



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

Eighth “Report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat”

11 February 2019

Mr. President, Excellencies and Distinguished Representatives,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, at the outset I would like to express my sincere condolences to and solidarity with Member States where terrorist attacks have recently taken place – the Philippines, Mali, Colombia, Kenya, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to name just a few.

Mr. President,

I thank you for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the eighth “Report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat”, as requested by Security Council resolutions 2253 (2015) and 2368 (2017).

This report was prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee in close collaboration with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and other United Nations entities and international organizations.

The report highlights that ISIL remains a threat as a global organization with centralized leadership, despite a fall in international attacks and plots in 2018. This threat is increased by returning, relocating or released foreign terrorist fighters. The report illustrates how the United Nations has continued to support Member States to address this threat since the Secretary-General’s last report, which was published on 16 August 2018.

Mr. President,

Let me illustrate some key aspects of this new report:

Having its center of gravity in Iraq and Syrian Arab Republic, where it is reported to control between 14,000 and 18,000 militants, including up to 3,000 foreign terrorist fighters, ISIL has continued

to evolve into a covert network operating at the local level and organizing itself at the provincial level, with a reported intent to undermine any form of stabilization on the ground.

Despite the more concealed or locally embedded activities of ISIL cells, its central leadership retains an influence and maintains an intent to generate internationally-directed attacks and thereby still plays an important role in advancing the group's objectives. This is exacerbated by the challenge of foreign terrorist fighters who either are leaving conflict zones, or those who are returning or who are about to be released from prison. In this context, radicalization in prison settings is seen as particular challenge in Europe and Iraq.

The report also notes that so-called "frustrated travelers", namely those who have failed to reach the core conflict zone or have been redirected elsewhere either by ISIL or at their own initiative, may contribute to increasing the threat, which has already been observed in Europe and South-East Asia. Likewise, the handling of dependents, radicalized women and traumatized minors are pointed out as challenges and potential serious threat.

In terms of ISIL's financial strength, the report notes that despite some loss of revenue due to territorial setbacks, ISIL could sustain its operations through accessible reserves, in cash or investment in businesses, ranging between \$50 and \$300 million. ISIL cells are also reported to generate revenue through criminal activities.

The report accounts for the evolving threat and ISIL's activities in different regions of the world – from the Middle East, Africa - particularly North, West and East Africa - to Europe, Central and South Asia, and to Southeast Asia.

In the Middle East, the residual threat in Iraq is reported to emanate both from local ISIL remnants and from fighters crossing the border from the Syrian Arab Republic. Equipment has been retained from the time when its regime was intact. The report also highlights a threat posed by unarmed aircraft systems (UAS) within the conflict zone.

For Africa, the report highlights the threat posed by ISIL in Libya, where police stations in various locations and oil facilities have been targeted.

In Europe, the number of returnees reaching the region in the period under review is reported to be relatively low. Approximately 1,000 foreign terrorist fighters are reported to have travelled from the Western Balkans to the conflict zone in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, of which 100 have been reported killed, 300 returned, with the remainder unaccounted for.

In Afghanistan, ISIL is reported to control some training camps, and to have created a network of cells in various Afghan cities, including Kabul. Furthermore, a close link between the local ISIL leadership and its core in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq is reported. ISIL also carried out several high-profile attacks throughout last year, against a wide range of targets.

ISIL has continued attempts to expand its area of activity in Central Asia. For South-East Asia, the report observes an increasing role of young people and women in terrorist operations in the region.
Mr. President,

Against this background of continuously evolving challenges and the importance of the prevention of radicalization in light of an upcoming “wave” of released foreign terrorist fighters, the United Nations system has received a framework from this Council and the General Assembly for how to support Member States in their efforts to effectively counter the rapidly evolving and transnational threat from ISIL.

This report of the Secretary-General outlines work done by the UN entities, including CTED, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, UNODC, UNDP, UNESCO, OHCHR, ICAO, Interpol and others, in the fields of prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration; international judicial cooperation; countering the financing of terrorism; border management and law enforcement; countering terrorist narratives and engaging communities in preventing and countering violent extremism when conducive to terrorism.

ASG Coninx in her intervention will highlight some of these activities in more detail.

Mr. President,

I would also like to avail this opportunity to highlight that the Secretary-General, in this report, has encouraged my office (the Office of Counter-Terrorism) to provide a forum on which relevant expertise and good practices can be shared, in order to strengthen coordinated action to meet the ongoing needs of Member States. This is especially important in the area of addressing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, including relocators and returnees. These efforts will be strengthened by a clearer and more logical UN counter-terrorism architecture put in place through the launch of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact by the Secretary-General in December last year, which is a major step forward in enhancing overall coordination and coherence across the UN system.

Mr. President,

My office is also working jointly with Member States to implement the outcomes of the High-level Conference of heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States held in June last year in New York by organizing thematic regional events on countering and preventing terrorism. One of such event being planned with the Government of Switzerland will focus on the foreign terrorist fighter’s phenomenon.

The Secretary-General has stressed that despite recent successes against ISIL / Da’esh and its affiliates, the threat posed by returning and relocating fighters, as well as from individuals inspired by them, remains high and has a global reach. I would therefore emphasize, the recent ISIL losses should not lead to complacency at any level.

The threat of terrorism is a global challenge. It has grown in magnitude and impact over the last several decades. It does not recognize any geographical or perceived borders. Given the complexity, it is only through a well-coordinated multilateral response that we can address this challenge. I therefore, through this Council, request continued support of Member States for the United Nations counter-terrorism work.

Thank you, Mr. President.