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SESSION III: Upholding human rights and promoting gender responsiveness while countering terrorism in the age of transformative technologies

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There is a need to address human rights and specifically women's rights dimensions of new technologies and counterterrorism.

New technologies have the potential to make counter-terrorism efforts more targeted and efficient. However technological advancements have profound implications for human rights.

Bridging the human rights guidance gap concerning the use of new technologies is essential to ensure compliance with existing State human rights obligations, particularly when the Security Council has called on Member States to use these tools to address terrorism challenges, such as using biometric data for screening, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration strategies for foreign fighters.

Gender dimensions are too often overlooked in policy discussions on new technologies: New technologies are usually considered as gender-neutral. However, gender norms shape new technologies. Strategies to reduce risks are usually based on gendered assumptions. This is the case of cyber security that often imports concepts from military security, notably about the threats that are prioritized – threats to state and physical harms to infrastructure. Cyber-security should focus on the security of people and the different security issues women and men face.

Online activities of Violent Extremist Organizations have important gender dimensions. A key element that is often unreported is recruitment propaganda targets women, and even the role of women in recruitment itself. Women may find more opportunities to play an active role in terrorist organisations through online activities, because there are fewer restrictions on their ability to access this space than in the rest of society. A gender lens is needed to respond effectively to these dynamics.

So far, the UN counterterrorism architecture has not identified nor addressed the human rights and gender dimensions of "technology" solutions. There is need for gender- and human rights-based analysis in this matter, including in relation to the obligations imposed by the Security Council. Likewise, there is a need to monitor the use of these technologies to identify and overcome any gendered harm. Civil society, academia and industry must be brought in to this analysis.

In Asia, UN Women has trained young women and men leaders, notably from marginalized groups, to strengthen their digital literacy and online advocacy capacities to produce and disseminate alternative narratives to hate speech through social media. UN Women also worked with various partners to produce a series of comedic videos to challenge the gendered narratives used by violent extremist groups in the region to radicalize and recruit. More efforts are required though as analysis of social media conducted by UN Women and UNDP in South and South-East Asia suggests that online misogyny and hate speech directed at women is at the center of violent extremist groups strategies.

Last but not least, we need to address the role of women and cybersecurity: Women have historically struggled to have due and adequate representation in the security sector that dominates counter-terrorism enforcement. The same applies for the fields of tech. Concrete efforts need to be done to ensure the effective and meaningful participation and leadership of women in decision-making processes related to the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the context of international security. This is a must for gendered dimensions to cybersecurity and other new technologies to be considered.

Technology is a tool but like any tool it can intentionally or unintentionally cause harm if risks, threats and opportunities are not assessed. Strong gender analysis can help mitigate these risks. Thank you for your time and attention.

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