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IP CRIME CONFERENCE

# LYON FRANCE | 2025

## 18th International Law Enforcement Intellectual Property Crime Conference

# CONFERENCE REPORT

# Introduction

At its core, the annual International Law Enforcement Intellectual Property (IP) Crime Conference exemplifies a "partnership of partnerships."

This year was especially significant since it was the first Conference hosted in Lyon, France – home to INTERPOL's General Secretariat headquarters. This location provided a unique opportunity for attendees to connect directly with INTERPOL officials and gain insights into the INTERPOL Global Academy and specialized crime units.

The theme of the 18th Annual International Law Enforcement IP Crime Conference — 'Working in Partnership to Advance Safety and Security'— underscored the importance of collaboration in confronting the evolving nature of IP crime. As the Secretary General of INTERPOL said, "Much of the information, resources, and knowledge we need to conduct investigations or even to prevent crime is with private entity partners." The President and Chief Executive Officer of ULSE concurred, observing the need for "partnership with law enforcement and first responders" in "shaping public policy to address emerging risks" from counterfeit products. "No country, agency, or organization can face these challenges alone."

Meeting in Lyon, France, more than 450 conference participants from 70 countries and 230 organizations heard from experts on these issues and had opportunities for training and developing new partnerships in the home city of INTERPOL. The conference featured plenary speakers, expert panels, and specialized workshops (see sidebar on workshops), as well as recognition of outstanding contributions to the fight against IP crime and illicit trade (see sidebar on International IP Crime Investigators College awards).

Among the broad themes the conference addressed were issues arising from

- Transportation of illicit goods
- Research and training to assist law enforcement
- The challenges and opportunities posed by technology generally and artificial intelligence (AI) specifically
- Pharmaceutical products
- Electronic mobility (eMobility) devices
- Crime convergence and links between different types of organized crime, such as human trafficking, slavery, and IP crime
- Other crimes related to illicit trade.

General training sessions focused on developing multi-level responses to illicit trade, understanding the landscape of security and supply chain integrity risks, and applying innovative solutions to safety and security challenges.

Although the need for partnerships to fight illicit trade has long been evident, it became especially clear during the shift in trade patterns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a representative from an electronic commerce (e-commerce) platform told the conference. "Traditional enforcement methods weren't enough anymore," the representative said. "We needed a new approach [that] combines data, artificial intelligence, machine learning," and the expertise of law enforcement officials and brand owners. More generally, the representative of a second e-commerce platform noted, "The digital economy has revolutionized trade, empowering small businesses, for instance, to reach global customers. But it has also empowered counterfeiters, who exploit technology, logistics, and social media to sell dangerous and fraudulent goods."

## Global Trade and Transportation Safety

As global commerce has become more diverse, transportation supply chains have become increasingly complex. As a member of a U.S. transportation safety committee observed, it is unusual for many products to only travel on one mode to the consumer.

Even seemingly singular modes of transport can encompass multiple ones. For example, air cargo shipments, an international aviation representative said, have a uniquely dispersed supply chain that enables the rapid transport of goods. Dispersing the supply chain disperses risks, but can also lead to vulnerabilities, such as those in surface transport from a screening checkpoint to loading onto an aircraft.

Trade routes themselves have changed or become more complex. As a UN representative noted, conflicts have shifted more trade to the Middle Corridor, for example, through Armenia and Azerbaijan, while those in the Middle East have shifted trade toward the Red Sea and ports.

Maritime shipments, another industry representative said, pose unique challenges due to their volume. Last year, the representative stated, more than 13 billion tons of cargo—equivalent to 20 times the mass of the Great Wall of China—was transported by sea in 17 million containers on ships that carried between 12,000 and 24,000 containers each. Given this scale, the UN representative added, "We cannot expect [to be] inspecting . . . each container, because that would be slowing down the chain of trade," and even "blocking a port." Rather, the representative said, there "should [b]e less inspections . . . to obtain more results."

Yet misdeclaration and non-declaration of dangerous goods pose what the maritime representative claimed is the "biggest challenge" in maritime trade today. Some goods, although not inherently dangerous, can become hazardous when they come into contact with misdeclared goods that are.

One need for collaboration in this area is the consistent application of regulations. "We have the regulations," the maritime representative emphasized. "Nothing needs to be invented. The problem... is the different level of implementation in different countries." Reasons for inconsistent implementation may range from the lack of capability to enforce standards to the volume of trade some countries must monitor.

Ensuring safety and security has also, the aviation representative said, required differing approaches given the level of intent behind each: safety incidents are unintended while security incidents are the result of deliberate action by a bad actor. For example, safety regulations may recommend fewer openings of cargo holds, but security regulations recommend opening them as needed to check for possible sabotage. Nevertheless, the aviation representative said, there is increasing recognition of the need for "better alignment between safety and security. Because if you have some kind of safety incident on board an aircraft and it crashes, or a bomb that's been put inside cargo, the outcome is often the same."

Panelists noted the need for a "multi-layered approach, using a combination of measures," including technology, to manage dangerous cargoes. Use of technology, including AI, raises its own resource issues. "The algorithms and the software, the technology used to detect these things, are really expensive," the aviation industry representative noted. "And not every state has that capability. We have different levels of state capability and resources." Still, the UN representative said, AI can help integrate and automate targeting systems used by different enforcement agencies.

States may also form partnerships and combine resources to address problems related to illicit trade. In the Caribbean region, for example, small island states with responsibility for large expanses of water have formed a Regional Security System (RSS) to intercept illicit goods at air and sea entry points. RSS work, an organizational representative said, has enabled states in the region to merge air surveillance with maritime patrols. It has also helped build capabilities by developing standard procedures for the police and military in dealing with IP crimes and conducting training exercises for them. Other initiatives that customs and law enforcement representatives suggested include simplified procedures for express consignment and postal packages, a central data repository on IP and related crimes, and joint training for customs and police officials.

## Training and Research Partnerships, Including Immersive Learning

Partnership with others, such as sharing resources, offers law enforcement agencies one way to enhance their capabilities. Training and research offer another way to improve both capabilities and partnerships themselves.

One promising means for agencies to improve both their capabilities and their partnerships is immersive learning. Immersive learning places participants in a virtual environment where they can practice skills in realistic, simulated scenarios without the need for physical access or exposure to hazardous materials. Participants may use virtual reality headsets showing them simulated crime scenes. The experience can build participant skills in a controlled environment that can be adapted for varying circumstances. The approach, said a South African police Task Force leader whose agency has used the IIPCIC Classroom-in-a-box VR, provides "a quicker way of reaching [training] goals."

Immersive learning can help provide more effective responses by making mentorship more effective. When older personnel shadowed younger ones on the job, it could take years for the younger ones to become effective. However, with the IIPCIC Classroom-in-a-box immersive learning, younger officers can achieve their training goals more quickly and easily. In addition, the South African leader said, "everyone on board is going through the same sequence and the same scenarios. So, there's a similar understanding [among all on] what's supposed to be done."

Immersive learning can also help improve responses by involving other parties. "There is no way police officers can continue doing trainings that comprise police only. We need to expand," said a Namibian officer. "We need to share, to bring stakeholders and law enforcement in one room to share an immersive learning environment where [all] can understand their role in . . . investigating these cases from the initial stage . . . to prosecution. There are certain skills that we as law enforcers... do not have that other stakeholders have."

Immersive learning can enhance the speed and accuracy of responses to incidents by demonstrating how to resolve complex scenarios. "Investigations are complex, particularly multi-agency ones," said a representative of a Bahrain intellectual property organization. "Immersive learning can show law enforcement agencies how . . . to solve complex scenarios . . . help them identify digital evidence, and conduct online investigations, which is not easy to do with traditional training."

Efforts to implement immersive training face challenges. Among these, the Bahrain representative noted, are costs, resistance to change, and lack of trainers. Yet, as the Namibian officer said, while immersive training can be expensive to establish, once it is implemented, it can make training easier, and it can be tailored to different scenarios. In addition, by providing common training, the Bahrain representative noted that immersive training can ensure officers from different countries, who combat transnational crimes such as those related to illicit trade, perform at similar levels, with "no one left behind in training."

Beyond training, academic research can help law enforcement officials identify new means to combat illicit trade. "Law enforcement strategies are increasingly data-driven and evidence-based," an INTERPOL academic coordinator said. "And research plays a vital role, whether it's mapping counterfeiting networks, understanding or analyzing criminal behavior, [or] evaluating the impact of legislation." Furthermore, a Swiss researcher said, research can bring persons "from different backgrounds . . . to think closely about the most pressing problems that law enforcement [is] facing today."

Research, a Swedish academic noted, can help in understanding, prioritizing, and measuring problems. One project in Sweden, the academic said, helped shift perceptions that organized crime was focused on guns to a more accurate analysis of its participation in fraud.

A U.S. analyst of European crime said research can provide "a big picture context." It can provide frameworks for problem-solving, means to make informed decisions regarding resource allocations or strategic plans, and explore questions outside of operational priorities, all without the institutional bias that may be present in law enforcement agencies facing political pressures or internal agendas. "Enforcement – academic partnerships," the analyst said, "create mutual benefits, combining real-world impact and actionable insight, ensuring the relevance to practitioners."

## AI and Technology Solutions

AI and other technology, conference panelists noted, can be a "multiplier" in illicit trade—both in producing and preventing it. "The digital economy has revolutionized trade," an ecommerce platform representative said, "empowering small businesses, for instance, to reach global customers. But it has also empowered counterfeiters, who exploit technology, logistics, and social media to sell dangerous and fraudulent goods."

Historically, a music industry representative noted, "criminals needed technical expertise, [and] they needed to invest time, effort, and resources in developing schemes and methodologies to run a digital piracy enterprise." Technology has lowered the barriers to acquiring each of those: "Now we have bad actors that have at their disposal AI tools that enable them to execute this unlawful activity with basically little or no technical expertise or involvement."

"It's not so much that AI is creating more and new crimes," a UL representative added. "It's making older scams more sophisticated. They're launching quicker. They're harder to uncover, and they're harder to take down." For example, the representative said, scammers can use AI tools to translate perfectly to the victim's language or create what appears to be a copy of a current newspaper to prove that a scammer, or a virtual representation of a scammer, is "real." As a result, the representative concluded, "I don't think we're at the summit" of AI-enabled crimes. "I think we're at the very beginning."

One way to help limit AI-related crime, the ULRI representative suggested, is to have "resource officers or somebody who can help victims of AI-enabled or digital-enabled crimes in their local community, [whose] purpose is to simply educate and train members of their community on what these types of scams look like." Broader education may also help: a Serbian government representative noted extensive training in using AI for all students. Some form of "cradle to grave training on AI," the ULRI representative said, could help reduce "a lot of the 'low-hanging fruit' crime" and "leave more time for [law enforcement] to manage the more dangerous parts of AI that affect all of us more."

While AI can enable crimes, it can also help in detecting and preventing them. The music industry representative noted it is "very helpful for looking at large data sets for identifying trends, identifying risks." The ecommerce platform representative viewed "technology as a force multiplier. Technology underpins every part of our enforcement program. Artificial intelligence . . . helps to detect subtle brand impersonations, misspellings, and image misuse."

A proprietary large language model detection system, the ecommerce representative claimed, has achieved greater than 90 percent accuracy in pilot programs to flag potential infringements. "Optical character recognition scans hundreds of millions of images daily to identify logos and hidden brand names which are embedded in images and otherwise would go undetected," the representative added. "Artificial intelligence is not a silver bullet. It cannot replace human expertise . . . But it allows us to scale enforcement across hundreds of millions of listings and to focus expert attention where it matters most."

Simpler forms of technology can also help in the fight against illicit trade, especially when they enlist others to join it. An example provided by a trade official: the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa has helped encourage the use of a mobile phone application that allows consumers to learn sourcing information about the goods they buy, including whether they are legitimate.

Even simpler uses of technology have helped foster collaboration and partnerships in the fight against illicit trade. In South Africa, a WhatsApp group has brought together law enforcement officers who enforce against illicit trade. As a trade official said, "should you come across counterfeit pharmaceutical products, for instance, and you take a picture, put it on the WhatsApp group, within seconds you get a response [from one of] the team of health inspectors in the group . . . And if you're in this group, you have the phone numbers of everybody that you will actually need in this value chain of IP enforcement at your fingertips." Similarly, an INTERPOL official noted that a global email group can yield quick results from around the world. "You'll have someone sending a message saying, I'm in Brazil right now, and I've got a problem with this. And within 10 minutes, someone from another continent has replied saying, give me a call, I can help you out. It's really basic. It's really simple. But it really works."

## Using Technology to Address Pharmaceutical Counterfeiting

Among the most dangerous illicit goods are counterfeit pharmaceutical products. Three trends are worsening the problem of counterfeit pharmaceuticals, a pharmaceutical executive told the conference. First, "the scale of counterfeit medicine production is significantly increasing . . . with counterfeiters producing full-scale production runs that rival authentic commercial production." Second, "counterfeiters are [producing drugs] increasingly similar to the authentic products . . . they are counterfeiting. They are often visually indistinguishable" from legitimate products. Third, "counterfeit medicines are entering the legitimate supply chain" with increasing frequency.

Pharmaceutical companies seek ways to better and more easily detect counterfeit drugs. A representative from another pharmaceutical company noted a three-step process for detecting counterfeit medicines. The first step is to verify that the artwork and product information on the packaging match those in company records. The second step is to scan the packaging materials and upload a photo of them for analysis to determine whether the packaging is likely to be counterfeit, tampered with, or represents trademark infringement. The third is to conduct a spectrum test with a handheld spectrometer that the company has developed to determine if a product is genuine or counterfeit.

While such proprietary systems are helpful and evolving, a former U.S. prosecutor said there is a need for fast, reliable, and simple technology that law enforcement can use. And, the prosecutor noted, such a system is becoming available thanks to a collaboration launched at an earlier IP Crime Conference. At the 2023 conference, the prosecutor proposed "a stretch goal" for a single, simple technology that might assist law enforcement. As the prosecutor explained, "Various companies have donated technologies . . . to test and verify their particular products . . . And there are hundreds of [such] tools . . . The challenge that I saw was that hundreds of tools are not very effective or efficient. [So] I proposed as a stretch goal one device . . . that would have pharma companies, technology companies, consumer goods companies, et cetera on the device . . . [A U.S. Customs official] said this is what we want . . . And we worked the last two years to develop and then to get the technology approved."

The device seeks to detect counterfeits by scanning all information available on packaging—e.g., serial numbers, expiration dates, product stock keeping unit (SKU), number of dosages—and comparing that for a legitimate product. While counterfeiters may successfully fake one or more of these items on packaging, successfully replicating all—e.g., ensuring serial number, expiration date, SKU, and dosages reflect what the legitimate manufacturer produced on a package—can be more difficult, making successful counterfeiting more difficult, and detection of counterfeits easier.


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Panel Session 7
Using Technology to Better Address Pharmace
and Medical Device Counterfeiting
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## Illicit Lithium-Ion Batteries in eMobility Devices

An increasingly dangerous category of illicit goods is eMobility devices, particularly those powered by counterfeit or substandard lithium-ion batteries. In 2023, a ULSE partnerships executive told the conference that New York City had 268 fires caused by lithium-ion batteries, which injured 150 people and killed 18. In London, fires caused by batteries on eMobility devices occur, on average, every other day. Such fires can be difficult to extinguish, a former U.S. fire administrator said, because of the speed at which they develop, the intensity with which they burn, and the dangers (e.g., carcinogenic contaminants) they pose to firefighters.

EMobility device fires, panelists noted, have grown sharply in recent years. Indeed, the U.S. fire administrator said, "Before 2021, we really never saw these kinds of fires." In some ways, panelists said, the problem accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when delivery services increased rapidly. A UK electrical safety director noted the popularity of eMobility devices among "financially constrained gig economy workers, the Uber Eats drivers [who] need to earn money. They tend to live on a hand-to-mouth existence, and they choose to buy products, whether it's cheap e-bikes or additional batteries to extend the range of their existing e-bikes, allowing them to work longer, go faster, and afford the essentials to keep a roof over their head. And safety is secondary" for them.

Many people may not even be aware of the safety issues involved. The ULSE executive cited data showing that most eMobility device owners are unaware that their device has a lithium-ion battery, and that most will charge their lithium-ion batteries by their front door, where fires can rapidly spread throughout a residence. Similarly, the former U.S. fire administrator said, many consumers have "no idea about the [possible dangers] of aftermarket chargers [or] that what they're doing is wrong until they witness an event." Further complicating the problem, the UK electrical safety director said, are the use of universal chargers with improper voltages and self-assembled conversion kits. "Most of these fires," the director added, "occur when the [devices are] on charge."

Addressing the problem of hazardous eMobility devices requires a combination of research, regulation, and education. One difficulty in addressing lithium-ion battery fires, the former U.S. fire administrator said, is inconsistent identification of them. "Our data system in the U.S. was completely antiquated, and so we had firefighters across the country documenting the fires . . . in different categories," the administrator said. "Some [were] calling them vehicle fires, some electrical fires, and some hazardous materials fires. Well, if you collect data on them in different categories, then you cannot summarize the real problem." Summarizing the problem, the administrator added, would also require information on the context of such fires as well as their characteristics (e.g., number of cells). A better understanding of such fires can, in turn, inform effective suppression techniques. As the administrator noted, "If it's an [electric vehicle] and it's out in an open parking lot, then maybe you let it burn [,] rather than pouring copious amounts of water [on it], particularly in nations that have to use their drinking water for fire suppression."

Regulation has had some effect. Since passage of a local law requiring eMobility devices to meet UL standards, the UL executive said, New York City has seen only one death from an unregulated device. Yet marketing illicit batteries continues elsewhere. UK efforts aim to place greater responsibility on online marketplaces for the sale of electrical goods on these platforms. These efforts, the UK electrical safety director said, should also ensure responsibility throughout the supply chain and make eMobility devices subject to third-party certification. The UK electrical safety director added that current efforts to evade regulation can be as simple as faking conformity and marketing, or selling substandard conversion kits, and obtaining and selling substandard battery cells.

Enforcement efforts face challenges. "In the Caribbean," a Jamaican police official said, "enforcement officers are hardly ever trained to investigate these types of offenses." Furthermore, Caribbean officials enforcing against illicit eMobility devices must rely on "antiquated laws" regarding trademarks and counterfeiting, without specific legislation on eMobility devices. Finally, the official stated that home delivery of goods in the region often bypasses customs checks, and differences in jurisdictional and regulatory processes make enforcement of regulations challenging. Nevertheless, partnerships between law enforcement officials and intellectual property owners are having some effect in addressing the problem in the region.

Several educational initiatives aim to raise awareness and improve safety. The ULSE "Take Charge" campaign provides research and support to partners on fire safety precautions regarding batteries. The London Fire Brigade and the UK Bicycle Association have backed efforts to improve standards and educate users. Fire Prevention Week in the United States has focused on lithium-ion battery safety. Educational campaigns, the UK electrical safety director said, should not be "one big campaign that's going to cater to everyone." Rather, the director said, targeted campaigns can be more effective. Uber, for example, has partnered with fire safety officials to provide multi-language leaflets on battery safety to delivery personnel in London. The London Fire Brigade has partnered with fire safety officials to target "locations where the riders tend to go to look at their bikes and let them know if they have one of these troublesome batteries that we've identified." Education efforts have also, the electrical safety director said, stressed "there's no point putting food on the table if you haven't got a family there to feed. It's as stark as that."

Overall, the ULSE executive concluded, "This is not a single country issue. This is not a single-sector issue, but rather a shared global challenge that requires a shared global response. Standards and certification are certainly part of it. Consumer education, enforcement, and support for our frontline first responders can help us to move forward together."


BOUTIQUE

## IP Crime and Convergence

Intellectual property crime is often tied to other forms of transnational organized crime. As the representative of a global customs organization said, "law enforcement agencies [should] look at IP crime in the larger context of global criminality. To recognize it as a means to achieve wider-reaching and destructive ends." A Jamaican police official discussed "transnational criminal groups operating in the Caribbean [that] are poly-crime in nature, and they will do anything to make money. So, we have seen the proliferation of firearms, drug trafficking, human trafficking, wildlife trafficking, and trafficking in counterfeit goods."

The worst crime associated with product counterfeiting, said the director of an anti-counterfeiting organization, "is the demand they create for forced labor and child labor. To carry out tasks such as manufacturing counterfeits or sewing labels onto garments or helping to distribute or sell products on street corners or in some of these counterfeit markets." Addressing this problem, the director stressed, will require "governments to understand that they cannot achieve their human rights objectives without stopping and addressing illicit trade in all of its forms." It will also require, the director said, partnership organizations such as INTERPOL to build capacity in addressing these and related crimes and private parties to contribute as well.

A recent case in Manchester illustrates the use of trafficked labor in counterfeit operations as well as the speed at which migrant labor may be exploited. A representative of an anti-slavery organization based in the United Kingdom noted that during a raid, Manchester police discovered "children who had gone missing from a migrant processing center several weeks earlier. These children had been disappeared and then just turned up randomly in this manufacturing unit. And I think that speaks to the level of organization" in such criminal schemes, including the ability of organized crime networks to find "cheap, exploitative free labor." Criminals were even quicker to organize "spotters" for their counterfeiting operations, i.e., persons who would watch shop doors or be positioned on street corners to look out for police. Such persons, the anti-slavery representative said, "came from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Yemen, and . . . had arrived the day before into Calais. [Within] 24 hours[, they] had been absorbed by organized crime groups, whisked off to Manchester, and put to work on the streets."

Such trafficking, an INTERPOL analyst said, can often go undetected, because "it's very hard to find what you're not looking for. And I think one of the first things that needs to be socialized among the law enforcement community is that . . . we can no longer be purists, just as the criminals are no longer purists. We need to be aware of the different crime forms that are coexisting in the environment." Greater awareness can tip law enforcement to other problems. For example, the UK anti-slavery representative recounted a story about a supermarket worker who noticed a colleague charging an electric shaver in the staff room. The supermarket worker realized that it was likely because the owner of the shaver was living without electricity. Follow-up actions confirmed the shaver owner was living in a squalid trailer in which other trafficking victims were also housed.

Addressing forced labor for illicit trade, panelists said, will require both collaboration and new approaches. The chairman of an intellectual property rights organization suggested "a global organization lead this effort and prioritize it." Such an effort, the chairman added, could increase training and capacity building regarding this issue. The INTERPOL analyst, while also noting the importance of a joint effort, suggested that law enforcement officers "need to have a wider set of tools," and need "to be aware of these other forms of criminality that intersect with the crimes that they've been investigating in the past."

# Conclusion

The 18th Annual International Law Enforcement Intellectual Property (IP) Crime Conference highlighted both the success of and the continuing need for partnerships in addressing IP crime on multiple dimensions. These include protecting shipping routes from illicit goods, empowering law enforcement in combating illicit trade, employing AI and other technology solutions to protect trade, addressing particularly dangerous categories of illicit goods, and recognizing the connection between illicit trade and other crimes.

The varied ways that goods reach consumers, including parcel deliveries to homes, require attention across transportation networks. Complex supply chains, shifting trade routes, and large volumes of trade require coordinated approaches in addressing illicit trade. Regulatory consistency across jurisdictions could aid these approaches, as may increasing convergence between regulations for safety and regulations for security. A multi-layered approach using technology, including AI, can help manage trade routes, although resource disparities among states may limit the implementation of such an approach.

Regional partnerships, such as that of the Regional Security System in the Caribbean, can help small states monitor large areas and combine resources for enforcement. Streamlined procedures for express shipments, centralized data on IP crimes, and joint training for customs and police personnel may also help to develop and boost partnerships.

Collaboration for capacity building, training and research can help improve the effectiveness of operations against illicit training. Immersive training using virtual environments can provide venues for realistic and safe training. Such training accelerates the development of skills among participants and ensures consistent understanding of tactics among them as well. In particular, immersive training can help participants across multiple agencies understand their roles, from investigation to prosecution, in combating illicit crime. As such, it also improves response to complex scenarios. Used in a blended learning approach, immersive learning spark awe and engagement in any classroom.

As demonstrated by the IIPCIC Classroom-in-a-box tested strategy, VR becomes more than a tech demo—it becomes a transformative learning tool students will never forget. It does have high initial costs, but once implemented, it is adaptable and scalable. It can also provide standardized training across borders, aiding in transnational efforts against crime. Academic research can further support efforts against illicit trade by providing data-driven, evidence-based strategies. Such research can help map criminal networks, analyze behavior, and assess the impact of proposed legislation, strengthening partnerships between law enforcement and legislators. Academic research can further advance partnerships by bringing diverse perspectives to tackle pressing law enforcement issues.

It can provide unbiased insights and strategic frameworks, particularly for agencies under political or other forms of pressure. Ideally, academic partnerships with enforcement agencies should combine research insights with practicable recommendations, enhancing decision-making and long-term planning.

AI and digital tools can empower both legitimate businesses and criminals. They can make it easier for criminals to undertake new and traditional scams, making them faster, more convincing, and harder to detect.

AI enables the creation of realistic fake content, thereby increasing the credibility of scams. At the same time, AI can help detect brand impersonation, image misuse, and subtle infringements. It enables those seeking to protect intellectual property to review millions of possible infringements, which would not be possible by human review alone. AI can enable scalable enforcement, but panelists said, complements rather than replaces human expertise.

Not all technological solutions to address illicit trade need to be as sophisticated as AI. Mobile apps developed in partnership by law enforcement and consumer protection agencies, for example, have helped consumers verify the legitimacy of products. Messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and email groups, have helped foster collaboration among enforcement officers around the world.

Technology is evolving to combat one of the most dangerous groups of illicit goods, counterfeit pharmaceutical products. Counterfeit drug production is increasing in scale, rivaling legitimate manufacturers. Fake medicines are becoming visually indistinguishable from real ones, and counterfeits are infiltrating legitimate supply chains more frequently.

Pharmaceutical companies may seek to protect against counterfeits by verifying their packaging, scanning and analyzing the packaging for tampering, and using handheld spectrometers to test product authenticity. While such proprietary approaches can help, law enforcement requires more general approaches. A single device, proposed in concept at a previous IP Crime Conference, may help detect counterfeits by scanning packaging data (e.g., serial numbers, expiration dates, SKU, dosages) and cross-checking against legitimate product records. Such a device can make it harder for counterfeiters to fake products by making it more difficult to replicate all elements accurately and in concordance with each other.

Another category of illicit goods requiring a partnership response is illicit batteries that may be used in eMobility devices. Counterfeit or substandard lithium-ion batteries in scooters or electronic bicycles can produce fires that are intense, fast-spreading, and dangerous to extinguish. The use of such devices has increased rapidly in recent years, and users may be unaware of the dangers of them. Inconsistent classification of these fires has made it difficult to develop best practices for managing them.

Regulations have helped reduce the dangers of illicit batteries, but enforcement gaps remain. Education and awareness campaigns, especially when targeted toward specific groups of users and emphasizing the life-threatening nature of illicit batteries, can have some effect. Global collaboration is needed on this issue, which spans countries and sectors.

IP crime is often part of larger criminal operations, including drug, firearm, human, and wildlife trafficking. This is because many criminal groups will pursue any profitable illegal activity. This requires law enforcement to be aware of the connections among crimes when investigating any one crime.

Among the most pernicious crimes tied to illicit trade are forced labor. Counterfeit production frequently involves forced or child labor. Indeed, governments must address illicit trade to protect human rights. Organized crime networks have shown a remarkable ability to identify and quickly exploit migrant workers. Such trafficking often goes unnoticed unless observers know what signs to look for. Partnerships among governments, international agencies, and the private sector can help raise awareness of this issue and its relationship to illicit trade.

Throughout the conference, law enforcement representatives emphasized the importance of collaboration with others to combat IP crime. Similarly, as a pharmaceutical executive observed, private industry can investigate illicit trade, but it cannot enforce against it.

Addressing such crime, an INTERPOL official noted, requires investing in capabilities across all sectors and all borders. Partnership is not optional in such efforts but essential. Technology cannot replace partnerships, but can enable them. Partnership building should not be limited to a single project, but rather the foundation upon which all efforts against illicit trade rest.

Illicit trade and IP crime continue to threaten public safety and human lives, and not just economic risks. Partnerships such as that between ULSE and INTERPOL, the chairman of ULSE noted, show the value of global collaboration, bringing together experts from diverse fields to share insights and strategies. Partnerships can help foster the continued cooperation, innovation, and dedication needed to stay ahead of illicit trade specifically and criminal networks generally.


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President and CE

## Training and Seminar Highlights

As it has in recent years, the IP Crime Conference featured an IIPCIC interactive training session preceding the main program. This workshop sought to guide participants "From Strategy to Action: A Multilevel Response to Counterfeit Battery Threats."

Our 2025 IIPCIC workshop presented an interactive tabletop exercise based on the IIPCIC Task Force Model for preventing and combating IP crime, with a special focus on operational and tactical level interventions. Centered on the real-world threat of life-endangering counterfeit batteries, the workshop guided participants through coordinated multi-agency responses, intelligence sharing, and hands-on enforcement scenarios. The workshop emphasized intelligence-driven decision-making, inter-agency cooperation, and public-private partnerships, offering a dynamic VR simulation of how structured, scalable task forces can effectively respond to real-world IP crime threats delivered via the IIPCIC Classroom-in-a-box

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Participants worked through exercises on prioritizing operations related to illicit batteries, searching containers containing such batteries, investigating infringing sites, and managing information after enforcement actions. In prioritizing operations, participants emphasized the need for developing initial partnerships. Such partnerships should involve brand owners in identifying illicit batteries, prioritizing intelligence on operations, and, if possible, disrupting shipments. In searching containers, participants emphasized the need for safety, including the use of personal protective equipment and, if possible, conducting searches away from populated areas, using robots to assist in examination, and engaging fire services as early as possible.

In conducting onsite investigations, participants emphasized the need to gather intelligence beforehand, preventing inadvertent early notice of operations, and awareness of other infringements. In managing information after enforcement, participants emphasized the importance of anticipating media inquiries, focusing on the specific risks associated with illicit products, and recognizing the need to move beyond initial enforcement.

Taking advantage of meeting in Lyon, the conference also featured a post-program safety and security seminar at INTERPOL headquarters on reducing safety risks from hazardous goods in shipping networks and ensuring supply chain integrity at enforcement interdiction points.

The safety and security seminars discussed understanding the landscape of safety risks in shipping networks and at interdiction points, as well as safety challenges and innovative solutions for them. Participants noted that illicit trade has shifted into small parcels and postal deliveries—suggesting that e-commerce is now the weak link in global supply chains. AI can help address this problem by making it plausible to screen every parcel everywhere, enabling real-time risk assessments.

Participants also noted that global alignment is necessary among partners to utilize technology effectively, as well as to address illicit trade threats across multiple platforms, including e-commerce and free trade zones. Strategic hubs can help provide intelligence and data analytics needed to guide actions. Law enforcement should also enhance its understanding of illicit trade and crimes associated with it, an effort that INTERPOL, working in collaboration with private sector parties, may help lead.

## IIPCIC Awards

IIPCIC, each year, seeks to recognize outstanding achievements of individuals and teams who have demonstrated exceptional leadership, innovation, and dedication to combating IP crime. This year, IIPCIC presented both a Professional Service Award and a Commendation of Merit Award.

The Professional Service Award was presented to Dr. Mansoor Alrazooqi, Director of the Virtual Technology Center at Dubai Police. The award, Jorge Fainstein Day Gastrell, Head of the INTERPOL Global Academy, said, is presented in recognition of those who have "demonstrated the highest professional standards through innovative approaches."

In accepting the award, Dr Alrazooqi noted that "protecting intellectual property requires creativity as much as enforcement." He credited the efforts of his team and the commitment of Dubai to innovation, safety, and the rule of law.

The commendation of merit award was presented to Mr Christopher Watkins and Ms Laura Jane Griffiths of Operation Archer in Newport, Wales. The commendation of merit, Fainstein Day Gastrell said, is awarded "for demonstration of outstanding leadership in the design or implementation of a unique and innovative approach for an intellectual property or counterfeiting case."

Operation Archer was developed in response to the growing prevalence of counterfeits across England and Wales. "Traditional criminal enforcement methods," Watkins said, "while vital, can often be slow, complex, and resource-intensive."

With UK funding and relying on the Proceeds of Crime Act, Operation Archer enabled officers to seize bank accounts suspected of holding criminal proceeds. "This civil recovery model," Watkins said, "has allowed us to act faster, more flexibly, and more effectively." Over the course of 18 months, Watkins said, the operation has handled more than 110 cases and seen the forfeiture of hundreds of thousands of pounds.


Dr Mansoor Alrazooqi
Director, Virtual Technology
Center Training Department
Dubai Police


IIPCIC Commendation of Merit
Operation Archer
Trading Standards UK
Newport City Council

INTERPOL GLOBAL ACADEMY

IP CRIME INVESTIGATORS COLLEGE

The IIPCIC programme of study for law enforcement consists of 5 online curriculums, industry-specific courses, short courses, pre-recorded webinars and podcasts. An IIPCIC certificate endorsed by INTERPOL is available to download after successful completion of each curriculum and industry-specific course. All police officers, customs officers, prosecutors, and regulatory body representatives can take the IIPCIC training without charge.

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