UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM
UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT)

UNICRI
United Nations
Interregional Crime and Justice
Research Institute
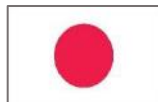
CTED
UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTORATE

UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Press release

Side Event on Counter-Terrorism in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Risks, Opportunities and Safeguarding Human Rights

New York, 29 June 2021 – The *Counter-Terrorism in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Risks, Opportunities and Safeguarding Human Rights* side event was held today as part of the Second Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations. The event was co-organized by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) in collaboration with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and with the support of the Permanent Mission of Japan and the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

The event presented an array of UN research initiatives in the area of artificial intelligence (AI) and counter-terrorism and formally launched two reports developed by UNOCT/UNCCT and UNICRI, entitled "*Algorithms and Terrorism: The Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence for Terrorist Purposes*", and *"Leveraging Artificial Intelligence to Combat the Terrorist Use of the Internet and Social Media – A Focus on South and South East Asia"*. It also provided updates on preliminary findings of research led by OHCHR together with UNOCT/UNCCT and UNICRI on the *"Human Rights Perspectives to the Use of AI in Counter-Terrorism"*.

The virtual event was attended by representatives from Member States, international and regional organizations, the private sector, academia, civil society organizations and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities. It featured discussions on some of the nuances of the risk-benefit duality of AI from a counter-terrorism perspective. The discussion was contextualized in light of the European Commission's legislative initiative on Laying Down Harmonized Rules on Artificial Intelligence – the first proposed legal framework on AI.

During the welcoming remarks, Under-Secretary-General Mr. Vladimir Voronkov highlighted that *"Terrorists have been early adopters of emerging technologies, which tend to be under-regulated and under-governed. Lack of adequate policies, regulations and governance hinder Member States' abilities to effectively use predictive artificial intelligence capabilities in a manner that also safeguards human rights, such as the right to privacy, and the right of freedom of opinion. However, if harnessed responsibly, predictive artificial intelligence to counter terrorism might minimize the need for more invasive monitoring of citizens that lead to human rights concerns."*

Ms. Antonia Marie De Meo, Director of UNICRI stressed that *"Artificial intelligence has now entered the mainstream and impacts us all, regardless of our direct personal involvement with science or*

technology. It is a highly technical domain, filled with legal, ethical, societal, and scientific challenges that we will grapple with for many years to come. The solutions may not come easily, but we must find them together."

Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights *"AI has shown enormous benefits in vaccine development, for disaster recovery and humanitarian assistance, and it holds potential for climate change and counter-terrorism. Yet, with great power comes great responsibility. This power must be harnessed to protect against the harmful impacts on rights and freedoms that may result from overreaching, or inadvertently. The UN's joint initiatives on artificial intelligence, counter-terrorism, and human rights can provide critical guidance on how to do this"*

Ms. Michele Coninsx, Executive Director of CTED *"It is imperative that all stakeholders using these tools be subject to independent oversight mechanisms in order to ensure fairness, transparency and accountability."*

Mr. Tamaura Shu, Counsellor/Political Coordinator at the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations stated that *"[…]to ensure that the international community stays ahead of risks associated with AI, it is critical to deepen and broaden understanding on the potential role of AI in the Counter-Terrorism context. This awareness has led Japan to support a capacity-building project under the UNOCT's Global Counter-Terrorism Programme on Cybersecurity and New Technologies".*

Mr. Olivier Onidi, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs and Counter-Terrorism Coordinator of the European Commission provided *"The recently adopted [EU] AI legislative proposal is a most important step to create trust in the technology by setting strict rules for high-risk AI tools, which are to be respected throughout the life-cycle of the product and not only at the time of development."*

The event helped enhance the knowledge and understanding of Member States, relevant regional and international organizations and the AI industry to identify potential abuse of AI for terrorist purposes, as well as to lay foundations for counter-terrorism agencies, law enforcement and other security forces to explore innovative and practical human rights-compliant AI-based tools to augment existing investigative capacities, to identify, investigate and remove terrorist related content online, and to support building cases for prosecution.

This initiative is part of UNCCT's Global Counter-Terrorism Programme on Cybersecurity and New Technologies, which seeks to support Member States, international and regional organizations and UN entities to raise awareness of the cyber terrorism threats and to enhance technical capacities required to prevent, mitigate and counter the misuse of new technologies, including the Internet and AI, by terrorists and violent extremist groups to perpetrate attacks against critical infrastructure.

This joint UNCCT/UNOCT and UNICRI research initiative is funded with generous contributions from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Japan.

****
For more information:
- Ms. Laurence Gerard (gerardl@un.org), Public Information Officer, UNOCT

www.un.org/counterterrorism/CTweek-sidevents
@UN_OCT | #CTWeek | #UNiteToCounterTerrorism