



Recorded remarks by Mr. Raffi Gregorian,

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Conference on Transnational Terrorist Threats from Emerging and Re-Emerging Violent Extremist Movements

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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank the Council of Europe's Committee on Counter-Terrorism for inviting me to address you this important conference on Transnational Terrorist Threats from Emerging and Re-Emerging Violent Extremist Movements. I am sorry not to be able to join you in person, as when you hear me, I will be in the air travelling from the Middle East back to New York.

The thematic focus of the conference is timely indeed. While Al-Qaida, Da'esh and their affiliates continue to constitute the biggest transnational terrorist threat, the threat posed by terrorist actors motivated by what is often described as "far right" or "extreme right wing" ideologies, having last peaked in the 1990s with events like the Oklahoma City bombing, has once again become a matter of international concern.

While the threat remains primarily domestic in focus, the motives, inspiration, and goals underpinning such terrorist attacks are increasingly shared transnationally. This has been amplified by terrorist activity in the online space, where both terrorist groups and individuals establish new connections, communicate, network and raise funds, as well as share common violent ideologies and narratives.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the threat significantly as it further aggravated socio-economic inequality worldwide. Although pandemic-related lockdowns and travel restrictions have led to a lower number of attacks, terrorist groups have exploited the induced crisis to diversify their support base by capitalising on individuals' fears and sense of isolation, as well as on social fragmentation and polarisation. It also contributed to the erosion of trust in public institutions and governance structures.

Recognising this, during the General Assembly's 7th biennial review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in June 2021, Member States agreed on the importance of strengthening the understanding of the threat of terrorism based on what they agreed to define as xenophobia, racism, and other forms of



intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief, or XRIRB, and requested the Secretary-General prepare a report on the topic. I would like to take the opportunity to introduce this report, whose preparation was coordinated by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and released at the end of August.

The report offers a first look into the threat, including its manifestations within the global terrorist landscape and the motivations, objectives and organization of such groups, as well as some emerging responses. It reflects an inclusive approach based on formal and informal feedback from, and consultations with, a broad range of stakeholders. This included 35 Member States, two regional organizations, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, 13 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities and more than 15 civil society organisations. However, it should be stressed that the report is simply an initial take on a complex and dynamic phenomenon.

The report indicates that terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism and intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief, have varied and context-specific motives and objectives. These groups and their members are not united, and they espouse narratives and ideologies aiming at various goals using fake news or disinformation, conspiracy theories and hatemongering content. These groups and networks seem to operate in structurally diffuse organizational structures that are often characterized by a lack of centralized leadership. The so-called lone actors are often self-recruited or radicalized to violence, although often connected to and inspired by communications with and postings by other like-minded people.

Allow me to highlight five major observations from the Secretary-General's report.

First, in producing the document, it became evident that additional data is still required to further advance our understanding of the full scope and nature of the threat. In addition, the potentially expansive categorization of violence that may fall into the broad scope of XRIRB poses additional challenges not only to understanding, but also to responding to the threat.

This means that, above all, while we believe the report responds to the request by Member States, it should be regarded as a contribution for further debate rather than a definitive statement on XRIRB, which many Member States define in accordance with their national experience.

Second, while several Member States see terrorist attacks inspired by Da'esh, Al-Qaida, and affiliated groups and individuals as the highest threat in their territories, the majority of States acknowledge the overall rise and the increasing seriousness of threats on the basis of XRIRB, with a few countries even seeing it as the greater threat.

Third, although terrorist attacks based on XRIRB are not a new phenomenon, they have grown significantly over the past decade worldwide. Radicalised actors



have maximized the misuse of the online space to build networks, increase their reach and influence, mobilize supporters and fundraise transnationally, as well as spread conspiracy theories against ethnic, religious, gender and minority groups.

Our increased reliance on the online space during the pandemic contributed to accelerating extremist narratives, as opportunities emerged to forge an unprecedented number of online connections between like-minded individuals and groups internationally. It is therefore important to ensure that attention to counter-terrorism is sustained as COVID-19 restrictions worldwide continue to ease.

Fourth, it is the primary responsibility of Member States to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, including terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief. Response measures still need to comply with international law, in particular international human rights law, international refugee law, and international humanitarian law. Countering terrorism does not justify overlooking or relegating those commitments to a secondary level.

Finally, the report encourages Member States to further develop international cooperation to share expertise and resources in this area. This reinforces the need for closer collaboration and exchange of information among relevant stakeholders.

I hope the findings and recommendations provided in the Secretary-General's report will contribute not only to our collective understanding of terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief, but also to our common efforts in addressing and preventing this threat.

I am confident that your discussions at this conference will bring us a step closer in that direction.

Thank you.