

NEWS FROM U.S. SENATOR SHELDON WHITEHOUSE

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**Opening Statement of Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
Crime and Terrorism Judiciary Subcommittee Hearing
“Combating International Organized Crime:
Evaluating Current Authorities, Tools, and Resources”
*As Prepared for Delivery***

Washington, D.C. – Every day, overseas criminal networks target Americans, weakening our economic prosperity and our safety. Today’s hearing provides us an opportunity to evaluate our current statutory authorities, law enforcement tools, and resources for protecting the American people from the serious and ever-growing threat of international organized crime.

The organized crime networks we confront today have changed significantly from La Cosa Nostra and other criminal networks we confronted in the past. Criminal groups increasingly operate internationally, taking advantage of globalization, the internet, and new technologies to engage in sophisticated and expansive crimes targeted at victims an ocean away.

Overseas networks of cybercriminals have hacked into the computer networks of innovative American businesses, stealing valuable intellectual property in order to produce cheap competitors or counterfeits. Large-scale criminal enterprises are openly engaged in the online sale of massive amounts of stolen American movies, music, and software. And an entire criminal industry has grown up around stealing and selling credit card numbers, bank account passwords, and personal identification information of American consumers.

Criminal groups involved in human trafficking or smuggling narcotics and weapons are dangers to our communities – often engaging in kidnapping, extortion, and related acts of violence along the way. Some overseas crime networks are linked to terrorist organizations.

These foreign criminals’ overseas base of operations, flexible network structures, and use of the internet and other modern tools create significant challenges for U.S. law enforcement. Investigators tracking an international crime group must regularly work in – and with – several different countries to build a single case. The laws and practical circumstances in each country pose obstacles to uncovering evidence, interviewing witnesses, and locating criminal suspects. And the hi-tech tools used by foreign criminals require our law enforcement experts to use complex and often costly forensics to identify those responsible for a crime.

Even once investigators have pieced together a case against a dangerous group and found their suspects, additional hurdles may stand in the way of bringing foreign criminals to justice. Criminal statutes, for example, may not apply to criminal groups based overseas. And some of

our most powerful criminal laws for prosecuting organized crime may not capture the types of fraud and theft that international criminals engage in today. The RICO statute, just to name one example, does not apply to computer crimes and thus does not help combat overseas hacking rings.

Overseas criminal groups demand heightened attention and resources from many elements of our government. Investigative and law enforcement agencies must work together to detect and disrupt overseas criminal plots. They must also collaborate with our economic, diplomatic, and intelligence communities to share threat information, cut off criminal networks' access to funds, and supplement criminal prosecutions with other approaches to keep the American people safe.

It is good that the Administration has announced an aggressive strategy to combat international organized crime and prepared specific legislative recommendations on which Congress can act. Today, we are joined by representatives from the Department of Justice, the Treasury Department, and ICE, who are well positioned to discuss the threats we face from foreign criminals. I also look forward to hearing more from them about what actions the Administration has taken, and what we in Congress can do to provide law enforcement with the tools it needs to confront this challenge.

Protecting American citizens and business from foreign criminals is not a partisan issue. Members of Congress in both parties agree that we must strengthen our ability to take down these overseas criminals. Our ranking member, Senator Kyl, is unfortunately not able to join us today because of his commitments on the debt committee. But I have greatly enjoyed collaborating with him this year on legislation concerning cybersecurity and on other hearings, and I look forward to working with him, and other members of the committee, on this important issue.

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