PRESS RELEASE

The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre launches Cybersecurity Innovation Challenge in Collaboration with OICT, and AIT

Vienna, 6 December 2019 – The Cybersecurity Innovation Challenge on 'Countering Digital Terrorism' concluded its two-day event in Vienna, Austria. The event was co-organized by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), the United Nations Office of Information Communication and Technology (OICT), and the Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT).

"I'm counting on you to come up with ideas that can be galvanized into solutions for one of the major challenges of the modern digital era, the cybersecurity threat," said the UN Assistant Secretary-General and Chief Information and Technology Officer Ms. Atefeh Riazi in a video message to the 35 young people from 16 countries grouped into 13 teams that participated in the Cybersecurity Innovation Challenge.

The aim of the innovation challenge was to raise awareness among the youth on the digital terrorist threat, and to engage them in finding innovative solutions towards this threat. The finalist teams were selected among 60 teams that submitted ideas during the call for proposals.

"Digital terrorism is the unfortunate reality we face today, and it is a reality we need to confront. We therefore must act in a coordinated and cooperative manner to get ahead of the curve and anticipate the use that terrorists could make of emerging technologies. At the United Nations, we believe that engaging the youth in solving global issues is key in finding sustainable solutions. This exercise will certainly contribute to shape future activities of the UNCCT Global Counter-Terrorism Programme on Cybersecurity and New Technologies", Ulrik Ahnfeldt-Mollerup stated on behalf of UNCCT.

Anton Plimon, Managing Director of AIT, which hosted the Cybersecurity Innovation Challenge, welcomed the cooperation with the United Nations and stated that "Appropriate regulatory framework conditions, an active culture of innovation, and broad cooperation among all knowledge providers in society are essential in order to be able to develop the tools we need to manage digital technologies in pace with disruptive changes and create a functional digital 'data space' at a global level."

The first keynote speaker Dr. Ralph Hammer, Chief Operative in Charge for Security and Defense Research at the Staff Group for Technology Transfer and Security Research of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology, stressed the urgent need to keep terrorists and other malign actors from taking shelter in the digital realm and using it against

society. "The contestants in the challenge would play a vital part by implementing their ideas for cutting-edge technology and state-of-the-art-knowledge to help make the upcoming age of digitalization a worthwhile place to live," he underlined.

The second keynote speaker Dr. Helmut Schnitzer, Austrian Federal Chancellery Head of Department Security Policy, Justice and Home Affairs, emphasized that effective digital infrastructures are a prerequisite for providing services of critical infrastructures such as energy, water and transport and thus it is a top priority for Austria to make cyber space sufficiently safe and secure at national and international level. He underscored the importance of research being embedded in social discourse to address the challenges of cyber security within the framework of a global dialogue.

Over the two-day event, participants further developed their ideas into more comprehensive, sustainable and practical solutions, with the support of a group of expert mentors from civil society and United Nations entities who provided guidance on best practices and UN values. The 4 best solutions were given a special mention by a jury of senior officers from organizing entities.

The event reaffirmed that "whole-of-society" and youth engagement approaches are the effective ways to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The UNCCT was established in 2011 through an initial contribution from Saudi Arabia of $10 million to enhance United Nations counter-terrorism efforts, such as providing capacity-building support to Member States for the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In 2014, Saudi Arabia contributed an additional $100 million to the Centre. In 2017, the Centre was moved to the newly established UN Office of Counter-Terrorism and Mr. Vladimir Voronkov was appointed Executive Director of the Centre.

UNCCT works on all four (4) pillars of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy on issues such as addressing the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon; countering the financing of terrorism; enhancing border security and management; promoting human rights while countering terrorism; and supporting victims of terrorism, among others.

Since April 2012, UNCCT has implemented more than 80 capacity-building projects at global, regional and national levels. The Centre focuses its activities on countries and regions where the threat of terrorism is most acute.

The Members of the Advisory Board include: Saudi Arabia (Chair), Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Russian Federation, Pakistan, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and the European Union (Guest Member).