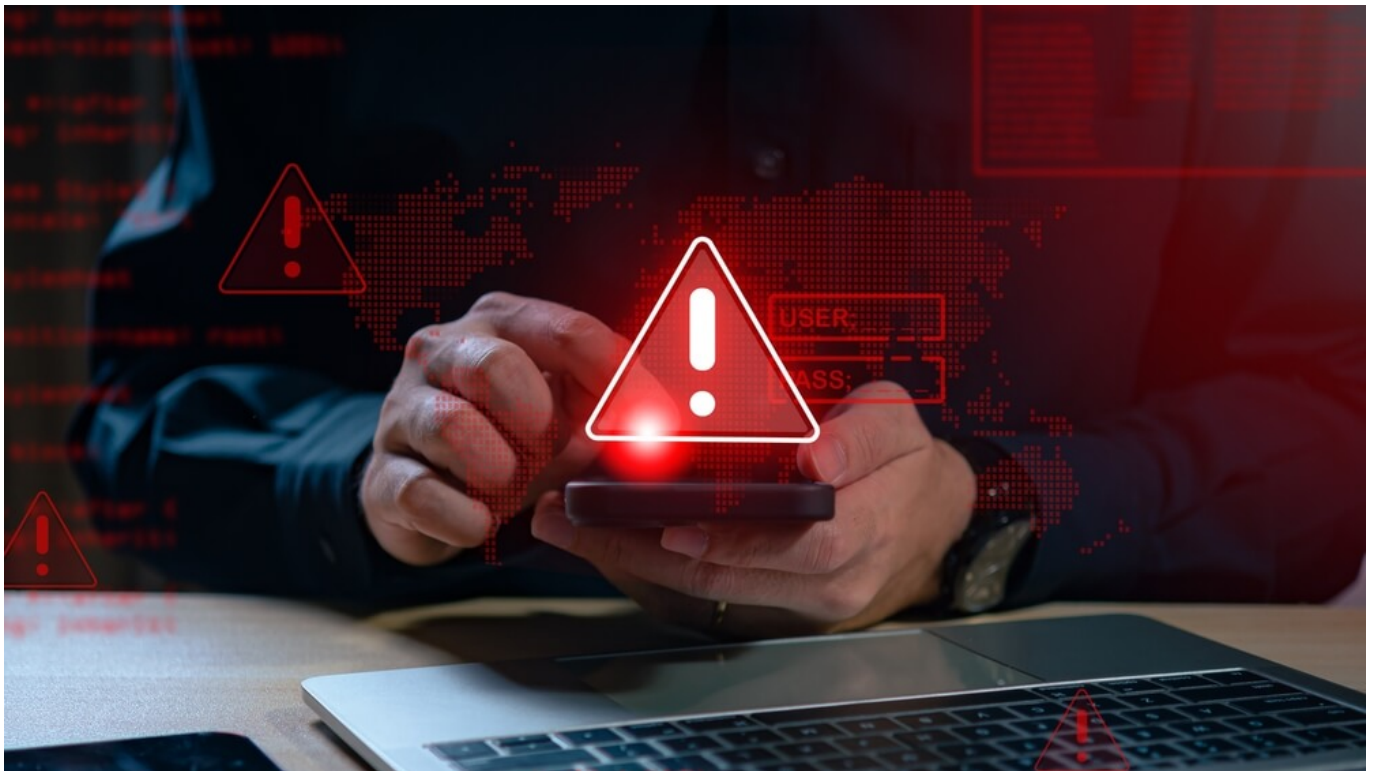




By: TA | AP Brief

Asian and Latin American countries formed a partnership to fight online scams



Thailand helped launch a global effort to fight the spread of online scams that include **criminal enterprises** based largely in Southeast Asia estimated to bilk billions of dollars annually from victims around the world.

Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime hosted a conference in Bangkok culminating in the announcement of the new initiative called the Global Partnership Against Online Scams.

Thai Prime Minister **Anutin Charnvirakul** said in his keynote speech Wednesday that online scams "reveal a deeper problem — a collective vulnerability that no country can address alone."

The partnership agreement signed by conference participants Thailand, Bangladesh, Nepal, Peru and the United Arab Emirates will include political commitment, law enforcement, victim protection and public awareness and cross-border collaboration, a statement said.

The conference received assistance from the private sector including internet giants Meta and TikTok.

Meta, the corporate owner of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, presented a threat report underlining the increased use of artificial intelligence by scam networks and protocols the company is using in its attempts to stop scams on its social media platforms.

Social media application TikTok signed on to the conference's closing statement, becoming one of the first private sector members of the partnership.

The company on Thursday also said it had signed agreements with major investors to form a new **TikTok U.S. joint venture**.

TikTok, which primarily focuses on short-form videos is one of the world's most popular social media platforms but has faced challenges from various governments including the U.S. over its **Chinese ownership**, the European Union over transparency

breaches, Canada regarding child protection protocols and data sharing in Indonesia.

Private partnerships in anti-scam initiatives

Scam centers, which extort money from victims online through bogus investment schemes and faked loved interests, have proliferated across **Southeast Asia**. Scam victims lost between \$18 billion and \$37 billion in 2023, the UNODC estimates.

The importance of private partnerships in anti-scam initiatives was stressed throughout the two-day conference in Thailand's capital, which was attended by more than 300 participants from nearly 60 countries.

Brian Hanley, Asia-Pacific director of the Global Anti-Scam Alliance, which TikTok joined this month, explained it will be harder to combat criminal networks without "all the major stakeholders at the table."

"Scams are exploiting, not only transnational boundaries, but also the seams across various platforms from banks, telcos, to social media platforms," Hanley said.

The alliance describes itself as a collective effort to combat the scam problem by governments, law enforcement, consumer protection organizations and companies involved in social media

The alliance describes itself as a collective effort to combat the scam problem by governments, law enforcement, consumer protection organizations and companies involved in social media, cybersecurity and other aspects of the internet.

"TikTok is the one that we're talking about today, but hopefully tomorrow everyone's joining," Hanley said. "We're starting to get

critical mass and momentum as everyone realizes it's affecting their bottom lines and consumer trust.”

Recent scam center raids in Myanmar, victim repatriation issues in Thailand and the death of a **South Korean student** forced into scam work in **Cambodia** have spurred demand for regional action.

Cambodia is known as a hub for scam compounds and has been criticized by its neighbor Thailand, but the two countries are engaged in an armed conflict and Cambodia was not represented at the conference.

Similar pledges to fight scam networks were made by members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in the months leading up to the Bangkok conference.

They include the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime, which more than 70 countries signed in October in Vietnam. U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres called the document “a vow that no country, no matter their level of development, will be left defenseless against cybercrime.”