

Cocaine and heroin smugglers earn \$280 million a day-U.N.

VIENNA, Oct 18 (Reuters) - Drug traffickers are making hundreds of millions of dollars every single day and countries must step up cooperation to stop an illegal trade which fuels global terrorism, the United Nations crime chief said on Monday.

"Drug trafficking continues to be the most lucrative line of business for criminals," said Yuri Fedotov, a Russian diplomat who took over as executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) earlier this year.

"Cocaine and heroin traffickers are earning almost \$280 million every day," he added at the start of a week-long meeting in Vienna to review global progress on the issue.

Fedotov urged better use of the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, a pact adopted in Palermo 10 years ago which he said was a major landmark in international law providing a basis for extraditions, intelligence-sharing and joint investigations.

He said his office knew of only 19 states, out of the 157 countries which have ratified the convention, which had used it to facilitate international cooperation, including extraditions, to combat criminal gangs.

"When we will be united I think we will have better chances to win this war," he said. "The convention is a powerful tool, but it remains underutilised."

Fedotov said cocaine smuggled from the Andean region to North America and Europe and heroin trafficked from Afghanistan to Europe were worth \$72 billion and \$33 billion annually -- money he said was being "invested in criminal businesses and fuelling terrorism."

He estimated that human trafficking of mostly women and children to Europe for sexual exploitation brought in \$3 billion each year while smuggling of migrants from Latin America to North America earned \$6.6 billion.

Website note:

Arlacchi's main achievements during its UN mandate are the signing by 124 countries of the Palermo Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000), and the strategy "a Drug Free World" for the elimination of coca and opium cultivation worldwide approved by the UN General Assembly in 1998. The impact of this strategy has been evaluated in March 2009 by the Un Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which decided to reconfirm it for another ten years.