



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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

**Online Side Event at the 75th anniversary session
of the UN General Assembly**

**“Central Asian Experience
with individuals returned from Syria and Iraq:
successes, challenges, and lessons learned”**

25 September 2020

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to this important event, co-organized by my Office and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA).

Protecting, repatriating, prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating individuals with alleged links to UN-listed terrorist groups is a critical concern for many countries around the world.

And it is as complex as it is critical.

Supporting Member States in taking action in this regard is a top priority for the United Nations system under the leadership of Secretary-General Guterres.

A number of Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 2178 and 2396, call upon Member States to cooperate in their efforts to address the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighter returnees, relocators and their accompanying family members.

This includes developing and implementing effective human rights-based and age- and gender-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration strategies.

The Security Council has provided Member States with additional, actionable guidance in this regard through the Madrid Guiding Principles to stem the flow of Foreign Terrorist Fighters which were adopted by the Security Council in 2015, and the related Addendum in 2018.

Excellencies,

The dire humanitarian situation and significant protection needs of women and children with alleged links to terrorist groups stranded in camps in north-eastern Syria and Iraq are of utmost concern.

Secretary-General Guterres has underscored the urgency of an adequate international response.

Member States in Central Asia were among the first countries to fulfil their responsibilities under international law by repatriating their nationals from conflict zones.

They and a few other Member States have led by example, paving the way for others to follow.

Their experiences are a source of valuable lessons for other countries that have already repatriated, or are committed to repatriating, their nationals, or have address individuals returned on their own.

In today's event we will acknowledge the successes, consider the challenges and discuss lessons learned from the experiences of Central Asian countries.

My Office, together with the Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy, has produced an animated video entitled "Returning home, rebuilding lives" which will be shown shortly.

The story in the video is based on real events and its main protagonists - women and children - were able to return home thanks to the considerable efforts of their governments.

While watching the video, we should ask ourselves: What would have happened to these people if they had not been repatriated?

Would the children have been brainwashed and forced to join the ranks of terrorist groups? Would they have been transformed from victims to perpetrators?

Would they have developed anger and hatred towards their own countries that stigmatized them by refusing to take them back and let them fend for themselves for no fault of their own?

Would they still be alive?

The consequences of inaction are significant and long-term.

We risk driving these people back into the hands of ISIL and other terrorist groups.

And we risk compounding the trauma, nurturing the hatred and continuing the cycle of violence for generations to come.

I fully understand that prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating these individuals back into society is complex and challenging. It can also be a sensitive, controversial and even a divisive topic.

Governments—and societies— have to reconcile protection, accountability and public security considerations – all hard enough on their own, and even more so in conjunction with each other.

But the current situation is completely untenable.

The time for action is long overdue. It is a moral, human rights and security imperative.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I encourage you to engage in the panel discussion with Representatives of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as well as our colleagues from UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, to reflect on how UN entities have supported, and could further support, the rehabilitation and reintegration efforts of Member States.

This will be followed by an intervention by a representative of the Bulan Institute, a civil society organization doing excellent research on the issue of repatriation in Central Asia.

I met with the representatives of this civil society organization on the margins of the Vienna Conference on FTFs and I was very impressed by their work in this regard.

We will then hear from my Deputy, Mr. Raffi Gregorian, on a practical way forward, through the provision of whole-of-UN support to requesting Member States through a Global Framework developed by 15 UN entities and co-led by my Office and UNICEF.

I look forward to a productive discussion that leads to concrete action and tangible results.

I thank you.