



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

28-30 JUNE 2021

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS • NEW YORK

**Statement by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office
of Counter-Terrorism**

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

**Closing Session
30 June 2021, 11.40 a.m.**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are concluding today the Second Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations, including a rich and productive High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States.

The Conference featured 13 interactive sessions. I am grateful to our 85 session chairs and panellists, as well as to the co-organizers of 36 side events.

I am impressed by this number. This is because of the activities of Member States. This is because of the activities of UN entities. We had a big number of and very important side events. Despite the technical glitches that happened from time to time, I think it was a successful story. I think the majority of you participated in many side events, and it was really very interesting and very constructive exchange of views on the counter-terrorism agenda. Speaking about side events, almost 5,000 participants attended these side events. 5,000 participants. So I think it is a very good number.

I would like to use this opportunity to say words of gratitude to United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism team and our colleagues from the United Nations Global Compact entities for enormous efforts to organize successfully the Second Counter-Terrorism Week in the United Nations.

2021 COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK

www.un.org/counterterrorism/HLC2021
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Speaking about the High-Level Conference - Almost 1,000 participants representing 147 Member States, 28 international and regional organizations, 38 United Nations entities, 88 civil society and private sector organizations attended the High-Level Conference. 1,000 participants.

My special words of gratitude to the Secretary-General for convening this Conference under his auspices, to our eminent speakers and donors, especially the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Qatar.

The idea of this biennial Conference emanated from the Secretary-General's vision to promote a networked global counter-terrorism response, supported by regional conferences.

Our deliberations over the last few days have advanced this goal. We have developed a better understanding of the impact of new technologies on both the conditions conducive to terrorism and our counter-terrorism efforts, including resulting challenges and opportunities.

At the same time, we also recognized that terrorists continue to mainly execute low-tech attacks, and we need to address traditional tactics, while preparing for threats of tomorrow.

In September, my Office will provide a detailed report summarizing the discussions and outcomes of the Conference.

For now, let me highlight some important initial conclusions and recommendations that emerged over the course of the Counter-Terrorism Week.

Dear Colleagues,

It is clear that despite the significant progress we have made in our fight against terrorism, the threat has diversified, and many countries have faced an increase in terrorist activity that gained momentum during the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Globally, the threat continues to stem mainly from ISIL, Al-Qaida and their affiliates seeking to stage a comeback in Iraq and Syria, to undermine the prospects for peace in Afghanistan, expand and entrench themselves in parts of Africa, and inspire lone actors worldwide.

Participants mentioned four strategic challenges for international counter-terrorism efforts:

First, how to urgently deal with the complex legacies from ISIL's crimes in Iraq and Syria – and bring foreign terrorist fighters to justice to break the cycle of violence, as well as address the situation of tens of thousands of children and other individuals stranded in camps, in dire need of protection and repatriation.

Second, how to urgently address the increasing terrorist threat in some parts of Africa, where the security situation is rapidly deteriorating in a complex interplay of conflict, development challenges, and human rights abuses, fuelling grievances and instability.

Third, how to take concerted action to tackle the growing, transnational terrorist threat from small groups and lone actors motivated by xenophobia, racism, misogyny and other forms of intolerance, which has been boosted by the surge in online hate, conspiracy theories, and anti-government sentiment during the pandemic.

And fourth, how to upgrade our technological awareness, capabilities, and preparedness to counter terrorism.

Dear Colleagues,

Throughout the Conference, we looked at the impact of new and emerging technologies on counter-terrorism, from harnessing their enormous potential to mitigating their unintended risks.

As technologies transform societies - quickly and unevenly - inter-generational, gender, geographic and socio-economic divides can be exacerbated and exploited by terrorists.

Our deliberations these past three days have made clear that partnerships that leverage unique entry-points, capabilities and insights from Member States, civil society and the private sector are essential to understand and address this phenomenon.

We also need inclusive, forward-looking, evidence-based approaches to build resilience. I am committed to advance behavioural insights, in close partnership with other UN entities, through the International Hub in Doha.

Countering the spread of terrorist content online remains high on the agenda. Hate speech has become pervasive and self-reinforcing through algorithms and online echo chambers, including in video gaming platforms, on which my Office will spearhead a new initiative.

Other challenges identified during the Conference included:

- First, the vulnerabilities to cyber-attacks and linkages to cybercrime, which spiked during COVID-19;
- Second, the more complex money trail to terrorism, including through blockchain and crowdfunding;
- Third, terrorists use of Artificial Intelligence, 3D printing, and unmanned aerial systems, which exposes the greater need to strengthen the protection of vulnerable targets.

At the same time, I was encouraged to hear about the tremendous potential of new technologies to enhance monitoring, preparedness, law enforcement and criminal justice capabilities in the discussions.

'Big Data' technologies have brought about seismic changes in collecting, analysing, utilizing, and sharing operational information to identify terrorism-related threats, including through effective screening against databases and watchlists.

Biometrics and digital forensics can help tighten the net to catch and prosecute suspected terrorists – although much more is needed to build national capacities to responsibly collect, preserve and use digital evidence before the courts.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

We discussed in multiple sessions the centrality of upholding the rule of law and human rights for the success of our counter-terrorism efforts.

We must preserve and defend these fundamental values and operating principles while we work together to prevent terrorists' efforts to destabilize our governments and societies.

Participants encouraged specific analysis and exchange of experience from a human rights, age and gender perspective to insert systematic safeguards in counter-terrorism.

As part of these efforts, my Office will finalize the organizational arrangements of gender and human rights policies needed to further mainstream these issues into all our programming.

I am grateful for the expressions of support to the leadership, capacity-building and advocacy work of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and its United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year.

During the pandemic, we were able to upgrade our capacity-building systems and extend our reach through innovative, virtual solutions, which will remain part of our toolbox to supplement in-person interactions.

My Office will also continue to enhance monitoring and evaluation, enshrining a results-based focus, including through the use of innovative technologies.

At the same time, we should continue our efforts to deliver tailored capacity-building assistance closer to recipients in a cost-effective manner to sustain impact, including through the United Nations' field-based programme offices. The programme offices we have established will be instrumental in this regard.

Dear Colleagues,

There were sobering reminders throughout the Conference that new technologies are adding a layer of complexity, just as many Member States continue to face severe capacity challenges in terms of baseline counter-terrorism requirements.

The international community cannot afford to leave any country behind: solidarity is in our common interest. It is clear that a terrorist safe haven anywhere is a threat everywhere.

During this week, participants have urged sustained political and financial commitment to strengthen social resilience and institutional capacities of countries most affected by terrorism.

My Office will step up its support for Africa, including through our new counter-terrorism training hub in Rabat, regional capacity-building office in Nairobi, and assistance to Member States in setting up inter-agency coordination mechanisms for counter-terrorism.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we come to the end of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly and mark the fifteenth anniversary of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, we should take comfort that this Counter-Terrorism Week has reinvigorated support for multilateralism in response to the complex challenges associated with terrorism, in a world shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This afternoon, the General Assembly will hold the formal review of the Strategy, and we hope that Member States adopt a substantive, forward-looking, and most importantly, consensus-based resolution to guide our counter-terrorism efforts over the next two years.

Some of the outcomes agreed *ad referendum* in the draft resolution will be path-breaking, such as:

- Countering the use of new technologies for terrorist purposes, including cooperative measures against the online spread of terrorist content;
- Tackling the rise in attacks based on xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance;
- Addressing terrorist radicalization in prison and fostering rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorism offenders;
- Repatriating, reintegrating and rehabilitating children with links to foreign terrorist fighters;
- Strengthening attention to the rule of law and human rights, including gender equality and the rights of the child, as well as humanitarian action in Member States' efforts and United Nations capacity-building support;
- Considering what the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism will need in order to carry out its core functions;
- And assessing whether the United Nations counter-terrorism architecture needs an internal advisory monitoring and evaluation capacity on human rights, as well as what possible methodologies and tools for a comprehensive results framework could benefit the United Nations' support of the implementation of the Strategy by Member States.

I would like to express my special thanks and gratitude to the two co-facilitators of the review process, Ambassador Al-Hassan of Oman and Ambassador Santos of Spain, and Member States for their preliminary agreement on such a valuable draft resolution. It is really a very significant step forward in the counter-terrorism agenda.

Dear Participants,

I am profoundly grateful to you for your support to and engagement with the United Nations' counter-terrorism work.

Our shared interest in countering and preventing terrorism anywhere and our solidarity with the victims unites us.

We at the United Nations stand ready to provide leadership and to support you. I will be looking forward to seeing many of you at the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism, which we still hope to hold in-person in December, and to meeting you again in June 2023 for the Third Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations.

I thank you.