



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**

‘A Perfect Storm: White Supremacists, Conspiracy Theorists and Violent Extremism’

**30 June 2021
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.**

Ladies and gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

Let me first thank the Soufan Centre and the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States for organizing this side event on white supremacy, conspiracy theorists and violent extremism.

As we heard throughout this second CT week, the terrorist threat from neo-Nazi and other ethnically or racially motivated movements is on the rise.

It has become the number one national security threat for many countries in Europe, North America and Oceania, and evidence of its transnational dimensions is increasing.

The Secretary-General had alerted Member States to this threat in April 2018 and again in February 2020, just before the onset of COVID-19 crisis, which has only magnified the phenomenon further.

And in February this year, the Secretary-General called for global, coordinated action to tackle it.

Among UN partners, we have held several rounds of discussions on this topic, including in the Secretary-General’s High-level Action Group on Preventing Violent Extremism.

The aim has been to improve our own understanding of the phenomenon; the legal, human rights and gender aspects; and the need to encourage Member States to follow a principled, consistent, and multi-dimensional response.

As food-for-thought for today, I would like to highlight three challenges in moving forward:

First, terminology:

We all know what we are talking about when discussing these groups, but how to refer to them has been very contentious, owing to different legal, political and cultural realities and sensitivities.

This makes the recent consensus review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy all the more practically important, since it now provides a reference point:

The General Assembly called on Member States to take appropriate measures to address the new and emerging threats posed by the rise in terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief, including through investigation, information exchange and cooperation.

Second, legal clarity and consistency:

It is incumbent on each Member State to define terrorism and acts of terrorism in line with international law, including human rights – and not to conflate terrorism, violent extremism, hate crimes, and hate speech – which could result in an over-extensive application of the counter-terrorism framework.

At the same time, each State must also apply its national definitions consistently in similar situations, irrespective of the background and perceived motivations of the individuals involved, lest it creates impressions of double standards.

Still, the lack of international definition and designations of specific groups will continue to make the removal of online content related to this form of terrorism difficult across jurisdictions.

And third, dedicated focus and tailored approach:

Although we have an extensive CT/PCVE toolbox to draw from, experience has also taught us that effectiveness lies in cooperation and tailored implementation.

For this we need to develop a better, common understanding of the phenomenon, which is decentralized and ideologically fragmented yet also networked and mutually reinforcing.

And events such as today's are key to bringing about convergence, collaboration and joint action. This is especially important to being able to uncover and address transnational dimensions.

Dear Colleagues,

The General Assembly has mandated the Secretary-General to produce a report before September next year, in consultation with Member States, on the motivations, objectives, organization and the threat posed by such groups, and effective counter narratives, capacities, and strategies in this regard. This will be another important step forward.

To conclude I want to highlight UNOCT's Global Programme on PCVE as a good example of how UN entities are already leveraging their existing work to address this threat.

For example, the Programme has provided training for journalists and social media activists in South Asia on how to detect misinformation.

It has also supported young leaders to design their own policy solutions against the rise of white supremacist narratives in schools in Sweden and Australia.

And we now seek to spearhead research and collaboration on countering the use of online gaming platforms by neo-Nazi, white supremacist and other such violent groups.

More can be done, more should be done, and we look forward to working with interested Member States, partners and donors to tackle the threat posed by those adhering to violence to achieve their hateful aims.

I look forward to the outcome of today's discussion, and to our continued cooperation.

Thank you.