



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

**Video message of Mr. Vladimir Voronkov
Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism
to the international videoconference in Tashkent, entitled
“The role of youth in combating radicalism, extremism and terrorism”**

Thursday, 18 February 2021

Excellencies, dear Colleagues,

I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of Uzbekistan for organizing this important conference on the role of youth in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.

The United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Guterres has urged us to put youth at the heart of our collective efforts to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, building back better, and rethinking and re-energizing global activity.

Indeed, the challenges that young people encounter have intensified with the spread of COVID-19, which has caused families and communities great uncertainty, disruption and fear.

Terrorists are trying to take advantage of socioeconomic and political grievances exacerbated by the pandemic to challenge states’ authority and invigorate their propaganda efforts to prey on captive young audiences.

Millions of youth are confined to their homes and are out of schools and jobs, with little or no opportunities for socialization and self-realisation. Their frustration, combined with more time spent online, increases their vulnerability to violent extremist agendas.

As terrorists and violent extremists are trying to adapt to the COVID-19 context to advance their hateful agendas, we must also adapt and innovate to prevent and counter their efforts. We must remain vigilant, mobilized and united against the scourge of violent extremism and terrorism.

Excellencies, dear Colleagues,

Thousands of children held in camps in northeast Syria, who are deprived of basic needs and support services and exposed to violence, are particularly at grave risk.

Leaving them there will only cause further human suffering and risk of radicalizing the next generation of girls and boys.

The experiences of the international community in dealing with children affected by armed conflict demonstrate that they can successfully recover and reintegrate into their communities.

I commend the efforts of Uzbekistan and other Member States that have repatriated their nationals, and urge all other countries to follow this path providing holistic, gender-responsive, age-sensitive, and human rights-based support.

Through the Global Framework on United Nations support to Member States on individuals returned from Syria and Iraq, my Office and UNICEF are already working with Central Asian States to ensure that United Nations support meets the needs on the ground.

We stand ready to continue and increase our work in this field as needed.

Dear Colleagues,

Young people can have and are having a positive and powerful impact on the world – right here, right now. We must listen to their voices, to their expectations and fears, but also what they have to offer. And we must ensure their meaningful participation in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive for terrorism. Youth engagement and youth empowerment are vital to success in this regard.

The United Nations System, through our Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, is committed to working with all generations to ensure a future without terrorism.

I was glad to hear that the United Nations Country Team in Uzbekistan is piloting the roll-out of the “United Nations Youth 2030 Strategy”, with the robust support of the Youth Agency and other national partners.

UN agencies, funds and programmes in Uzbekistan are also implementing a range of youth-centred policies and programmes, including a Joint Programme on Youth for Social Cohesion in Fergana Valley, and two youth focused Joint Programmes in the Aral

Sea region. You can count on my Office to further this work on, for and—most importantly— with youth.

A year ago, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in my Office launched a Global Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme. I very much hope to see young Uzbeks actively participating in our initiatives.

In this regard, we look forward to strengthening the youth component in the fourth phase of our joint project with the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia to support the Joint Plan of Action for the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia.

Our International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter-Terrorism, recently established in Doha with the support of the State of Qatar, will also work on youth-focused ideas to address risk and resilience factors and develop behaviourally informed interventions that effectively prevent and counter violent extremism.

My message today is simple but important: listen to youth, hear them out, and work with them. Young people have much to offer, and we cannot succeed in our efforts to defeat the scourge of terrorism without a youth-centric approach.

Now, I am pleased to share with you several young voices from around the world with whom my Office has had the pleasure to work with in our effort to promote youth-led solutions to prevent and counter violent extremism.

[VIDEO TESTIMONIALS 1:15 MINUTES]

As you can see, these young women and men truly inspire us. And it is an honor to work hand-in-hand with youth.

But much more can and should be done. Young people deserve peace, justice, sustainable development, respect for human rights and human dignity.

Everyday young people across the world are fighting for equal opportunities, education, inclusive communities and peaceful societies. Let me say that this is also our fight.

It is time to build an alliance with youth. An alliance for today and for the future, to ensure that no one is left behind.

Once again, I would like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the organizers of this important conference.