

International Conference on Criminal Threats and International Answers in the Global Sports Industry

Executive Summary

Public interest in sports and the global sports industry is at an all-time high, thanks in part to technological advances that allow fans on one continent to follow events on another continent in real time. These same advances have also called attention to the growing involvement of organized crime and corrupt actors in the sports industry at national and international levels. Corruption in sports takes many forms, from illegal betting and match fixing, to labor trafficking, bribery, and money laundering. According to some estimates, organized crime may launder up to \$140 billion per year through sports betting.¹

The International Conference on *Criminal Threats and International Answers in the Global Sports Industry*, which took place in Milan, Italy, on December 12 and 13, 2014, brought together experts from both public and private sectors to brainstorm solutions to protect the integrity of sports. The International Scientific and Professional Advisory Council of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme-ISPAC, an institute with particular Crime Prevention competency in the field of corruption, has decided to devote its annual Conference to this important topic. ISPAC and the National Center for Prevention and Social Defence Foundation (CNPDS) organized the conference in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), and the U.S. Department of State.

Participants included representatives of international organizations, governments, academic institutions, industry, and civil society. Opening remarks were provided by Prof. Stefano Manacorda, Vice-President of ISPAC; Mr. Stuart Page, Vice-President of the UNICRI Board of Trustees; and Ambassador Philip Reeker, U.S. Consul General in Milan. Mr. Dimosthenes Chrysikos offered keynote remarks on behalf of UNODC.

The diversity of participants reflected one of the key themes of the conference: the importance of international cooperation and a multi-stakeholder approach to crime and corruption in sports, particularly in light of the asymmetry of national regulatory frameworks. Several speakers, including Ambassador Reeker and Mr. Chrysikos, highlighted the role of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in setting standards that enable greater international cooperation against a wide range of transnational criminal threats, including those that affect the global sports industry.

Integrity in sport requires the participation of all stakeholders, not only governments. Everyone, from referees and players to national associations and betting operators, has a role to play, whether the issue is preventing terrorist attacks during major events or ensuring the integrity of national bids to host those events. Many speakers observed the challenge of reconciling enforcement with the principle of the "autonomy of sport," particularly with respect to match fixing and illegal betting. It was noted that this traditional autonomy, among other factors, makes it difficult to measure the true scale of criminal and corrupt involvement in the sports industry, and even more difficult to combat it.

¹ Sorbonne-ICSS Report, "Fighting against the Manipulation of Sports Competitions" (November 2014), p.14. http://sorbonne-icss.univ-paris1.fr/uploads/media/Sorbonne-ICSS_Final_Report_Part_1_-_6_Dec._2014_02.pdf (accessed March 9, 2015)

Many agreed that prevention of match fixing is a key element of eliminating corruption and crime in sports. Prevention involves building partnerships and sharing information across borders and sectors, including law enforcement, regulators, betting operators, and civil society organizations. To this end developing a solid methodology for public private cooperation it became crucial to enable all the stakeholders to contribute in the elaboration and the implementation of any preventive measure. UNICRI experience in this field can constitute an important model to support concerned Governments associations and industries. On the other hand, training for sports participants, such as referees and players, is an important aspect of preventing match fixing by giving stakeholders the tools to recognize threats. One example of such a program is INTERPOL's Integrity in Sport initiative, which aims to raise awareness of match fixing and deter corrupt behavior.

Although match fixing and illegal betting dominated the discussion due to the value and global reach of the illicit activity, several other forms of crime and corruption in, or related to, sports were observed. Criminal organizations and other illicit actors may launder money through the buying of clubs, player transfers, and obtaining government contracts. Human trafficking on the margins of major events including labor trafficking as part of the construction of venues was found to be of particular concern. In addition, the process of bidding for, planning, and hosting a major event provides many opportunities for corruption, which are important to recognize and block.

Preserving the integrity of sports is doubly important given the unique power of sports to bring people together and effect positive change. Sports have played an important role in diplomacy and international cooperation since even before the earliest Olympic Games. The wide appeal of sports is apparent given there are more national football associations affiliated with FIFA than Members States of the United Nations. When played fairly, sports not only promote values like sportsmanship, but also provide an important opportunity for interaction and collaboration across international borders.

Conclusions

All of these issues are of increasing public interest, which participants expected to galvanize coordinated international action to prevent and combat them. UNICRI, ISPAC, and the U.S. Department of State offered several conclusions and recommendations for next steps, including:

1. Wider implementation and enforcement of existing international instruments, including the UNTOC and UNCAC, to combat organized crime and corruption in sport;
2. The need for empirical studies to better understand the scope and scale of the threat(s); and
3. The importance of creating the conditions to allow a real and effective multi-stakeholder approach involving the public and private sectors, as well as civil society.