



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

United Nations High-Level International Conference on Human Rights, Civil Society and Counter-Terrorism

“For a Future Free From Terrorism: The Role of Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Civil Society Engagement in Effective Counter-Terrorism Efforts” - 10-11 May 2022

Co-Chairs Summary

Mr. Vladimir Voronkov

United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

I have the honour to present the co-chairs’ summary for this Conference.

Let me first reiterate my deep gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Spain for having co-organized this important event and particularly to His Excellency Mr. José Manuel Albares Bueno, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and Cooperation and His Excellency Mr. Fernando Grande-Marlaska, the Minister of Interior for their participation.

I am thankful to our distinguished speakers and 430 participants from Member States, international and regional organizations, and United Nations partners.

My heartfelt appreciation especially to 44 civil society representatives for having openly shared their views, insights, and experiences over the past few days.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the victims of terrorism who courageously presented their powerful stories in the “Memories Campaign” documentary.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

This is our first High-Level Conference dedicated to human rights, civil society and counter-terrorism.

My Office will work with the Government of Spain, and in consultation with our civil society partners, to prepare an outcome document reflecting our discussions over the past days.

I would however like to share with you some key conclusions, on behalf of the co-chairs:

First, the rule of law, human rights, and gender mainstreaming are the cornerstones of effective and sustainable counter-terrorism responses.

Of course, nothing can ever justify terrorism. Member States have legitimate reasons to take those measures necessary to address this threat.

However, as reiterated during this conference, our collective efforts against terrorism cannot succeed if they neglect or abuse the rule of law and human rights, if they undermine civic space and principled humanitarian action, and if they fail to advance the rights of the child, women, and victims.

Unfortunately, our discussions over the past days underscored that many counter-terrorism laws, policies, and practices continue to have an adverse impact on the rule of law and human rights.

They often rely on vague or overly broad definitions of acts of terrorism and in some cases are even used to oppress civil society actors and human rights defenders.

This is not only wrong – it is counterproductive.

This conference highlighted several areas that require our urgent action.

This includes ensuring accountability in the counter-terrorism context.

Bringing perpetrators of terrorist offences to justice is critical to deter future attacks and to uphold the rights of victims of terrorism and their families.

Comprehensive, gender-sensitive and human rights-compliant prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters and their families are key in this regard.

A comprehensive approach to accountability is also crucial in cases of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by terrorist groups.

At the same time, participants called for meaningful accountability for abuses and violations committed by state or non-state actors in the context of countering terrorism. Impunity for those acts may otherwise fuel further radicalization to terrorism.

Another area explored during this conference is the need to duly integrate gender analysis and gender perspectives in all policies and measures to prevent violent extremism and terrorism.

This includes taking into consideration the differential impact of violent extremism and terrorism as well as initiatives to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism on men, women, boys and girls.

Participants further underlined women's critical roles as preventers and peacebuilders. We need to empower, meaningfully engage with, and promote the leadership of women, including women human rights defenders and women-led civil society organizations in our efforts.

As the General Assembly's resolution on the Seventh Review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy demonstrated, gender considerations in the counter-terrorism context have been increasingly on the agenda of the international community. We need now to match the rhetoric by concrete action and implementation.

Second, we need to safeguard principled humanitarian action in a context of increasingly complex linkages between terrorism and armed conflict.

Participants underlined the challenges raised by the increase in the number of armed groups designated as terrorist organizations that are engaged in non-international armed conflicts.

They also expressed concerns about the contribution of terrorist activity to complex humanitarian emergencies, including through forced displacement and persecution on the basis of gender, religious or ethnic affiliation, or other protected characteristics.

We further heard about the threats and attacks by terrorist elements against humanitarian actors and their activities.

At the same time, ill-conceived, or improperly applied counter-terrorism measures often impede impartial humanitarian action and contribute to the shrinking of the humanitarian space.

Participants stressed the need to enable a safe and unhindered environment for impartial humanitarian actors to deliver aid and alleviate the suffering of individuals affected by humanitarian emergencies, including those linked to armed conflicts where terrorist groups are active.

Third, we need to consolidate our support to victims of terrorism.

The "Memories Campaign" film launched this morning is another powerful reminder of the need to redouble our efforts to break free from terrorist violence.

Societies benefit when victims are recognized as bearers of rights and are treated with compassion and respect.

Strengthening victims' resilience, showing solidarity, and supporting victims contribute to rebuilding the fabric of a fragmented community torn apart by terrorism.

Despite some progress, more needs to be done, including by states adopting gender-sensitive comprehensive national assistance plans.

This was also encouraged by the General Assembly in its seventh review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The Model Legislative Provisions recently launched by my Office, together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, have been mentioned as useful guidance to provide holistic and comprehensive support to victims.

While the primary responsibility for protecting the rights of victims lies with Member States, we need to empower and meaningfully engage all relevant stakeholders, including civil society and affected communities at the local level.

Securing access to justice and providing sustainable support to victims should remain our priority.

We look forward to continuing our discussions during the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism that my Office will organize in September this year.

Fourth, civil society actors, including human rights defenders, youth, women and grass-roots organizations, are essential interlocutors for both Member States and the United Nations. They bring unique perspectives and expertise, drawing upon their knowledge of realities on the ground and access to local communities.

A vibrant and pluralistic civic space contributes to building resilience to terrorism, promoting human rights and gender equality, realizing the sustainable development goals, advocating for victims' needs, and supporting rehabilitation and reintegration.

Our discussions highlighted the need for a cooperative and participatory “whole-of-society” approach - from the development of counter-terrorism laws, policies and measures - to their implementation and evaluation.

Transparent, comprehensive, inclusive and meaningful partnerships with civil society contribute to increased legitimacy of decision-making and accountability, as well as enhanced effectiveness and sustainability of counter-terrorism laws, measures and policies.

Partnering with civil society actors requires us to create a safe space for them to express their views, without fear of reprisals, undue securitization or instrumentalization, particularly of women.

Women human rights defenders face particular risks and should not be silenced in the name of countering terrorism.

Fifth, the United Nations needs to reinforce its role in promoting respect for, and protection of human rights, gender equality and the rule of law in counter-terrorism efforts.

We welcome participants' call for strengthened efforts to meaningfully implement Pillar IV of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Member States have the primary responsibility to implement the Strategy in a balanced manner. The United Nations remains committed to support Member States in this endeavor.

We need more human rights and gender mainstreaming in the United Nations counter-terrorism activities, including the enhanced implementation of the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, but also more dedicated initiatives on human rights, the rule of law and gender equality.

The reform of the United Nations counter-terrorism architecture by the Secretary-General – with the establishment of my Office and the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact – has been a major step forward in enhancing coordination and coherence in the work of the United Nations system.

The Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, now comprising 45 United Nations and non- United Nations entities, continues to promote gender, human rights and the rule of law, as well as enhanced engagement with academia and civil society.

Our Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Platform, which connects over 900 focal points from Counter-Terrorism Compact entities, 13 Member States and nine regional organizations, serves as a vehicle for enhanced information-sharing and coordination among entities and is a useful tool for Member States to engage with all United Nations entities on counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism policy and programming.

We must continue to leverage the strength of this mechanism and its interagency working groups, to strengthen human rights, rule of law and gender mainstreaming as cross-cutting priorities across the United Nations system.

Sixth, we need to translate our commitment to the rule of law, human rights, and gender mainstreaming into concrete and impactful actions, backed up with adequate resources.

Excellencies,

The Secretary-General has recommended “a human rights reset for counter-terrorism”, in line with his Call to Action for Human Rights.

The time has come to act concretely to place human rights “front and centre in the fight against terror”, as reaffirmed by the Secretary-General during this Conference.

This is the responsibility of Member States at the national level, and bilaterally as capacity-building providers, within the framework of the United Nations.

I am confident that our exchanges over the past three days have inspired us to redouble our efforts to advance the balanced implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

My Office will continue to play its part to strengthen our partnership with you all to support a coordinated, coherent, human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive “all-of-UN approach” to prevent and counter terrorism.

This event would not have been possible without the excellent partnership and support of the Kingdom of Spain. I am pleased to turn now to H.E. Mr. Fernando Grande-Marlaska, Minister of the Interior of Spain, for his concluding remarks.

Thank you for your attention.