



VIRTUAL COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK

6-10 JULY 2020

Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week

Closing Remarks by
Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov

10 July 2020

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is my great pleasure to conclude this Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week. The first of its kind in the United Nations. And the first of its kind in the framework of the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations.

I am grateful to the eminent persons who inspired our discussions, especially United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and European Union High Representative Josep Borell.

My deepest thanks to all the moderators, distinguished speakers and over 1000 participants who made this week a success with their insightful contributions and recommendations.

I am pleased to note that representatives from 134 different Member States, over 150 representatives from international and regional organizations, over 200 representatives from United Nations entities, and over 80 representatives from civil society and the private sector, participated in this Week's events.



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The COVID-19 pandemic has presented the international community with one of the greatest challenges since the creation of the United Nations 75 years ago – testing national resilience, international solidarity and multilateral cooperation.

While our attention is rightly focused on fighting the virus, we cannot pause our efforts to prevent and counter the global threat of terrorism. As the Secretary-General underscored, we need to keep up the momentum.

This week was a unique opportunity to reflect together on the implications of the COVID-19 crisis on counter-terrorism, Member States' priorities in this context, and how the United Nations system and its partners can support them.

I would like to briefly set out the key conclusions from our discussions.

First, we heard in the high-level opening that a strategic investment in preparedness is needed to help build resilient societies able to cope with the unpredictable environment and global challenges of the 21st century, including terrorism.

COVID-19 has highlighted, and it could also exacerbate, old and new challenges and fault-lines that terrorists are keen to exploit, including socio-economic inequalities, weak governance, political disenfranchisement, human rights abuses, and the misuse of new technologies.

Second, we need to strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation at all levels in order to “build back better”. This requires a renewed, collective commitment guided by the United Nations Charter and international law.

To achieve this, we need to build on the Secretary-General’s call to harness “the power of multilateralism.”



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The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions provide the normative basis for strong, holistic and collective action against the transnational scourge of terrorism.

The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact serves as a dynamic platform to further strengthen multilateral cooperation and enhance coordination and coherence in the delivery of United Nations technical assistance to Member States.

I would especially like to thank the State of Qatar in this regard for its financial contribution which made possible the development of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Platform.

Third, all events underscored the need to fully respect human rights and the rule of law in the fight against terrorism.

This is integral to the whole United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, not just its fourth pillar, and has been consistently reaffirmed by the Security Council.

But we also heard that much more is needed to translate this into practice – to move from words to concrete action, ensuring that measures to counter terrorism do not shrink civic space or hinder humanitarian activities.

I want to reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations System in this regard, guided by the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights.

I intend, therefore, to hold a regional high-level conference on human rights and counter-terrorism as soon as the current COVID-19 context allows.

Fourth, our discussions emphasized the importance of exchanging information to stay on top of a terrorism threat. This threat is ever more complex.



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A threat that is global but exploits local conflicts, grievances and frustrations.

A threat that comes from transnational networks like ISIL and Al-Qaida, their regional affiliates and seasoned fighters; but also, from individuals and groups acting alone; and from neo-Nazis, white supremacists and new forms of racially, ethnically, politically and ideologically motivated acts of terrorism.

Fifth, participants noted that the last few months should serve as a reminder that bio and cyber terrorism could pose serious threats to international peace and security, with consequences that span across borders.

Pandemics magnify these threats, putting additional pressure on emergency response and security structures, and increasing the risk of weaponization by non-state actors.

To address these risks, multi-stakeholder collaboration and harnessing the power of technology for the good of all humankind is critical.

This is what the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation is about.

Sixth, throughout the week we heard that we need a whole-of-society approach to counter the enduring appeal of violent extremism, now fueled by hate speech and xenophobia unleashed by the pandemic.

Participants particularly emphasized the need for decisive action to prevent terrorist misuse of social media and the Internet while protecting freedom of expression.

These efforts must be underpinned by strong partnerships between governments, tech companies and civil society, and a strategic communications' approach with credible voices and positive messages to counter terrorist narratives.



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Civil society actors make crucial contributions to the kind of bottom-up prevention efforts that resonate with local communities.

We need a massive investment in young people, gender-sensitive and youth-driven initiatives if we want to build healthy and inclusive societies.

Seventh, we discussed ongoing challenges to address the threat posed by thousands of foreign terrorist fighters.

The international community must continue to prioritize international cooperation and technical assistance so that Member States can detect terrorists and interdict their movement; investigate, apprehend and bring them to justice, in accordance with international law.

I would like to echo the grave concerns expressed by several participants regarding women and children with suspected links to United Nations listed terrorist groups who remain stranded in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

COVID-19 is compounding their already dire humanitarian, human rights and security situation, and deterring repatriation efforts.

I urge Member States to take swift action regarding their nationals to meet their international obligations and prevent this issue being used to radicalize future generations. Its very important to be fast in this regard.

Eighth, I would like to pay tribute to the compelling stories we heard about the plight of victims of terrorism. They are our reason of being and we need to make sure others don't suffer the way they have.



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We heard how the pandemic has placed additional burdens on victims and survivors by adding to their trauma.

The response to the pandemic should not stop the hard-fought progress made to uphold the rights and address the needs of victims.

These discussions will feed into the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism that we will hold next year.

Ninth, the need for a gender-sensitive approach was underlined throughout the week, not just as a matter of international human rights law, but of operational effectiveness.

We need to better understand how terrorists prey differently on women and men to incite and recruit, the range of roles women and men play in both terrorism and counter-terrorism, and the differentiated impact of terrorism and counter-terrorism on women and men, also in this pandemic environment.

Last but not least, I was proud to launch a virtual exhibition on the work of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre together with His Excellency Ambassador Al-Mouallimi, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations and Chair of the Centre's Advisory Board.

The UNCCT Expo showcases the Centre's capacity-building activities, confirming its reputation as a global centre of excellence.

The Expo will remain open on our website for the next three weeks and I strongly encourage everyone to visit it.



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I would also like to express my gratitude to all 31 donors among Member States and the European Union which are contributing to the United Nations Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism and making the work of the Office possible.

Finally, I would like to express my words of gratitude to Microsoft for its technical support of our discussions and excellent cooperation. Let's stay connected!

Dear Colleagues,

We are yet to fully understand the impact and consequences of COVID-19 on global peace and security.

We need to remain vigilant and united; we need to anticipate the evolving threat posed by terrorists; and we need to adjust our responses to changes brought by the pandemic.

Over the coming months, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism will continue engaging closely with you in the lead up to the seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

And I look forward to seeing you again in person for the Second Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations Headquarters in New York next year, including the Second High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies and the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism.

I now declare this Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week closed.

Thank you very much for your attention. Please stay safe and sound.