

TALKING POINTS - Side event on launching the 2021-2022 Multi-Year Appeal for Counter-Terrorism

Counter Terrorism Week 2021

29th June 8.00 – 9.30 am (NY ETD) (Bangladesh time 6.00 – 7.30 pm)

CO-ORGANIZERS: UNOCT, CTED AND UNODC

About the event:

This virtual side event is to launch the 2021-2022 United Nations Multi-Year Appeal for Counter-Terrorism, which seeks funding for more than 50 global, regional, and national projects from over 10 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities across the four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Opening/closing remarks by:

- Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, UNOCT
- Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UNODC
- Ms. Michèle Coninx, Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director, CTED

Background:

The Multi-Year Appeal is a resource mobilisation tool. It consolidates projects and programmes by UN entities into a single compendium that is available to all Member States including interested donors, as well as beneficiary countries. It serves as a mechanism to reduce competition amongst UN entities for the same scarce donor resources. A Multi-Year Appeal is not a funding instrument, where UN entities apply for funding grants. As the name implies, it is an appeal to Member States for resources to fund the projects and programmes that UN entities have developed to support the capacities of Member States to implement the four pillars of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

In response to the UNOCT multi-year-appeal, the UN Country Team in Bangladesh working on P/CVE has submitted a concept note. The implementing agencies are UNDP, UN Women, UNOCT, UNODC, IOM and UNRCO. Most of the initiatives will be driven by UNDP, supported by and in collaboration with other UN partners.

Talking points (max 6 minutes):

Introduction:

My greetings to all of you, wherever you are. First, let me take this opportunity to thank all the UN colleagues for including the ONE UN initiative from Bangladesh in the multi-year appeal for counter-terrorism.

It's my privilege to be here today to present to you the Bangladesh submission called the "One UN comprehensive technical support to address online and offline challenges of and vulnerabilities to Violent Extremism in Bangladesh". It is an initiative that reflects the collective and collaborative effort, harnessing the comparative advantages of UN agencies working in Bangladesh.

Challenges:

Since its Liberation war in 1971, Bangladesh has remained largely peaceful with an admirable growth trajectory.

However, many of you may recall the deadliest terrorist attack in Bangladesh's history that took place in July 2016 when local extremists attacked the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka, killing 22 civilians and 2 police officers.

Since then, Bangladesh has had considerable success in tackling violent extremism. Yet, small attacks have taken place, which shows a less intense but still prevailing threat of violent extremism in Bangladesh.

So the question remains - what are the challenges and what have we seen? At present, we have witnessed two major concerns which I will highlight.

Firstly, the increased risks of online radicalization.

- The internet penetration in Bangladesh is rapidly increasing. A decade ago, Internet penetration in the country was less than one percent. By the end of 2020, an estimated 70 percent of the country's 165 million people were online.
- Violent Extremist actors are increasingly using social media as a tool to propagate extreme narratives. Research in 2020 has shown that in one year the number of subscriptions in Bangladesh to Violent Extremist channels doubled from 2.1 Million to 4.4 million.
- Bangladesh police have revealed that in recent years, "82% of the people arrested for being involved in extremist activities were radicalized through various forms of social media, most of them were university educated."

Secondly, the increased religious intolerance.

- The concern on this increased intolerance lies mainly as it is creating a conducive environment for hate speech and culminating in violent incidents including violence against women and minorities.
- It is undermining democracy and secularism and is setting back achievements Bangladesh has made in women empowerment. The impunity for violence that comes with the intolerance, can on the longer term pave the way for increased radicalization and violent extremism in Bangladesh.
- Social media also plays an important role feeding this intolerance. The extremist groups are waging a battle online against policies intended to empower women, including long-standing prohibitions in secular Bangladesh against polygamy, child marriage, and slavery.

The COVID 19 Pandemic:

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to a new landscape for violent extremists to exploit. Due to the lock-down internet penetration in Bangladesh has accelerated. Violent extremists have taken the opportunity and have increased their online propaganda.

The UN Response:

With the challenges illustrated above, the UN since 2017, have supported the Government, Civil society organizations, youth and women in preventing and countering of violent extremism in Bangladesh through various projects, research and capacity building efforts.

However, a major constraint for success is the lack of an overarching coordination mechanism at the Government level to address issues around preventing and countering violent extremism.

About ONE UN PCVE Programme:

Now let me highlight some of the key elements of the joint UN intervention.

It brings all the ongoing PCVE work by the UN agencies in Bangladesh under one programmatic framework.

This Programme is in line with all the four pillars of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy. The initiative will be supported by five UN agencies which are UNDP, UN Women, UNOCT, UNODC and IOM. The different UN agencies will bring their specific expertise and mandates.

The overall approach is threefold.

- First, research to better understand the complex spectrum ranging from radicalisation, disinformation to hate speech and how it may be conducive to violent extremism.
- Second, use this knowledge to identify vulnerable groups and empower them, and develop alternative messages of inclusivity and tolerance.
- Third, it is vital to use existing and new coordination mechanisms and to find new ways to bring all researchers, activists and government officials together to form a broader alliance to formulate policies and promote greater equality, inclusivity, and tolerance in Bangladesh.

The existing partnerships with state and non-state actors will be continued under this common programmatic framework to ensure a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach with increased opportunities to improve PCVE coordination between all actors.

The inclusivity will enable the project in adopting human rights-based and gender-focused approaches to programming.

The Project will be administered by UNDP and coordinated through the Resident Coordinator's Office in Dhaka. A project advisory board, consisting of government and CSO representatives, donor partners and UN agencies, will review progress and provide strategic directions.

Resource Mobilization Challenge:

Countering and preventing violent extremism requires long-term and sustained efforts. Unfortunately, we do observe that while there is a lot of interest just after an incident, like the Holey bakery attack in Bangladesh, the urgency and focus is waning.

With the COVID 19 crisis and many competing needs for funding, the effort to mobilize resources remains a daunting challenge than ever before. At the same time, we can also observe that with limited availability of funding, we are forced to rethink our approaches and find new ways of working.

This is exactly what has happened in Bangladesh. UN agencies who are organized through the UNRCO-led PVE Working Group, have taken the initiative to bring the existing coordination to a new level and join forces by bringing their ongoing and planned work under one programmatic framework.

The proposal submitted by UNDP, is the result of coordinated, collaborative work and consultations with all UN agencies involved. Instead of competing for resources, we as the UN will jointly approach donors for funding.

Closing remarks:

Let me reiterate - The joint intervention will not just enhance the effectiveness of UN's work but will also provide opportunities to improve overall PCVE coordination with the Government by bringing together the different Government partners of the UN agencies.

We remain hopeful and expect that this improved way of working, and the joint approach to resource mobilization, will enhance the UN support as well as bring success in countering and preventing violent extremism in Bangladesh.

And it can serve as a model to replicate in other countries and parts of the world.

Thank you!