



VIRTUAL COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK

6-10 JULY 2020



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe

UNOCT Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week
Strategic and Practical Challenges of Countering Terrorism
in a Global Pandemic Environment

Interactive Closing Discussion
10 July 2020

Remarks by OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger

Check against delivery

Member States' Counter-Terrorism Priorities in the Post COVID-19 Environment – Synergies and Complementarities between the COVID-19 and the Counter-Terrorism Agendas

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I thank Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov and the UNOCT for organising the 2020 Counter-terrorism Week in these challenging times.

COVID-19 has become a transnational security threat. The Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) has responded in a proactive way and with commitment and creativity. The pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges but is also an opportunity for us to think about new ways for implementing our mandates in cooperation with other partners.



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As highlighted by other speakers in the course of this week, we have identified a number of short and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the OSCE's work.

Let me just mention three:

- First, terrorist organizations and violent extremist movements – including violent Islamist groups and violent far right organizations – are trying to capitalize on the vulnerability, fear and uncertainty generated by the pandemic. To advance their causes, they are spreading disinformation, hatred and propaganda online, which is even more damaging in times of lock-down.
- Second, there is concern that terrorists may develop new operational capacities taking advantage of the changing security environment and increasing risks to “soft” targets and critical infrastructure, including health institutions.
- Third, a lack of access to vital services such as healthcare can contribute to the grievances that make individuals vulnerable to recruitment into violent extremist groups. So it is important to consider the potential negative long-term impacts of the pandemic, and the ways in which they may create conditions conducive to violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism (VERLT).

At the OSCE, we are committed to supporting our participating States and Partners for Co-operation to deal with these multifaceted challenges.

We will continue to promote a measured and proportionate response to evolving terrorist threats during this period of global vulnerability. In doing so, we will take into account the heightened relevance of the rule of law, gender equality and human rights in shaping counter-terrorism strategies and laws. We will also continue to support national institutions in developing whole-of-society approaches to preventing radicalization to violence.



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Dear colleagues,

At a time of emergency, governments first tend to focus their resources on responding to the challenge within their borders. This is a natural tendency in times of crisis. However, transnational security threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic demand that we also look outward. This is where the UN, the OSCE and other international partners come in.

At the OSCE, we have used this time to strengthen our programmatic work on the handling of electronic evidence, on countering terrorist financing and on gender mainstreaming in law enforcement, just to name a few of our focus areas.

To this end, we have organized numerous virtual discussions, workshops and expert roundtables, drawing together different OSCE executive structures and reaching out to national experts and our international partners, including the UN, the EU and Interpol.

Among several new initiatives, the OSCE recently launched an e-learning course on *Preventing and Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes*, available both in English and Russian. Together with UNODC, we also recently conducted a first online training for Central Asia on countering the financing of terrorism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE is the largest regional organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. Most of our staff is working in locations where the reach of the International Community is relatively limited. We have people on the ground ready to provide support, wherever possible and in line with respective mandates.

The UNOCT-OSCE Biennial Action Plan of September last year has further strengthened our co-operation. OSCE and UNOCT co-operated on two conferences on countering terrorist financing, one in Ashgabat, one in Dushanbe, and co-organized another in Ulaanbaatar.



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In February this year, the OSCE and UNOCT, jointly with the Swiss Government, convened a Regional High-level Conference on Foreign Terrorist Fighters, in cooperation with the Albanian OSCE Chair 2020.

At this joint event in Vienna there was a strong focus on repatriation and rehabilitation, particularly of women and children associated with Foreign Terrorist Fighters, in line with the *Key Principles* put forward by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in April last year.

The draft outcome document of this conference will inform discussions at the upcoming OSCE Annual Counter-Terrorism Conference, convened by the Albanian OSCE Chair in September. It will take place in a hybrid format as has become common practice at the OSCE.

In parallel, we are also working on an update of our Joint Action Plan with UNODC. Moreover, we have joined forces with the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UNCTED) in the area of *Soft Target and Critical Infrastructure Protection* and supporting country assessment visits with our experts. And, we continue to compare our working agendas with those of UN Women and UNDP.

We are firmly committed to providing a substantive contribution to the fight against terrorism, in strong partnership with the UN and other international and regional partner organizations.

I thank you for your attention.

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