



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

At the Civil Society Workshop in advance of the Abu Dhabi Regional Conference on “Empowering Youth and Promoting Tolerance: Practical Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism”

17 December 2019 – Abu Dhabi

Good morning dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to welcome you to this dedicated civil society workshop in advance of the United Nations-United Arab Emirates Regional Conference for Arab League Countries on Empowering Youth and Promoting Tolerance.

This is our first regional conference to be preceded by a dedicated CSO-led workshop. It is a part of our commitment to strengthening the engagement, inclusion and contribution of civil society to the Regional Conferences—and to all of our work.

Let me express my sincere gratitude to the Government of the United Arab Emirates, which has graciously co-hosted the Regional Conference, and contributed financially to making this workshop a reality.

I would also like to pay tribute to our civil society partners, the Global Center on Cooperative Security and Hedayah.

Dear Colleagues,

First and foremost, civil society is an indispensable partner and a key actor which can provide impactful and lasting contributions to preventing and countering violent extremism conducive to terrorism. As such, civil society organizations are critical for fostering a culture of tolerance and open dialogue.

They also have a critical role to play in empowering youth and promoting tolerance. We know that terrorist organizations have made a strategic investment in youth – and so our investment in youth must be smarter, sustained and more strategic.

Today, nearly half the world's population – 46 % - is 24 years old or younger, with Africa and the Middle East having the highest proportions of young people. Recent statistics also indicate that more than one hundred million Arab youth will enter the labour market in the next decade. That is twice the global average.

Strong cooperation with civil society and local stakeholders at the grassroots level is vital to delivering results on the ground. So too is the meaningful participation and leadership of our young men and women in this endeavour.

We cannot succeed in our efforts without your contributions, and we cannot build national and community resilience without your full engagement and participation.

This is why I am excited to see so many of you here today.

Dear Colleagues,

In adopting the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2006, the General Assembly encouraged Member States to foster the involvement of civil society in a global campaign against terrorism (...)."

In June 2018 the General Assembly adopted resolution 72/284 encouraging "Member States, United Nations entities, regional and sub-regional organizations and relevant actors to consider instituting mechanisms to involve youth in the promotion of a culture of peace, tolerance and intercultural and interreligious dialogue (...)."

In addition, the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism also recognizes the importance of engaging civil society, as well as youth, in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.

In this Plan, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of including civil society organizations in developing national P/CVE plans, and recommended that Member States "support the establishment of regional and global networks

for civil society, youth, women's organizations and religious leaders to enable them to share good practices and experience.”

During last year's Counter-Terrorism Week, in June 2018, Member States recognized the vital role that civil society plays in preventing and countering violent extremism.

And in his key note address, Secretary-General Guterres called for governments to adopt a comprehensive and inclusive approach involving all parts of society and noted the “unique and invaluable contribution” that civil society plays in this regard.

In sum, we are fully aware of the importance of civil society engagement to prevent and counter violent extremism. And we are taking action to translate this commitment into tangible actions.

My Office, for example, has made concerted efforts to ensure a more systematic and meaningful engagement of civil society at all levels and across all four pillars of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and P/CVE policies and programmes.

Civil society, for example, is at the heart of our efforts to support victims of terrorism and will play a central role in the organization of the first-ever Global Congress for Victims of Terrorism to take place next year in June in New York during the second High-Level Counter-terrorism week.

The issue of victims of terrorism is high on the UN agenda. We don't know how many victims are there, and what is their situation, but there are tens of thousands across the world. So we need to start by working together to better address the plight of victims and understand what should be our role and the role of civil society in recognizing and supporting them. Please join us in this very important effort.

And as noted before, through our partnership with Member States in our Regional Conferences, we have made the participation of civil society, women and youth a fundamental part of our planning and execution of these Conferences and their outcomes.

We are currently developing a comprehensive Global Youth Programme to prevent and counter violent extremism. And your contribution to the final shape of the Programme would be strongly welcomed.

Dear Colleagues,

This workshop is an opportunity for civil society to share views on good practices, lessons learned and challenges ahead.

Let us not forget that the voices of communities, including youth, are critical in these efforts, as they provide insight into root causes and localized realities of issues related to violent extremism and terrorism, and can promote the inclusion of those who are marginalized, ensuring that no one is left behind.

We are very concerned over the situation in the camps where children and women with alleged links to foreign terrorist fighters are being held. We need to do every effort to encourage countries to repatriate them, ensuring accountability but also rehabilitation.

Communities are ideally placed to provide early warning on violent extremism and are also crucial to the effective, context-specific rehabilitation and reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their families.

We are here today to listen to you and leverage your creativity, wealth of knowledge and experiences that will contribute to our deliberations in the coming days.

Dear Colleagues,

The outcomes of your discussions will feed into the regional conference in the coming days and shape the recommendations that will be presented during the High-Level Counter-Terrorism week in June 2020.

2019 has been designated by the United Arab Emirates as the Year of Tolerance.

I can see no better way to close out this year but with a renewed commitment to mutual understanding, inter-cultural dialogue and, with our young people in the Arab region at the centre of all our efforts.

I wish you productive discussions.

Thank you.