



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

Statement by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism

In-Person Briefing to Member States on the report of the Secretary-General for the Seventh Biennial Review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

5 March 2021

Your Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkır, President of the General Assembly,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to commend the leadership of the President of the General Assembly during this landmark seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly and reiterate the full support of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism to him and Member States.

I am grateful to their Excellencies, Ambassador Mohamed Al-Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman, and Ambassador Agustín Santos, Permanent Representative of Spain - co-facilitators of this important review process - for the invitation to brief you today.

Allow me also to pay tribute to His Excellency Ambassador Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, Permanent Representative of Nigeria, for his exceptional work as President of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly and the groundwork laid, under his stewardship, for this review.

As the seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was postponed to this session of the General Assembly due to the pandemic, the biennial review will actually cover a three-year period.

The update report that the General Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to submit by the end of February 2021 was issued last week.

This report (A/75/729) covers 2020 and should be considered in conjunction with the initial report of the Secretary-General (A/74/677) issued in February 2020, in line with General Assembly resolution 72/284.

Today, I will brief you on key elements of the update as well as the initial report.

We received submissions from 44 Member States and 5 regional organizations for the initial report, and from 50 Member States and 15 international and regional organizations for the update report.

My Office also invited civil society to provide inputs and we received submissions from 55 civil society organizations from around the world for the initial report and 53 for the update.

The preparation of the update report also benefitted from the rich exchange of views during the Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week from 6 to 10 July last year, with 1,000 participants, including representatives from 134 Member States and 88 civil society organizations.

Dear Colleagues,

Even as the world reels from the COVID-19 crisis, terrorism continues to pose a grave threat to international peace and security.

It is an evolving and diversifying threat, with many trends magnified during the pandemic, and many underlying drivers exacerbated by the political and socio-economic fallout from the crisis.

ISIL and Al-Qaida operate as resilient, covert transnational networks and still have substantial financial resources at their disposal, and access to weapons.

Their regional affiliates have gained autonomy, strength and ground – especially in Africa, exploiting and fueling conflicts and instability.

The international community is grappling with the complex security, humanitarian and human rights challenges posed by ISIL's remnants in Iraq and Syria and the legacies from its horrendous crimes.

Thousands of terrorists remain at large and could relocate to other conflict zones and fragile areas, posing a mid- to long-term global threat.

Tens of thousands of individuals associated with terrorist groups designated by the Security Council, including thousands of foreign women and children, remain stranded in overcrowded and precarious holding facilities in northeast Syria.

ISIL is on the rise again and could regain the capacity to orchestrate international attacks in the coming years.

At the same time, a resurgent terrorist threat has been catapulted to the fore during the COVID-19 infodemic of hate and conspiracy theories:

A growing, transnational threat stemming from neo-Nazism, white supremacy and other racially and ethnically motivated movements, laced with misogyny.

Fragmented and leaderless, the threat materializes often through low-cost, low-tech, copycat attacks by lone individuals or small groups, targeting soft and symbolic objects.

It transcends borders through common xenophobic narratives; networking and mutual inspiration online; international travel to rallies, marches, music and sporting events.

It creates frontier challenges, including the use of cryptocurrencies for financing, online video games to recruit, fringe social media platforms to communicate, and ambivalent or coded language to hide hate in plain sight and evade prosecution.

Dear Colleagues,

Terrorism must be tackled comprehensively and cooperatively.

No State is immune from either the direct threat of attacks or the indirect cost of terrorism on social cohesion, sustainable development, and human rights.

September will see the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people from more than 90 countries. The adoption of resolution 1373 (2001) by the Security Council has opened a new chapter in global fight against terrorism.

In June, we will mark the fifteenth anniversary of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which you are beginning to review.

This landmark year provides a special opportunity to reaffirm the leadership of the United Nations in the fight against terrorism and to chart a path forward, based on the principles laid down in the Strategy.

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues

In his report, the Secretary-General presented a seven-point vision to counter terrorism as the international community emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic. The report could serve as a basis for your deliberations over the coming months to review the Strategy.

So point number one, we need a reinvigorated multilateral response.

The United Nations is, today more than ever, crucial in addressing the global scourge of terrorism, bringing Member States, regional organizations and civil society together to facilitate dialogue, cooperation and partnerships at all levels for a united front against terrorism.

Countering terrorism requires 21st century international cooperation, anchored into international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and responsive to the realities of a globalized and interdependent world.

Now, more than ever, we need a broad-based alliance within and between countries to unambiguously reject and address terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

Civil society, in its diversity, can contribute in a variety of ways to make Member State and United Nations counter-terrorism efforts more effective, comprehensive and sustainable.

And as with its support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the private sector has a vested interest in preventing terrorists from harming communities and disrupting economies.

Second, we need to break the cycle of terrorist violence.

Deterring, disrupting and foiling terrorist attacks and bringing suspected terrorism offenders to justice must remain a priority during and after the pandemic.

Member States need to stay focused on degrading the capabilities of terrorist groups and denying them operational space and opportunities to strike, including by strengthening border security and countering terrorist travel; enhancing the use of intelligence, including financial intelligence; suppressing the financing of terrorism and addressing its evolving linkages with organized crime; preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons; and collecting, investigating, and using admissible evidence in courts of law.

Accountability is essential to break the cycle of impunity and terrorist violence.

Member States need to develop effective strategies for prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration that prevent recidivism, are based on human rights and the rule of law, and take gender and age into account.

It is especially urgent that the international community solves the protracted issue of ISIL members, especially associated women and children, stranded in deplorable conditions in camps in Syria and Iraq, lest our failure enables the group's resurgence.

The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre –or UNCCT–in my Office leads with UNICEF a Global Framework to coordinate the provision of support from 15 United Nations entities to requesting Member States regarding individuals returned from or remaining in Syria and Iraq.

These efforts are guided by the 'Key Principles for the Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women and Children with Links to United Nations-listed Terrorist Groups', issued by the Secretary-General in April 2019, which can serve as a helpful reference for Member States.

Third, we need to increase support for victims of terrorism.

Upholding the rights and addressing the needs of victims of terrorism is central to accountability, healing and prevention. It is a prerequisite for societies to heal and break free from terrorist violence.

I am worried that progress made in recent years could be eroded because of challenges related to the pandemic, which has caused additional hardships to victims.

With the review of the Strategy, the General Assembly can demonstrate continued leadership and build on its resolution 73/305, urging and enabling concrete actions to ensure that victims remain at the center of our efforts to prevent and counter terrorism.

This could include the establishment of a voluntarily funded programme to support States in providing durable assistance to victims.

In consultation with the Group of Friends of Victims of Terrorism, my Office is exploring to organize the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism in the last quarter of this year to make sure we can have inclusive— and hopefully in-person— participation of victims from around the world.

Fourth, building forward better for resilient societies is needed.

The pandemic has been a wake-up call on the need for whole-of-society efforts within and between countries to recover better together, and an opportunity for Member States to make a strategic investment in prevention and resilience.

Multidimensional efforts are needed so that women and men, girls and boys, do not turn to terrorism.

National strategies and programmes to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism need to be translated into coordinated and tailored action on the ground, working with communities and youth as partners.

More innovation is needed, such as the use of behavioral insights, sports or collaboration with the entertainment industry, as well as empirical evidence and evaluation, to improve our effectiveness.

And we must tackle head-on the rise in polarization and mistrust exacerbated by the pandemic and stoked and exploited by terrorists and violent extremists to radicalize and recruit.

Immunity to the virus of hate is built over time through free debates, dialogue and bridge-building, global citizenship education, and media and information literacy.

Fifth, we need to rise to the challenges and opportunities brought by new technologies.

There needs to be a steep change in how the international community mitigates the exploitation of rapidly developing new technologies by criminals for-hire and terrorists, including artificial intelligence, encryption, block-chain technology, synthetic biology, commercial 3-D printing and drones.

All these new technologies create new vulnerabilities, lower the barriers to prohibited weapons and offer new methods for conducting and delivering terrorist attacks.

Social media platforms have been facing intense scrutiny and criticism over the spread of terrorist content.

Engagement and partnership with industry, academia and civil society is essential to keep pace in the rapidly changing tech environment, closing regulatory loopholes and filling human and technological capability gaps exploited by criminals, while nurturing innovation.

Sixth, embedding human rights and gender equality in our approach is critical.

Efforts to combat terrorism must not compromise human rights under any circumstances.

Adequate safeguards should be put in place to prevent counter-terrorism measures from being applied arbitrarily, unnecessarily or disproportionately, which contributes to the shrinking of civic space.

The Secretary-General is calling for an urgent focus, with renewed political commitment and adequate resources, to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law in the implementation of all four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy – both online and offline.

Gender equality must be integral to these efforts to ensure that counter-terrorism efforts uphold women's rights and enable their meaningful participation, while avoiding their instrumentalization.

And seventh: It is vital that counter-terrorism measures do not prevent the effective delivery of humanitarian aid to populations in need, in full respect of international law.

Mr. President,

Dear Colleagues,

The report and update report of the Secretary-General outlines the support that the United Nations system has provided to Member States for the past three years, across the four pillars of the Strategy, always upon request.

The bulk of counter-terrorism assistance today is provided outside the United Nations framework, mostly bilaterally by Member States, which have the principal responsibility for implementing the Strategy.

Thanks to the reform of the United Nations counter-terrorism architecture and the establishment of my Office in June 2017, the United Nations system has made solid progress to better support Member States.

To complete the reform, the Secretary-General launched in December 2018 the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact – one of the largest cross-pillar coordination mechanisms in the United Nations system, bringing together 43 entities.

The Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Platform that my Office launched online at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic last year now connects focal points from 131 Member States.

I led a change management process to strengthen the internal organization of my Office, its project management capacity, and the profile of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre as a Centre of Excellence.

We consolidated our offer of capacity-building support around flagship programmes – like the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme – that consider the technical assessment recommendations from the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and leverage the mandate and expertise of our partners.

We have come a long way and we must now attain a sustainability model to put UN counter-terrorism efforts on a solid, durable footing.

I would like to elaborate on three points that you may want to consider in your deliberations, in addition to thematic priorities and the strategic outlook for the United Nations counter-terrorism efforts.

First, Member States may want to further facilitate joint planning and result-oriented, capacity-building coordination through the Counter-Terrorism Compact.

This could for instance be achieved through the development of voluntary national and/or regional implementation plans by Member States, in partnership with the United Nations, guided by the recommendations of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee based on CTED's assessments.

Such plans could facilitate prioritized and coordinated United Nations technical assistance, based upon national ownership and needs, with defined activities, outputs and outcomes that could be used to measure progress and impact.

In the same vein, Member States could support coordination initiatives and capacities in the field to strengthen the provision of support to requesting Member States.

For instance, based on requests from Member States, UNOCT is pursuing opportunities to shift programme and project positions to the field to be closer to its beneficiaries, strengthen coordination and coherence with partners and lead to more impactful and cost-efficient delivery.

We have already opened Programme Offices in Hungary and Qatar and look forward to opening new ones in the coming months in Morocco, Spain and Kenya. I am thankful to the respective countries for their support.

Second, I am encouraged by the wide support expressed by Member States to provide additional regular budget resources to my Office.

Since it was established, the Office has had only eight regular budget posts, including that of the Under-Secretary-General.

The Office depends for more than 96% of its budget on voluntary contributions, including for most of its core, senior management positions or to staff its mandated policy and coordination functions. This is not sustainable.

I take this opportunity to reiterate my sincere gratitude to our 33 donors, foremost among which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Qatar, and the European Union, for their indispensable support. I am extremely grateful for their partnership.

Member States could consider emphasizing the importance of increased and diversified voluntary contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism, managed by my Office, prioritizing support to multi-agency and multi-year projects and activities.

They could consider supporting dedicated funding windows, especially in support of pillar IV of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

We will be launching a second multi-year appeal through the Counter-Terrorism Compact in June, which will provide another concrete way Member States can resource key priorities and incentivize joint projects.

Third, stakeholder engagement. Member States may want to encourage stronger engagement of the United Nations system with the private sector and civil society.

The United Nations needs to engage the private sector in a more purposeful and concerted manner.

Staying ahead of the exploitation of social media, for instance, requires strategic partnerships with the private sector, such as with the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism.

Likewise, the United Nations system will greatly benefit from listening, encouraging and, as appropriate, supporting and partnering with civil society actors committed to the principles and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations.

My Office is fully committed to this, for which we have developed and are implementing a civil society engagement strategy.

In these efforts, it would be helpful to have the same authority other UN entities have to give grants in support of projects related to preventing or countering terrorism.

Such authority would simply allow us to use funds as donors wish, without any financial implication for the regular budget.

Mr. President,

Dear Colleagues,

This historic seventy-fifth anniversary of the Organization is a reminder of the strength of the United Nations: its universal normative mandate, its convening power, its global reach and its multidimensional expertise.

These advantages need to be fully harnessed in the fight against terrorism to promote and enable principled action by Member States, and stronger international, multi-stakeholder cooperation.

Multilateralism and international solidarity are essential to fighting terrorism.

I urge Member States to seize this seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy to maintain consensus and pursue practical dialogue and cooperation against terrorism.

The United Nations system is standing by you, and we look forward to the guidance of the General Assembly.

I thank you for your attention.

For more information on Seventh Review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, please visit: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>