as telegraphic money transfers, letters of credit and others to move dirty money around the globe easily. Huge amounts of funds have been able to move among corporate entities and financial institutions in a matter of minutes; if not seconds using telegraphic funds transfer and other sophisticated payment systems today. The supersonic speed with which money can navigate the labyrinth of global financial system has made untangling of dirty money from clean money an almost impossible task to do. I said in the past that states cannot afford to play second fiddle but must continuously to do research in areas of vulnerability to remain a step ahead of criminals. It is not surprising then that in some countries, criminals have incorporated their own Banks, issue their own debit and credit cards to facilitate their agents execute criminal activities globally.

According to UNEP Report (2021), environmental crimes have been on the uptake, fueled by the huge profits in billions of dollars earned by criminal enterprises every year. These crimes have widely featured as among the most profitable transnational criminal activities today. The monetary value of environmental crimes was estimated in 2016 at between US\$91-259 billion annually, the fourth largest criminal typology in the world after drugs, counterfeited goods and human trafficking. The estimated amount of money earned illegally from environmental crimes was estimated at a 26 per cent increase annually. Transnational crimes have been on the rise because of many factors such as illicitly accrued financial gains, porous land borders, low risk of detection, globalization and the ease with which criminals can communicate with each other just like legitimate businesses and etc.

Studies carried out in the USA over the years have found that illicit trade in dangerous products such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) has been on the rise. Chlorofluorocarbons are a class of chemical

compounds that serve as coolants in electric refrigerators and Automobile air conditioning systems, (ACS) in cars. By the way, motorists you are advised not to switch on ACs in your cars for more than five minutes, it is better open windows and use free natural air.

Virtually almost all modern cars, refrigerators, spray cans, insecticides, hairsprays, deodorants, shaving creams and a host of other applications have a substantial measure of chlorofluorocarbons. Two scientists—Dr Rowland Sherwood and Mario Molina at the University of California wrote a paper asserting that CFCs eventually escape into the atmosphere, where they react with ozone molecules, causing substantial damage to the ozone layer. The Professors asserted that the depletion of ozone molecules eventually causes the hole in the ozone layer to widen, and to release substantial ultraviolet rays, which in turn causes skin cancer, cataracts and sunburns. In spite of the foregoing risks, some consumers ignore expert advice and continue to use smuggled cosmetics, especially those containing mercury and hydroquinone—which are known to cause cancer. Despite the introduction of tight regulations against some cosmetics, somehow smugglers still find a way to get banned products on the market. Failure to adhere to expert advice is sometimes caused by the disconnect between regulators and the public, ignorance of knowledge (where some risks may not appear obvious) to some consumers, not to mention other factors. In view of compelling evidence that links urban congestion to environmental degradation, the use of public transport as in other big cities should be encouraged to minimize further damage. Does a family need to possess five cars in the same compound, considering the inherent environment damage they cause? I am wondering whether having capacity to buy certain things such as cars should translate into incapacity to appreciate certain realities of life such as environment protection? I can only urge the government to use policy measures and mitigate further environmental damage? As I conclude, ask yourself, “what have I done to leave the environment better than I found it?”

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