



**Statement of Mr. Leif Villadsen, Deputy Director,
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**Tenth Meeting of the
Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Committee
*24 January 2024 (2 minutes)***

Under-Secretary-General Voronkov,
Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you today on behalf of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and to share insights from our engagements in the field of counter-terrorism and violent extremism.

With respect to today' topic – allow me to highlight that UNICRI is, as many of you here, actively engaged throughout Africa.

Through various streams of our research, knowledge-development, and capacity-building activities, we have identified several challenges that I would like to share with you.

In the interest of time, I will highlight three areas:

First, *climate* remains one of the key issues of our time and its impact across Africa in the context of violent extremism cannot be discounted. Following the release of our study on climate change and violent extremism in the Sahel in November 2022, we have expanded our work in this domain. I would like to highlight our recent workshop with the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) on climate security policies with a gender-inclusive approach, as well as the training manual we have just developed that addresses the 'triple nexus' of gender, climate change, and violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel.

Second, *gender-based discrimination*. Gender remains a major challenge across Africa, and beyond, and we are committed to better understanding and advancing a gender-responsive approach to violent extremism. In this regard, late last year we released our study on ‘Voices of Resilience: A Gender Needs Analysis on Preventing Violent Extremism in the Sahel’. This report provides insights on the perceptions and experiences of women and girls, men, and boys in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, and sheds light on how best to design prevention of violent extremism initiatives based on solid gender analysis and tailored to local needs.

Third, we cannot turn a blind eye to the broad correlation *between organized crime and terrorism* – a long term priority area for UNICRI. Our different research assessments continue to illustrate that this ‘nexus’ remains widespread in various parts of the African continent. More must be done to identify and effectively address it.

I would also like to briefly highlight a new research initiative just launched, which is perhaps an old challenge taking on new dimensions – namely, Private Military Companies. Together with SIPRI, we will be exploring the recent rise in the use of PMCs in places such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, and Mali. In addition to the broader impact on peace and security, we will explore the nature of these groups’ interactions with organized crime networks, as well as terrorist and violent extremist groups and individuals. We look forward to sharing the findings of this study in the forthcoming meetings.

Finally, I would like to share that, as of next month, UNICRI’s Director, Antonia De Meo, will take up a new assignment following her appointment by the Secretary-General as Deputy Commissioner-General (Operational Support) at UNRWA. She regrets she was unable to join us here today, but wished to convey her thanks and appreciation to the many members of the Global Compact with whom she has had the pleasure to build an institutional relationship with on behalf of UNICRI. Pending the appointment of UNICRI’s next Director, it is my honour to serve and work with you as Acting Director of UNICRI.

I thank you.