

## INTERPOL'S RESPONSE TO INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY CRIME IN AFRICA TARGETED SUPPORT FOR THE LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMUNITY



Paul Stanfield  
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### The challenges in Africa

The negative impact of intellectual property crime is felt worldwide and Africa is no exception.

Geographically, the continent of Africa comprises many large, porous borders, the sheer extent of which makes them difficult to monitor effectively. West Africa, with numerous countries facing the Atlantic Ocean, is especially attractive to criminals as a transit hub between Europe and the Americas.

A number of free trade zones have been long established in Africa. While they boost legitimate trade and business growth, they can be exploited by criminals who take advantage of the relaxed tax and customs regulations. In July of this year, the African Union launched the operational phase of the [Africa Continental Free Trade Area \(AfCFTA\)](#) to establish a single market for goods and services across 54 countries. In addition, significant use of informal distribution systems – in which producers and sellers are unregistered – increases the difficulty of detecting the movement of illicit goods.

In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, the uptake of the Internet has opened up major new channels for distributing counterfeit goods with the added advantage of relative anonymity. According to the [International Telecommunication Union](#), the strongest growth in Internet use in recent years was reported in Africa, where the percentage of people using the Internet rose from 2.1 percent in 2005 to 24.4 percent in 2018. The trend is set to continue.

From a law enforcement perspective, we are seeing increasing evidence that proves what we have long suspected: IP crime is inextricably linked to other transnational crimes, including human trafficking and drug smuggling. These are all run by extensive and complex criminal enterprises, operating on sophisticated and flexible business models.

Despite these threats, IP crime tends not to be treated as a high priority area. This means there is a lack of understanding about the consequences, not enough specialized enforcement units devoted to preventing and investigating IP crimes, insufficient investment, and an absence of legal frameworks to adequately prosecute, sentence and deter.

#### Raising public awareness and shaping policy in Ghana

*People are dying of ignorance. They are consuming poor quality, even dangerous, products every day with no knowledge of the risks. We need to educate the public and drive the awareness agenda. This will help us gain strategic commitment from policy-makers to give greater attention to IP crime and to strengthen current laws that are not punitive enough.*

Elizabeth Viney  
Prosecutor and Trainer, Ghana Police Service

### INTERPOL's unique role

There is no question that illicit trade is a global phenomenon. Investigations have shown that countries in Africa are affected as the source, transit and destination of illicit goods, with routes connecting Africa with Asia, Europe, the Middle East and South America.

Clearly, this makes investigations complicated for law enforcement officials as they need to cooperate across borders and jurisdictions, and navigate different legislation, often with the added challenges of cultural and language differences.

This is where INTERPOL plays a vital role. Not only can we coordinate activities across a network of 194 member countries, but we can reach out to partners and stakeholders in the private sector, regulatory bodies and other international organizations. We offer a wide range of policing capabilities to our member countries to help prevent and investigate all types of transnational crime in all parts of the world.

### Investing in Africa

Focusing on Africa, INTERPOL has two major programmes under way to strengthen technical infrastructure and improve access to INTERPOL's policing capabilities. These initiatives benefit the fight against all types of transnational crime, including IP crime.

Firstly, the [West Africa Police Information System \(WAPIS\)](#) program, funded by the European Union, is working to enable police officers in West African countries to better manage criminal data nationally and share it more effectively regionally and globally.

Secondly, [I-ONE](#) is an initiative to upgrade and modernize INTERPOL National Central Bureaus (NCBs) in 31 countries in Africa. Renewed equipment will improve access to our secure global police communications network, called I-24/7, and facilitate searches against our criminal databases.

The value of INTERPOL tools and services

*Having worked at both the INTERPOL National Central Bureau for Nigeria and now at the Regional Bureau in Côte d'Ivoire, I have seen the importance of INTERPOL's policing capabilities firsthand. It's a real eye-opener to see regional cooperation in action and to see how training and operations develop a platform for trust between countries and investigators.*

Fortune Madume  
Regional Specialized Officer, Intellectual Property, INTERPOL Regional Bureau Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

### A global training platform

Training is a fundamental component of our activities. It goes without saying that police need to be equipped with specialized skills and knowledge before they can begin to tackle IP crime.

We are proud to work with Underwriters Laboratories (UL) to provide [International IP Crime Investigators College \(IIPCIC\)](#), a dedicated e-learning platform for law enforcement officers, regulatory authorities and private sector investigators worldwide.

More than 22,000 users from more than 170 countries have enrolled on IIPCIC courses. To cater for such a global audience, the courses are available in Arabic, English, French, Mandarin, Portuguese and Spanish.

IIPCIC contains a number of industry-specific courses that are of particular concern in Africa. For example, IP infringement in the vegetable seeds sector (see [Fake Seeds in Africa](#)) and the illicit trade in medical products. On a practical level, the module "Understanding and Addressing the Illicit Trade of Medical Products" is designed to help law enforcement investigators identify substandard and falsified medical products. Containing a case study about adulterated baby teething mixture, which led to the deaths of more than 80 children in Nigeria, the module brings home the stark reality of the dangers to public health.



### What is INTERPOL?

INTERPOL's role is to enable police in our 194 member countries to work together to fight transnational crime and make the world a safer place. We maintain global databases containing police information on criminals and crime, and we provide operational and forensic support, analysis services and training.

INTERPOL's General Secretariat is based in Lyon, France, supported by the Global Complex for Innovation in Singapore seven regional bureaus and Special Representative offices at the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations. Each member country runs an INTERPOL National Central Bureau, staffed by national law enforcement officials, which connects them and their frontline officers to our global network.