



## Combating Environmental Crimes: Why It Matters?

Environmental crimes are a growing threat to security, sustainable development, and environmental rule of law in the Americas. This criminal activity encompasses a wide range of illegal activities that harm ecosystems, wildlife, and human health. These offenses include illegal logging, wildlife trafficking, and unauthorized waste disposal. Illegal mining is a particularly destructive environmental crime, often linked to other transnational criminal networks. This practice not only devastates the environment, pollutes water sources, affects the social and economic conditions of the surrounding communities, but also frequently involves money laundering to conceal illicit profits. Moreover, illegal mining operations often use mercury in gold extraction, releasing this toxic substance into the environment. Mercury contamination poses severe risks to aquatic life, enters the food chain, and can cause long-term health problems in humans. The complex web of environmental crimes, exemplified by illegal mining, highlights the need for comprehensive law enforcement and international cooperation to protect our planet's resources and communities.

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## 1 Following the Illicit Gold Money Trail

Five Latin American nations (Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname) are major gold producers, but 50-60% of mining operations are part of the informal economy. From the covert importation of chemicals and machinery to the laundering of ill-gotten gains, illegal mining fuels a complex web of criminality that stretches far beyond the initial extraction.

To address this, the OAS's Department Against Transnational Organized Crime (DTCO) of the OAS Secretariat for Multidimensional Security has launched a comprehensive initiative. The program aims to combat illegal mining by improving legislation, inter-agency coordination, and international cooperation.

### OUR MISSION

To empower nations with tools and expertise to fight illegal mining at every stage, with an approach that targets the financial foundations of illegal mining, from prevention to prosecution and asset management.

### PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES SO FAR

 Colombia  Ecuador  Guyana  
 Peru  Suriname

### PARTNERS TO CURRENT PROJECTS

Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) of the United States Department of State.

### WHAT WE OFFER

- Assessment of illegal mining activities and money laundering schemes.
- Best practice exchanges among participating countries and agencies.
- Establishment of National Task Forces and regional networks.
- Specialized training for judges and prosecutors in combating illegal mining.
- Enhancement of asset recovery systems.
- Strengthening of regional cooperation.










## 2 Empowering Nations to Rein in Heavy Machinery

Colombia has experienced a significant expansion in alluvial gold mining using land-based machinery, with a notable environmental impact due to the extensive use of heavy machinery, resulting in the loss of thousands of hectares of high ecological value. To address this issue, the Department Against Transnational Organized Crime (DTCO) of the OAS Secretariat for Multidimensional Security has developed a program to identify gaps in heavy machinery control and curb its illicit use. By tackling the heavy machinery aspect of illegal mining, we're working to protect valuable ecosystems and promote responsible resource management across Latin America.

### OUR MISSION

We aim to standardize processes and strengthen mechanisms for generating, registering, and exchanging information on heavy machinery, sharing best practices across the region.


### PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES SO FAR

 Brazil  Chile  Colombia  Costa Rica  
 Dominican Republic  Ecuador  Mexico  
 Panama  Peru

### WHAT WE OFFER

- Identify illegal extraction of natural resources.
- Develop mechanisms for registering and exchanging information.
- Create policies for identifying and tracking machinery.
- Share results within the public, private, and regional sectors.

### PARTNERS TO CURRENT PROJECTS

 Office of Narcotics Affairs and Law Enforcement at the Embassy of the United States in Colombia.

## 3 Helping Countries Control the Use of Mercury for Gold Mining

Countries in the region struggle to control mercury imports and usage in small-scale mining, both legal and illegal. Widespread, uncontrolled mercury use in illegal operations can indicate criminal activity and weak regulation of illicit supply chains.

Most OAS member states' participation in the Minamata Convention on Mercury demonstrates their commitment to updating prevention and control mechanisms to meet international standards. In response, the Department Against Transnational Organized Crime (DTOC) of the OAS Secretariat for Multidimensional Security, the Artisanal Gold Council, and the U.S. Department of State's Office of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) developed a project to enhance international cooperation and improve regulatory systems for mercury use in gold extraction.

### OUR MISSION

We aim to promote Minamata Convention implementation, foster regional cooperation against illegal mercury trade, support mercury reduction planning, and enhance officials' capacity to combat illicit mercury use.

### WHAT WE OFFER

- Facilitate regional discussions on illicit mercury importation and trafficking through webinars and workshops.
- Advocate for the implementation of the Minamata Convention in OAS member states.

### BENEFICIARY COUNTRIES

All OAS States Members.

### PARTNERS TO CURRENT PROJECTS

-  U.S. Department of State's Office of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES).



# 50%

of mining operations are informal in the Americas

# 69,000

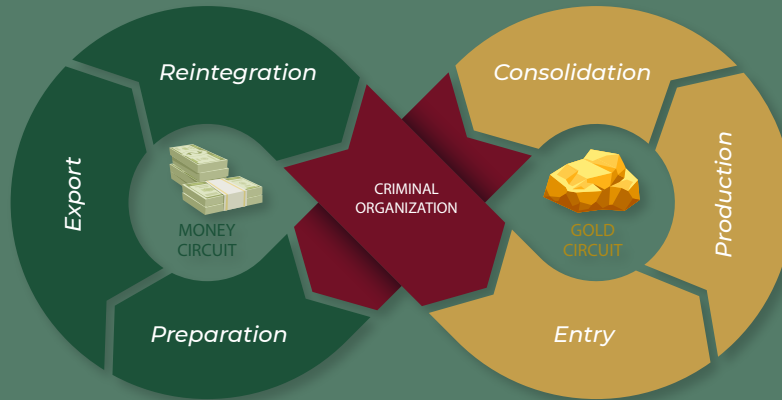
hectares were linked to illicit gold extraction in Colombia

# 11,000

hectares of high environmental value were lost in 2 years



## MECHANICS OF MONEY LAUNDERING FROM ILLEGAL MINING



**5** Latin American nations are major gold producers

**16** money laundering methods tied to illegal mining exposed



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