



Second United Nations
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ON COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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Second High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States

OPENING REMARKS

Session III: Upholding human rights and promoting gender responsiveness while countering terrorism in the age of transformative technologies

Tuesday, 29 June, 10:00 a.m.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues, good morning and welcome to all of here in the General Assembly Hall or participating online.

It is my distinct pleasure to be up here chairing this third session of the Second United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States on “Upholding human rights and promoting gender responsiveness while countering terrorism in the age of transformative technologies”.

We live in a world in which we can cross parts of the globe in just a matter of hours, communicate via real time video calls with people all over the world, transfer funds almost instantly, and have access to unprecedented amounts of information. New technologies such as artificial intelligence, 3D printing, synthetic biology, blockchain, unmanned aircraft systems, and the 5G-powered Internet of things promise to improve the quality of life in a variety of ways. Indeed, these sorts of technological advances have even allowed us to develop and deliver highly effective vaccines against a new virus – COVID-19 – at groundbreaking speed.

All of these exciting innovations can, and should, be means by which the human condition and human rights, including the promise of gender equality enshrined in the preamble of the UN Charter, are promoted and upheld.

2021 COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK

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Unfortunately, as we heard in yesterday's sessions, terrorists—who are the most heinous abusers of human rights—are seeking to use, or already are using, these same technologies to recruit, finance, communicate, plan, prepare, and even conduct attacks. How to prevent them from doing so is the subject of various side events and other conference sessions.

In this session, however, we will explore the challenges Member States face in protecting human rights while preventing and countering terrorism, including through the responsible use of new technologies.

For example, we are increasingly seeing artificial intelligence used in surveillance, screening and targeting systems, in combination with the use of biometric identifiers.

Yet the datasets informing many of these applications are flawed because they contain racial and gender biases which could lead to prohibited profiling and mis-identification on a systematic scale.

Such practices can exacerbate discrimination, often against already disadvantaged and marginalized groups, compounding the violations and abuses of their civil and political rights, while also alienating them from their own governments in a way that terrorists can exploit.

That is why as Secretary-General Guterres stated yesterday that “Protecting and promoting human rights, including gender equality, is not an operational or strategic impediment. It is a requirement for successful counter-terrorism. We know that when counter-terrorism is used to infringe upon the rights and freedoms of people, the result is more alienation within communities and stronger terrorist narratives. We must address this by ensuring that security approaches are non-discriminatory and abide by the rule of law.”

All this is why the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism mainstreams human rights and a gender perspective, including through a gender marker system, in all our projects and programmes.

As one example, take our multi-agency Counter-Terrorism Travel Programme, which helps Member States comply with Security Council resolution 2396 by adopting and using advance passenger information and passenger name record data systems to screen for known and suspected terrorists against INTERPOL and other databases. The programme helps beneficiary countries draft laws and regulations with robust data privacy protections. It also works to meaningfully mainstream gender by including women in the national passenger information units – often male-dominated arenas – to overcome the gender bias that can occur when only men write and use the search algorithms to look only for men and possibly missing half the picture.

I hope this session will provide other examples or suggest other ways in which we can uphold human rights and promote gender responsiveness while countering terrorism in the age of transformative technologies.

I now open the floor for remarks from the panellists, after which I will turn the list of inscribed speakers.

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Remarks from speakers

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It is now my pleasure to give the floor to our first distinguished speaker, Her Excellency Ms. Cristina Gallach, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and for Ibero-America and the Caribbean, Kingdom of Spain. Madam, you have the floor.

[Ms. Gallach delivers remarks, 6 min.]

I thank Secretary of State Gallach for her presentation and now invite Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Madam, the floor is yours.

[Ms. Bachelet delivers remarks, 6 min.]

I thank High Commissioner Bachelet for her remarks. I am pleased to now give the floor to Ms. Åsa Regnér, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women for her remarks. Dear Åsa, you have the floor.

[Ms. Regnér delivers remarks, 6 min.]

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Regnér for her statement. I would like to now invite Ms. Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education with UNESCO, to provide her remarks. Madam, you have the floor.

[Ms. Giannini delivers remarks, 6 min.]

I thank Assistant Director-General Giannini for her remarks. We will now hear from Ms. Miranda Sissons, Human Rights Chief at Facebook. Madam, you have the floor.

[Ms. Sissons delivers remarks, 6 min.]

I thank Ms. Sissons for her remarks. I now give the floor to Mr. Nicholas Rasmussen, Executive Director of the Global Internet Forum to Counter-Terrorism – GIFTC. Sir, you have the floor.

[Mr. Ramussen delivers remarks, 6 min.]

I thank Mr. Ramussen for his statement. It is my pleasure to now invite Ms. Yasmine Ahmed, Director of the United Kingdom Office of Human Rights Watch. Madam, the floor is yours.

[Ms. Ahmed delivers remarks, 6 min.]

I thank Ms. Ahmed for her statement. We will now turn to our last panellist, Professor Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. Dear Fionnuala, you have the floor.

[Ms. Ní Aoláin delivers remarks, 6 min.]

I thank Professor Ní Aoláin for her remarks. This concludes the first part of our session. Let me once again thank all panellists for their insightful contributions.

We will now turn to observations and questions from the floor according to the speakers' list established by the Secretariat. May I kindly remind all speakers to be short and concise and keep their remarks to under three minutes so as to allow all who wish to speak, including those carrying forward their interventions from Session I.

I thank you for your cooperation.