



The
Organised Crime
Task Force

ANNUAL REPORT 2005

SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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INTRODUCTION AND FOREWORD

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INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to introduce the fifth Annual Report by Northern Ireland's Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF).

By pioneering a multi-agency approach to tackling organised crime and galvanising inter-agency co-operation the OCTF has achieved significant success this year and I congratulate the Task Force members for how they have risen to the challenge presented by sophisticated, and often ruthless, organised criminals.

I am grateful to Ian Pearson for his endeavours as Chair of the OCTF and I know that Shaun Woodward will build on that work in the coming months and years.

The Government is fully committed to building a peaceful and prosperous society in Northern Ireland where communities are free from paramilitary control, fear and intimidation. However, this cannot be achieved solely through the efforts of the law enforcement agencies within the Task Force - the people of Northern Ireland must also be committed to supporting our efforts to rid the future of paramilitarism and organised criminality.

The past year has clearly demonstrated how organised crime affects all the people of Northern Ireland. But our successes have shown that a partnership approach can deliver an effective response to organised crime. Together, I am confident that we can create the kind of normal society that the people of Northern Ireland deserve.



RT HON PETER HAIN MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

FOREWORD

Organised crime is neither victimless nor discriminatory - it impacts upon all of the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Over the years, organised criminals have created countless victims across the whole spectrum of Northern Irish society: innocent individuals who have been held hostage to facilitate large scale armed robbery; cash couriers who have been viciously attacked in the course of doing their normal daily job; those who have struggled to maintain their business in spite of extortion demands and those whose legitimate business is constantly undermined through unfair competition from smuggled and counterfeit goods. The problems caused by organised crime affects us all.

Since its inception in 2000 the Organised Crime Task Force has proactively developed a joined up, collaborative approach to confront these problems in NI. Over the last twelve months the law enforcement agencies - the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the Assets Recovery Agency (ARA) - have had significant success in disrupting and frustrating the organised criminal gangs which pose the greatest threat. This year 28 such gangs have been disrupted or dismantled and 126 individuals arrested. Further details of the significant impact made by the Task Force partners against organised crime can be found in Chapter One. I am very grateful to these agencies for their ongoing commitment and all their efforts in the past year.

I wish to place on record my appreciation for those representatives from other Government Departments and the

private sector who willingly engage with the Organised Crime Task Force and directly add value to the law enforcement process.

In 2004-05, under the umbrella of the Task Force, the partner agencies have developed a number of initiatives which have complemented and added to the operational response, including the publication of the first joint Cross Border Organised Crime Assessment at last year's cross border co-operation seminar on organised crime. The annual seminar provides an important basis for ongoing co-operation between the law enforcement agencies from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and has the full support of both governments. A similar event will be convened later in the year.

The Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service has joined the Task Force and has embraced a challenging programme of work on behalf of the NI Government Departments to consider how best existing laws and regulations can be fully implemented and furthermore how they may be enhanced to tackle organised criminality. Work is already in progress to actively tackle the illegal dumping problem that has recently emerged, the public consultation exercise on charities regulation has recently completed and a review of the petrol licensing regime is underway.

Assets recovery is now firmly embedded into the OCTF's strategic response to organised crime in Northern Ireland. The implementation of the criminal confiscation powers (by both HMRC and PSNI) and the civil recovery and taxation powers (by the ARA), contained in the Proceeds of Crime Act, has created a comprehensive framework to enable the seizure of criminal profits and assets. The recently amended Rol legislation, which facilitates the Criminal Asset Bureau

formally sharing information with the ARA, is a welcome addition to the fight as is the planned significant expansion in the staffing of the ARA's Belfast office.

The legacy of the terrorist campaign is undoubtedly a considerable factor in the scale and sophistication of organised crime and our assessment shows that paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland continue to be actively engaged, to varying degrees, in unlawful activities such as the smuggling of oils and tobacco, alcohol fraud, intellectual property crime, extortion, drugs, armed robbery and money laundering.

I am conscious that despite our efforts on both strategic and operational fronts the Threat Assessment in Chapter Two indicates that overall levels of illegal activity remain high. And criminal gangs are becoming increasingly sophisticated and ruthless in the way they undertake their activities. I want to ensure that our response to these threats is comprehensive and effective, that the OCTF is fit for its purpose and that everything that can be done to tackle organised criminality is being done. The review of the Organised Crime Task Force, which will be completed shortly, will help determine whether, and how, it might be strengthened to enhance our response. More detail on this and other recent developments is provided in Chapter Three.

At a national level, the planned creation of the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) in April 2006 is a welcome development and whilst PSNI will retain lead responsibility for tackling organised crime in Northern Ireland, SOCA will undoubtedly contribute to the efforts in dismantling NI based organised criminal gangs, particularly those whose operations extend to GB. I look forward to welcoming SOCA representatives onto the OCTF.

In the year ahead I will be taking steps to enhance the OCTF's existing reporting mechanisms and develop appropriate measures which reflect the full impact of law enforcement activity and indicate the extent of progress being made against organised criminals. As part of this we are closely monitoring the work being pioneered by the Home Office to measure the harms caused by organised crime.

The Task Force is committed to continually raising awareness of the dangers of organised crime and it is crucial that public confidence is sustained by clearly demonstrating the vital work that is being done to rid Northern Ireland of organised crime and how those efforts are putting criminals out of business.

I should like to thank the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Assets Recovery Agency, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, the Home Office, the NI Government Departments and all those who have contributed to this year's Report. I know that they share my goal of building a society that is peaceful and prosperous and free from criminality and I look forward to working alongside them in the Task Force.



SHAUN WOODWARD MP
SECURITY MINISTER AND CHAIR OF
THE ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE

