



Second United Nations
**HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE
ON COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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**Second United Nations High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of
Member States**

**Session IV, Breakout session C: Protecting, repatriating, rehabilitating and reintegrating
women and children with links to United Nations listed terrorist groups**

29 June 2021, 15:00 – 16:30 PM

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this important and crucial discussion on “Protecting, repatriating, rehabilitating and reintegrating women and children with links to United Nations listed terrorist groups”.

In 2017, while still with the U.S. State Department, I was intimately involved in conceiving, drafting and negotiating Security Council resolution 2396. At that time the territorial defeat of ISIL was just starting to come into focus, and with it, a presumed outflow of foreign terrorist fighters seeking to relocate to their home or other countries, intent on carrying on the fight, joining up with adherents whose travel plans had been thwarted. The main concerns were on how to detect and intercept FTFs, prepare ourselves for attacks against soft targets, and rehabilitate and reintegrate FTFs after they had served their sentences.

We never thought we would be faced with a problem of tens of thousands of children and women affiliated with ISIL and its FTF cadre. No one thought that repatriating FTFs or their accompanying family members would be an issue.

2021 COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK

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Yet in the two years since ISIL's territorial defeat, its captured fighters and stranded families in northeast Syria and Iraq have posed significant challenges.

More tragically, the international community has made hardly any progress in addressing the situation of the thousands women and children suspected of having links with ISIL and held in precarious conditions in camps in the region.

The already dire humanitarian conditions in these camps continue to deteriorate, especially in Al-Hol camp. Poor sanitation, lack of basic services and overcrowding have resulted in a surge in COVID-19 cases in camps Syria.

On top of this, there are serious security concerns regarding the protection and safety of camp workers and residents seeking to break loose from ISIL. We have seen an escalation of violence in Al-Hol camp this year, including assaults and targeted killings.

These conditions can provide fertile ground for violent indoctrination, militant infiltration and terrorist recruitment in the camps. In fact, we have seen a rise in violent extremist activity within Al-Hol camp, which risks incubating new terrorist attacks in the mid- to long-term.

Dear Colleagues,

The risks to international peace and security grows every minute as this situation remains unaddressed.

While a number of Member States have led by example and worked to repatriate their nationals from Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, others consider the near-term obstacles to doing so greater than the long-term threat posed by inaction. Restrictions put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 certainly have not helped in that regard.

The Security Council Arrria Formula meeting, convened at the initiative of the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan in January, discussed how these challenges can be addressed, including through international and regional cooperation, as have a number of side events held last week and on the margins of last September's opening of the General Assembly. I look forward to hearing about the experiences of those countries from Ambassador Kuznetsova and Ambassador Ilyassov today. SRSG Gherman will also be sharing her insights on this issue with us.

I hope that these national experiences, complemented by UNICEF and ICRC perspectives, will help inform and inspire Member States to tackle the wide array of challenges in the various stages of repatriating, prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating.

I am encouraged by the increasing numbers of European children being repatriated from Al-Hol camp, who can now benefit from reintegration services in their home countries. But we need to move from “retail” operations of handfuls to “wholesale” operations of scores or hundreds. We must get the children, who have languished in these camps in dire conditions without education and under the constant threat of trauma for more than two years, out of harm’s way. Simply, condemning them to their fate is unconscionable.

The recent negotiations of the 7th biennial review resolution of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy showed a lot of progress on the issue, but also reflected the difficulties Member States are facing to find common ground. We should continue our common efforts to make more progress on some critical aspects of this issue.

Excellencies,

UNOCT has prioritized the plight of these women and children who remain in Syria and Iraq. Last August, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in my Office launched a new Global Framework to coordinate with UNICEF the provision of support from 15 United Nations entities to requesting Member States with regard to individuals returned from or remaining in northeast Syria and Iraq.

Under the Global Framework, we stand ready to provide, upon request, “all-of-UN” assistance along two distinct yet complementary pillars:

- A recovery and development pillar, coordinated by UNICEF, which responds to the humanitarian and protection needs of returning children and adults; and
- A security and accountability pillar, coordinated by UNOCT, which promotes security and addresses accountability in the repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration process for returning adults. This pillar builds Member State capacity to conduct investigations and prosecutions, using age- and gender-sensitive, human rights-centered methods.

The Global Framework will be officially launched during an event on the margins of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in September. Meanwhile Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are already receiving assistance under this “all-of-UN” mechanism. I am pleased that Ambassador Yasseen is joining us today to share insights from Iraq.

The side event organized by UNOCT, the US, Kazakhstan, and OHCHR last week showcased the Global Framework’s comprehensive UN support available to Member States, which is adaptable to any country of return that has repatriated or is willing to repatriate its nationals from Syria and Iraq.

The repatriation of third country nationals is a key responsibility of Member States. I implore countries not to abandon their nationals in these camps. Leaving them where they are comes with a much greater long-term security risk on top of a right-now human rights nightmare.

I look forward to hearing your views in a fruitful discussion this afternoon.

Thank you.