



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

Statement of Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism

Security Council meeting on *“Maintenance of international peace and security: Destruction and trafficking of cultural heritage by terrorist groups and in situations of armed conflict”*

Security Council Chamber - 30 November 2017, 10.00 a.m.

Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief on this important topic.

I would also like to welcome very warmly the new Director of UNESCO Ms. Azoulay here at the Security Council meeting.

The Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2347, which includes valuable recommendations, has greatly benefited from UNESCO’s leadership on this matter and the collaboration of other key entities such as UNODC.

Today, terrorists, particularly in armed conflict situations, are not only destroying lives and property but also historical sites and objects. The goal is obvious—to undermine national identity and international law. Because heritage constitutes a source of identity and cohesion not only for particular communities but the world community as such. When terrorist groups target World Heritage sites, it is an attack on our common historical roots and cultural diversity.

Additionally, the looting and illicit trafficking of cultural objects leads to the financing of terrorism and criminal networks.

The protection of cultural heritage has therefore become a vitally important task for the international community. Awareness of this matter has grown considerably over the past several years. Security Council Resolutions 2199 (2013) and 2253 (2015) established the link between the illicit trafficking of cultural objects and the financing of terrorism. Importantly, these resolutions have put in place a worldwide moratorium on the trade in cultural objects originating from Iraq, as of 6 August 1990, and Syria, as of 15 March 2011.

The Security Council, in resolution 2347 (2017) from March this year, focused specifically on cultural heritage, highlighting the protection of cultural heritage as an issue of peace and security.

In the same line, the General Assembly in its resolution 70/291 on the fifth review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy expressed concern that terrorists may benefit from transnational organized crime in some regions, including from the trafficking of cultural property, and condemned the destruction of cultural heritage by terrorist groups.

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In resolution 70/109, the General Assembly deplored attacks “on religious places and shrines and cultural sites in violation of international law, in particular human rights and humanitarian law, including any deliberate destruction of relics and monuments.”

Mr. President,

There is already a strong international legal and normative framework to address these crimes. Security Council resolution 2347 encourages Member States to ratify the 1970 UNESCO Convention on illicit trafficking and the 1954 Hague Convention on Protection of Cultural Property and its two Protocols, both of which are key instruments for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, as well as in peacetime through the implementation of administrative, legal, military and technical measures.

Other important international legal frameworks include the United Nations Conventions against Transnational Organized Crime and Corruption; the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism; and the International Guidelines for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Responses with Respect to the Trafficking in Cultural Property and Other Related Offences.

Mr. President,

Protecting our cultural heritage requires us to make every effort to implement this international legal and normative framework by strengthening international cooperation. The “All of UN” approach is key for an effective action.

There is a need to put a stronger focus on investigation, cross-border cooperation and exchange of information, and on bringing in private and public-sector partners, including collectors, art dealers, auction houses and the tourism sector, to promote supply chain integrity and stop the illicit trade and sale of cultural property.

The UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, through the Inter-Agency Working Group on Countering the Financing of Terrorism of CTITF, is supporting Member States efforts to curb illicit trafficking through advocacy and capacity-building assistance.

For example, UNESCO and UNODC are already working together, along with INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization, and other partners, to assist Member States in protecting cultural heritage and countering the trafficking in cultural property. We have also asked the United Nations entities to propose new projects and would welcome new proposals by Member States and regional organizations on how best we can support them in protecting their cultural heritage.

Mr. President,

With the assistance of United Nations entities, Member States are strengthening their legal frameworks and criminal justice systems, enhancing their collaboration to prevent and respond to terrorists’ attacks against their cultural heritage. We can, and must, do more. The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism stands ready to do its part.

Thank you, Mr. President.