



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

**Statement by Mr. Raffi Gregorian
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**International Association for Human Values:
“Strengthening Mental Health at the Core of Peacebuilding,
Development and Humanitarian work”**

7 April 2021

Thank you, Chair.

I am pleased to participate in this interesting panel discussion on mental health and psychosocial support in peacebuilding and development.

I know that some of you are asking yourselves, what has the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism got to do with today’s panel?

Well, a lot, actually.

Let me first talk about the current terrorist landscape, and then about some of our programmes that correspond to that landscape and that are relevant to the topic.

Last July, UNOCT held a week-long virtual conference to help Member States and civil society take stock of the effect the pandemic would have on terrorism and efforts to combat it.

It was apparent then and even clearer now that terrorist groups see the uncertainty created by the pandemic as a tactical advantage and a window of opportunity to advance their agendas.

They are exploiting the significant disruption and economic hardships caused by COVID-19 to spread fear, hate, and division, as well as radicalize and recruit new followers.

They have ramped up their propaganda efforts in cyberspace to target captive online audiences, especially youth, confined at home, many of them out of school or out of jobs.

With their ability to conduct attacks overseas stymied by pandemic-related travel restrictions, terrorists have continued to inspire others to attack at home. But they have also sought to take advantage of government forces re-deployed to address, or weakened by, the effects of the pandemic.

The result has been an upsurge in terrorist attacks in the Sahel and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, with ISIL and Al-Qaida regional affiliates there gaining autonomy, strength and ground.

The pandemic has also impeded efforts to repatriate tens of thousands of mostly women and children left over from ISIL's territorial last stand and who now remain stranded in camps in northeast Syria, their countries of nationality unable or unwilling to take them back.

Meanwhile, vital services for victims of terrorism, such as criminal justice processes and psychological support, have been badly affected, along with their access to their invaluable peer support, networks and ability to commemorate.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks not just the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, but also the 15th anniversary of the UN's four-pillar global strategy to counter terrorism. The strategy's first pillar is the effort to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. Activities under Pillar I constitute measures associated with preventing and countering violent extremism conducive to terrorism. PCVE, as it is known, occurs close to the nexus between development and security, which also relates to this conference's subject.

So with that in mind, let me highlight three important focus areas of UNOCT PCVE efforts.

First, upholding the rights and needs of victims of terrorism, including victims of sexual and gender-based violence and children affected by terrorism, is central to accountability, healing and prevention in order for societies to break free from terrorist violence.

Victims of terrorism often require longer-term multi-dimensional support to help them recover and cope with trauma, which for many victims has been re-triggered by the pandemic experience.

UNOCT's Global Victims of Terrorism Support Programme is providing technical assistance and capacity building to meet the needs and uphold the rights of victims of terrorism by requesting Member States.

UNOCT has also moved many of its activities online and connected victims and victims' associations together to build their resilience in the face of the global crisis.

This year will be a landmark year to strengthen our support for victims of terrorism and their families, particularly with the holding of the first UN Global Victims Congress and the annual International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism in August.

Second, repatriating, prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating foreign terrorist fighters and affiliated individuals stranded in the conflict zone, especially women and children.

More than two years after the territorial defeat of ISIL, some 27,500 foreign children are still in harm's way in the camps in northeast Syria, including about 8,000 children from some 60 countries other than Iraq. 90 per cent of them are under 12 years of age.

In response, we have developed a Global Framework of 15 UN entities to support requesting Member States with regard to individuals returned from Iraq and Syria, including protection of and psychosocial support for the children among them, but also measures that help States rehabilitate and reintegrate those associated with UN-designated terrorist groups. The Global Framework also helps States organize to hold accountable those persons who committed grievous offenses.

Third, our International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter-Terrorism, recently established in Doha, will address risk and resilience factors and develop behaviourally informed interventions that effectively prevent and counter violent extremism.

This will add a crucial new dimension to our understanding of why and how people become radicalized to violence and where we can intervene most effectively to halt the radicalization process.

Strengthened mental health and psychosocial support at the individual and community levels can prevent radicalization by addressing some of the cognitive vulnerabilities that violent extremists exploit. Creative use of behavioural insight methodologies can provide solutions to address these challenges.

Lastly, our UN Counter-Terrorism Centre has also developed a new Global PCVE Programme to streamline our offer of support, in partnership with UNDP and other UN entities, under nine mutually reinforcing portfolios, including education, human rights, youth, and strategic communications.

This programme will ensure that we mainstream gender, conflict-sensitivity, monitoring and evaluation and the do-no-harm principle in our PCVE work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In today's isolated work and pandemic stress environment, mental health and psychosocial support are crucial for building resilient communities. UNOCT and the 43 entities that make up the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Compact are fully committed to supporting Members States and our civil society partners in addressing all these challenges.

We look forward to continue working with all of you to pursue new projects and innovative ideas that will take us one step closer to a future without terrorism.

Thank you Chair.