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OSCE
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Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan



14 MAY 2024 | TASHKENT



First meeting of the Regional Expert Council in Central Asia on the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees to be held in Tashkent

**Opening Remarks, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General,
United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**

14 May 2024, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Good morning, dear friends,
Dear Eldor Takhirovich,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor to welcome you to the inaugural meeting of the Central Asia Regional Expert Council on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees.

I would like to sincerely thank the Republic of Uzbekistan for the implementation of this initiative and its financial support, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies.

I express my gratitude to the governments of the region - the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan - for participating in the inauguration of the Center.

I would also like to thank the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan, for their support as co-organizers of this event.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The repatriation of terrorist suspects from camps in northeastern Syria and Iraq and their relatives continues to be one of the most pressing and challenging challenges facing the international community. This task includes the need to bring to justice those associated with terrorist groups. Of utmost importance in this context is for children to be recognized and treated as victims of terrorism.

Today, building on over 10 years of exemplary efforts made by the Central Asian Member States, we mark another significant and timely milestone through the establishment of this one-of-a-kind initiative. There is no such Council anywhere yet.

As an intergovernmental structure, the Regional Expert Council aims to strengthen coordination among Central Asian countries, as well as share experiences and lessons learned on the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returning from conflict zones.

The establishment of the Expert Council provides an opportunity for States in the region to demonstrate their efforts in response to decisions of the UN Security Council and General Assembly calling for the development and implementation of comprehensive and flexible strategies in this area.

The establishment of the Expert Council also responds to the priorities outlined in the updated Joint Plan of Action for the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia.

Prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration strategies must comply with international law, take into account gender, and age aspects, and ensure the respect of human rights.

As we will hear today, the experience and leadership of Central Asian States continue to underscore the value of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches where government agencies effectively collaborate with one another, and engage with civil society organizations, especially women- and youth-led organizations.

Let us also be mindful of the work and challenges ahead. Unfortunately, many individuals remain in camps and detention centers in north-east Syria and Iraq, primarily women and children.

The UN Office of Counter-Terrorism views the initiative to establish a Regional Expert Council as an important step in the implementation of the UN Global Framework for Support to Third-Country Nationals located in Syria and Iraq.

My Office, together with UNICEF and the Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, is ready to take on the role of secretariat of the Regional Expert Council, which begins its work today.

Only by working together can we bring our plan to fruition.

Thank you for attention.