



## UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

### **“The Application of Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality Technologies in Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism”**

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**Opening Remarks by Mr. Mauro Miedico**

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*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good morning, good afternoon or good evening, wherever you may be now. On behalf of the **United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)** and the Global Future Council on Augmented and Virtual Reality of the World Economic Forum, I wish to warmly welcome you to the webinar on **“The Application of Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality (AR/VR) Technologies in Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism”**.

It is a great honor of mine to open this webinar on such an innovative and relevant topic and the first of its kind in the counter-terrorism and preventing of violent extremism field.

What do we want to achieve today? The purpose of today’s event is to introduce Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality technologies to the UN counter-terrorism community and launch what I am certain will be a rich and informative discussion. We wish to reflect on the risks but also the opportunities presented by these new technologies, as well as raise awareness, particularly in light of the great success we have recently experienced during our Second Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations, the theme of which centered around “Countering and Preventing Terrorism in the Age of Transformative Technologies: Addressing the Challenges of the New Decade.” With over 1,000 participants in the High-Level Conference and 10,000 participants across 36 side events, this webinar is the next natural step in emphasizing the critical importance around technologies in the UN arena including their role in international peace and security.

The work of the Global Future Council of which I am honored to also be a member has long illustrated the transformative role that AR/VR technologies occupy in society. I seize this occasion to thank colleagues at the WEF, and especially Ms. Stephanie Nassenstein who manages

this Council and all the Members of the Council for their incredibly useful and insightful work on AR/VR and for bringing this topic to UNOCT.

While these technologies hold great potential, terrorist groups have also proven to be adept at using them. Terrorists extensively use information communication technologies to expand their reach, radicalization, and recruitment methods, all of which target vulnerable people around the world. With the increased online connectivity resulting from the pandemic, this has enabled terrorist actors to reach a wider audience globally, feed misinformation and hatred. Young people, who are amongst the most enthusiastic adopters of AR/VR technology, have especially been targeted by terrorist messaging, notably through online gaming platforms, which points to a troubling trend of the potential risks of AR and VR technologies in the targeting of younger generations. As with any emerging technology, AR and VR systems also bring with them new challenges. At the same time, these new technologies have the potential to enhance prevention by propelling training efforts for both emergency-management and crisis -response. It is however vital that any exploration of their applications is in full respect of human rights and the rule of law.

In that sense, a united approach can help us collectively tap into the great potential of these technologies in our CT/PVE efforts. We need a whole-of-government, and whole-of-society approach, together with partner governments, civil society, non-governmental actors, academia, international partners, private sector entities, and with the full and equal participation of women and youth. The United Nations, more specifically UNOCT, is well placed to unite key stakeholders and produce sustainable solutions and this event is an evidence of our determination to establish platforms for communication and dialogue across different actors.

AR and VR technologies have the potential to become effective tools in the global fight against terrorism. AR/VR provides a cost-effective, rapid training solution used globally, and will one day be ubiquitous within training packages. Furthermore, AR/VR holds immense promise to be used as a tool in deradicalization initiatives. By allowing viewers to see through the eyes of others, AR/VR systems can build empathy with victims and ease intercommunal tensions. Moreover, these technologies can increase coordination in post terrorist attacks environments, enabling first responders to have a wholistic understanding of complex terrorist scenes. Such technology is already being tested in border security, emergency management, and criminal investigations.

At UNOCT we continue identifying and addressing the use of emerging technologies by terrorist groups, notably through the production of relevant reports, such as the ones we have produced in conjunction with UNICRI on “*Algorithms and Terrorism: The Malicious use of Artificial Intelligence for Terrorist Purposes*” and “*Leveraging Artificial Intelligence to Combat the Terrorist Use of the Internet and Social Media – A Focus on South and South East Asia*”. We also launched in our Counter Terrorism Centre a very successful Global Programme on Cybersecurity and New Technologies that provides the needed technical assistance to Member States.

Today’s webinar presents us with an opportunity to improve international cooperation and information sharing, and to build new partnerships that can lead to sustainable, practical solutions. It is vital that we develop robust collaboration efforts to explore and identify global solutions and

good practices to address the threats of AR and VR, but also to incorporate their potential use into counter-terrorism efforts while complying with human rights and international law.

We are especially thrilled to have top expert panelists with us today who will share their experience with augmented reality and virtual reality technologies, their related challenges and opportunities, as well as their experience in applying these technologies as capacity building tools. We will also benefit from their knowledge regarding lessons learned and good practices and on the future of these technologies in our CT/PVE efforts.

I am confident that today's discussions on the application of AR/VR technologies will set a strong foundation to guide us towards the development of effective measures against terrorism and violent extremism, upholding human rights and promoting gender responsiveness while countering terrorism in the age of these technologies. Let me particularly thank the two moderators Dr Robert Bunker and Dr Timothy Marler and all the experts and speakers who, out of their very busy scheduled, accepted with enthusiasm to bring their knowledge, experience and great skills to us today.

I thank you for your attention.