



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

**Remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov
Under-Secretary-General, UNOCT**

Commemoration of the International Day of Tolerance

16 November 2020

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be part of this commemoration of the International Day of Tolerance.

I would like to commend the Sultanate of Oman and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers for co-organizing this important event, which celebrates respect for diversity – a precondition for peaceful and stable societies.

Across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated socioeconomic grievances, social and political tensions and human rights violations.

It has contributed to an increase in racism, stigmatization, xenophobia, religious intolerance, anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination.

Violent extremist groups continue to exploit the disruption caused by the pandemic to spread their hateful narratives online and offline and incite attacks.

While Al-Qaeda and ISIL-affiliated groups and individual adherents continue to pose a threat in a number of countries, some Member States are also facing a growing transnational threat from neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and other racially and ethnically motivated groups.

Recent terrorist attacks in France and Austria have once again highlighted a dangerous ‘clash of civilizations’ narrative and stoked fear and tension.

These developments are stark reminders of how important is to bolster our efforts to fight intolerance and promote acceptance.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to share some ideas on how we can further contribute to building tolerant societies that are resilient to violence.

First and foremost, we must strengthen regional and international cooperation to prevent violent extremism and promote inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue through a 'reinvigorated multilateralism.'

A good example of how we are doing this is through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact that brings together 43 entities to ensure a coordinated and coherent approach in our efforts to prevent and counter terrorism.

Second, promoting tolerance requires a 'multidimensional' effort involving education, development, security, and cultural and sport initiatives as part of a holistic approach grounded in human rights and the rule of law.

Sport, in particular, plays a critical role in disseminating positive values, bringing different cultures together, promoting gender equality, empowering youth, and facilitating social integration.

This is why—in partnership with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the International Centre for Sport Security, my Office has launched a global programme to promote sport and its values as a tool to prevent violent extremism.

Third, promoting tolerance requires a 'whole-of-society' effort involving both state and non-state actors.

We need to take action at all levels, starting at the grassroots, where families, local communities, civil society organizations, youth, women and faith leaders actively and meaningfully participate in efforts to protect vulnerable individuals from being captured by violent extremist ideologies.

My Office has established an External Partnerships Section to strengthen our engagement with civil society, think tanks, academia and the private sector—particularly tech companies, which have a significant role to play in minimizing harmful content and online misinformation.

Fourth, we need to intensify efforts to counter violent extremist and divisive narratives by promoting positive ones.

Our Strategic Communications Programme implemented by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre helps stakeholders in countries around the world address the spread of conspiracy theories and hate speech.

Together with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (and I send my best regards to my friend Miguel Moratinos who is participating in this event) the Programme will soon implement the 'Peer-to-Peer Young Religious Leaders and Media Makers' project, which will enhance the capacity of young people to mediate sectarian tensions and provide alternatives to terrorist messages online through social media campaigns.

Last but not least, we need to continue to harness the voices of victims and survivors of terrorism as powerful and credible messengers of peace and tolerance.

My Office is implementing a new global Victims of Terrorism Support Programme, and will convene the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism during the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week in June next year.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The International Day of Tolerance reminds us of our moral obligation at the personal, national and international levels to embrace and promote the values of mutual respect, understanding and peaceful coexistence, and to take action against the underlying drivers of intolerance.

You have our full and firm commitment and support to this end.

I thank you.