



VIRTUAL COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK

6-10 JULY 2020

Press Release

The international community reaffirms its commitment to work together to fight terrorism and violent extremism amidst the global pandemic

New York, 10 July 2020 – The [Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week](#) organised by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) concluded its discussions on Friday. The week’s discussions focused on the strategic and practical challenges of countering terrorism in a global pandemic environment. Over 1000 participants from 134 Member States, 47 international and regional organisations, 88 civil society organisations and private sector entities attended the week’s events, which was the first of its kind held by the United Nations.

“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,” the **United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism, Vladimir Voronkov**, said at the high-level closing session today [\[statement\]](#). The world, he added, “is rightly focused on fighting the virus, but because terrorists are exploiting the situation, we cannot pause our efforts to prevent and counter the global threat of terrorism... This week was a unique opportunity to collectively reflect on these matters and listen to Member States’ priorities.”

Reiterating the call of the United Nations’ Secretary-General António Guterres to harness “the power of multilateralism”, Mr. Voronkov told the session attendees that “we need to strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation at all levels in order to ‘build back better’.” As mentioned in the opening of the Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week, the pace of digital transformation has been accelerated by COVID-19 which needs to be addressed more strategically at national as well as international levels.

Mr. Voronkov presented the key conclusions of the week’s discussions, stressing the need for strategic investment in prevention and preparedness in order to help build resilient societies, capable of coping with terrorism in an unpredictable environment.

We are confronting “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,” Mr. Voronkov warned while stating that bio and cyber terrorism pose increasing threats to international peace and security, putting additional pressure on emergency response and security structures.

Adding that gender-sensitive and youth-driven initiatives are key to build healthy and inclusive societies, Mr. Voronkov highlighted the important contribution of civil society to effective bottom-up prevention efforts. He also underscored the importance of public-private partnerships and decisive actions to prevent terrorist exploitation of social media and the Internet while protecting freedom of expression.

The Under-Secretary-General echoed the grave concerns expressed by multiple participants regarding women and children with alleged links to foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) who remain stranded in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. They

are in “dire and complex humanitarian, human rights and security situation,” said Mr. Voronkov urging Member States to take swift action to meet their international obligations and prevent the situation from being used by terrorists to radicalise future generations.

Mr. Voronkov also paid tribute to victims of terrorism across the world. “We heard how the pandemic has placed additional burdens on victims and survivors by adding to their trauma,” he said. “The response to the pandemic should not stop the hard-fought progress made to uphold the rights and address the needs of victims.” He confirmed that the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism will be held in 2021.

Mr. Voronkov emphasised the critical importance of adopting whole-of-society approaches and respecting human rights and the rule of law in the fight against terrorism, in line with the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the Secretary-General’s Call to Action for Human Rights. We need “to move from words to concrete action, ensuring that measures to counter terrorism do not shrink civic space or hinder humanitarian activities” said the Under-Secretary-General. Mr. Voronkov further welcomed strengthened engagement with civil society organisations, including through the implementation of UNOCT’s recently developed civil society engagement strategy, and announced UNOCT’s intention to hold a regional high-level conference on human rights and counter-terrorism as soon as the current COVID-19 context allows.

Mr. Voronkov also recalled the launch of the “[UNCCT Expo](#)”—showcasing the work of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) and its capacity-building activities, confirming its reputation as a Global Centre of Excellence. He again invited the participants of the Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week to visit the virtual exhibition.

Mr. Voronkov said that he was encouraged to hear the Member States reaffirm their commitment to international counter-terrorism cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations, with the support of CSOs, UN and private sector partners—and thanked Microsoft for their support to the Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week. “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,” he concluded, as he reiterated the readiness of the United Nations System as a whole to support these efforts.

The **high-level closing session also included statements** by Hon. Mr. Nathan Sales, Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism of the U.S. Department of State; H.E. Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union; H.E. Thomas Greminger, Secretary-General of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe; H.E. Mr. Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union; H.E. Mr. Dang Dinh Quy, Permanent Representative of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to the United Nations (ASEAN Chair); Ms. Alison August Treppel, Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, Organisation of American States; Mr. Gilles de Kerchove, European Union Counter-Terrorism Coordinator; H.E. Mr. Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations; and H.E. Mr. Zhang Jun, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations. (Quotes from their statements below)

The insights, views and ideas exchanged at the Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week will feed into next year’s High-Level Counter-Terrorism Week, set to take place during the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly. The High-Level Counter-Terrorism Week 2021 will include the seventh biennial review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the Second Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of the Member States, and the Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism.

QUOTES FROM DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS AT THE CLOSING SESSION

Hon. Mr. Nathan Sales, Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State: “The United States has been, and will remain, the security partner of choice,” said Ambassador Nathan Sales, U.S. State

Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism. "We're proud of the success that our friends have achieved by working with us."

H.E. Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President, Inter-Parliamentary Union: "We must understand that terrorism thrives when there is a lack of equal opportunities, when young people are robbed of their future, when the only option is to despair. There must indeed exist international cooperation to stem the tide of terrorism and avoid the loss of innocent lives, particularly as those most vulnerable - women and children - end up suffering enormously. But we must also address it at its root causes. Building towards peace also includes enabling economic prosperity for all. I am certain that if all parliamentarians strive to create conditions for peace, the world would be a less harsh place for those who have already and tragically suffered insurmountable loss."

H.E. Thomas Greminger, Secretary-General, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe: "The OSCE, in collaboration with the UN and other international partners, 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 comprehensive and human rights-based approaches to preventing radicalisation to violence."

H.E. Mr. Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security, African Union: "As the burden of COVID-19 pandemic spreads further into Africa, the potential for terrorist groups to continue to exploit existing vulnerabilities to gain support and strengthen will likely increase." "Continued cooperation and more comprehensive approaches that address the underlying drivers of radicalization towards terrorism and violent extremism are necessary to stop the further spread of terrorism activities in Africa. Our collective action and cooperation is needed now more than ever to silence the guns in our continent."

H.E. Mr. Dang Dinh Quy, Permanent Representative of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to the United Nations (ASEAN Chair): "Understanding the interaction between the pandemic and the threats of global terrorism will provide insights into how to better combat terrorism in the post-pandemic environment and prepare ourselves for future threats." "In recovering from the crisis and building back, we must not reduce our commitment and resources to counter terrorism."

Ms. Alison August Treppel, Executive Secretary, Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, Organization of American States: "We must continue to move away from being a reactive society and focus greater attention on prevention efforts, namely by strengthening capacities to protect our region's critical infrastructure, by increasing the exchange of operational information with our neighbors and partners, and by fostering greater preparedness and resiliency among our communities."

Mr. Gilles de Kerchove, European Union Counter-Terrorism Coordinator: "We must prevent the current health and economic crisis from becoming a security crisis, and our response must be based on effective multilateral cooperation with the UN at its core."

H.E. Mr. Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations: "COVID-19, as challenging and heart breaking as it has been for the world, provides a genuine opportunity for us to engage into a real substantive discussion in the upcoming GCTS review, to develop and update the Strategy in a meaningful manner, with the aim of making the world a safer place".

His Excellency Mr. Zhang Jun, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations: "It is of utmost importance to further promote multilateralism in counter-terrorism efforts, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Facts have proven that no country can stand alone in the face of pandemic situations, which also showed threats to unprecedented security issues." "Terrorism knows no borders, and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitute threat to international peace and security. Double-standards should be avoided in the fight against terrorism, by strengthen instead of weakening our firm support for international mechanisms and continue to support the UN to play a leading role in the fight against terrorism."

For more information:

- Visit: www.un.org/counterterrorism/2020-counter-terrorism-week
- Mr. Voronkov's statement:
https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/200710_usg_vctwk_closing_remarks.pdf
- Contact: gerardl@un.org
- Follow us on Twitter @UN_OCT and through the Week's key hashtags: #VirtualCTWeek #UNCCTExpo #UNiteToCounterTerrorism