



HEL F Lecture

“Europol and INTERPOL and the Fight against Environmental Crime and Corruption”

The Hague University of Applied Sciences hosted the Hague Environmental Law Facility (HEL F) event “Europol and INTERPOL and the Fight against Environmental Crime and Corruption” on the 12th of October 2016. HEL F is a cooperation between a number of The Hague-based organisations dealing with environmental policy and law, specifically the T.M.C. Asser Instituut, The Hague University of Applied Sciences, the Institute for Environmental Security, and the Peace Palace Library. The HEL F Lecture Series is a series of events on topical environmental issues. The two speakers, Mr Werner Gowitzke from Europol and Ms Nicki Mokhtari from INTERPOL, addressed two interrelated issues: (i) why environmental crimes deserve more attention; and (ii) how they are linked to financial and other crimes.

Mr Gowitzke, a Seconded National Expert on Environmental Crime at Europol, stressed the motive for environmental crime, noting that this kind of criminal activity offers high rewards with relatively low chances of any substantial penalty. Furthermore, he pointed to the perception in law enforcement circles of environmental crime as a victimless crime, causing it to rank fairly low on the priority list. He proceeded to outline Europol’s policy on environmental crime, and also made reference to informal networks, particularly EnviCrimeNet, which Europol cooperates with in the Intelligence Project on Environmental Crime (IPEC). Mr Gowitzke himself is a member of the IPEC team and was involved in the compiling of the 2015 EnviCrimeNet Report on Environmental Crime in Europe. Additionally, Mr Gowitzke addressed the nexus between environmental crime and other organised crime, particularly financial crime and corruption, noting that, in relation to wildlife trafficking, bribery of public officials and other corrupt practices are involved.

Ms Mokhtari, who also emphasised the urgency of taking action on environmental crime, elaborated on INTERPOL’s approach to this increasingly significant problem. She especially focused on the various ongoing INTERPOL projects on environmental crime, such as Projects Predator, Wisdom, Leaf, Scale and Eden. Ms Mokhtari, Project Manager on Anti-Corruption, Financial Crimes and Environmental Security, is working on Project Leaf, which is the INTERPOL initiative against illegal logging and related crimes. She noted in this regard the difficulties surrounding the identification of wood types and the challenge for customs services to distinguish between legal and illegal wood and wood products.

Ms Mokhtari also made some observations in relation to the corruption and financial crime aspects of environmental criminality. She noted the importance of a follow-the-money approach, which is stimulated by INTERPOL in its role as facilitator of international police cooperation. Furthermore, she also made reference to the bribery of public officials, particularly customs officers, in relation to environmental crime, remarking that this problem is exacerbated by the frequent remote stationing and low salaries of these officials.

Mr Gowitzke and Ms Mokhtari's contributions were followed by a lively debate, in which the speakers responded to a number of questions from the audience. The topic of environmental crime is particularly interesting in view of recent developments, including the adoption of the EU wildlife trafficking plan and the introduction of the first FLEGT-licensed wood from Indonesia in the EU. The debate was followed by a reception.