INTERPOL

PROJECT GAIA
2025 HIGHLIGHTS

January 2026

OPERATION MADRE TIERRA VII

INTERPOL coordinated a regional operation targeting wildlife, forestry and fisheries-related crimes, and illegal mining and pollution in nine countries in Latin America and the Caribbean*.

Operation Madre Tierra VII led to 225 arrests, identified over 400 suspected individuals, and seized trafficked animals, plants and minerals, including CITES-protected timber and wildlife species.

INTERPOL drafted a comprehensive analytical report on the operation and hosted a regional post-operational meeting in El Salvador where more than 20 law enforcement officers exchanged criminal intelligence and discussed new investigative leads.

*Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama

INTELLIGENCE SHARING AND ANALYSIS

Project GAIA held three national case coordination meetings for Argentina, Costa Rica and Panama on illegal mining and fisheries-related crimes. It also coordinated an intercontinental meeting, involving six Asia-Pacific countries and South Africa, held at our Singapore headquarters, where nearly 30 law enforcement representatives gathered to strengthen intelligence exchange and cooperation against pollution and waste crimes.

INTERPOL also drafted two criminal analysis reports on suspected plastic trafficking, and illicit mercury trafficking. In addition, we produced a diagnosis report for Panama, with recommendations on enhancing the country's capacities to fight illegal mining and trafficking of precious minerals and metals.

STRENGTHENING FORENSICS

Project GAIA supported the Brazilian Federal Police's Clean Gold Programme (Programa Ouro Alvo), aimed at creating a regional forensic database to trace the origin of seized gold.

Our specialist teams assisted in collecting gold reference samples in protected indigenous territories under criminal threat, contributed to a major operation against illegal gold mining in the Amazon basin which dismantled hundreds of dredges, and facilitated laboratory testing and analysis of seized gold of suspected illicit origin. We also facilitated the mentoring of Brazilian forensic experts on the use of cutting-edge specialised laboratory equipment. This equipment is now available to analyse samples from other countries in the region.

Ongoing INTERPOL-supported investigations led to the seizure of almost 150 kg of gold, with an estimated value of over USD 10 million, and the dismantling of criminal networks behind illegal gold extraction worth around USD 6.8 million.

MENTORING LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Project GAIA organised three major mentoring activities on environmental crime investigations for over 100 law enforcement officers in Asia-Pacific and the Americas.

In Panama, INTERPOL conducted a multi-agency session to enhance capacities to investigate gold trafficking and associated crimes and involved officers from multiple law enforcement agencies. Specialists from the Brazilian Federal Police also joined to share their regional expertise and the use of forensics and geospatial techniques.

In Brazil, the mentoring session focused on vessels posing a high risk for fisheries-related crimes. It brought together officers from numerous states across the country and comprised practical multi-agency vessel-boarding exercises organised at port facilities.

In Southeast Asia, a session for Vietnam was dedicated to mentoring law enforcement officers on investigating illegal mining and trafficking of critical minerals. It also involved participants from border regions with a high incidence of transnational crimes.

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More on Project GAIA :
https://www.interpol.int/Crimes/Environmental-crime/Projects/Project-GAIA