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**Statement by Ms. Yasmine Ahmed, Director, United Kingdom Office of Human Rights Watch**

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

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

**29 June 2021, 10 a.m.**

Thank you to UN Office for Counter Terrorism for the opportunity to speak on this important panel. As has been made clear by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism in her recent report of Jan 2021, women and girls in particular bear heavy and unseen burdens resulting from both the direct and indirect impacts of counter terrorism laws and practice. As is clear from the report of Special Rapporteur Ni Aolain, a report of 2009 from the same mandate, and the experience of countless women and girls, while counter terrorism laws and practices are often mistakenly viewed as gender-neutral, this is far from the truth.

When considering the human rights compliance and gender responsiveness of new technologies it is important to note that counter terrorism and violent extremism laws and policies continue to be created at the international, regional and domestic level in spaces that are dominated by men. Women have in large part been traditionally excluded from these spaces. While there has been an increasing attempt to mainstream a gender responsive and sensitive approach by including women and those with gender expertise into these space, in some instances this continues to be superficial and reflective of an 'add women and stir' approach, and in others it is done in a siloed manner that does not adequately put gender expertise at the very heart of policy formation. Women and

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those with gender expertise have also not been adequately represented in bodies that implement counter terrorism and violent extremism laws.

These structural deficiencies are critical to addressing the issue of how we ensure that counter terrorism and violent extremism laws and policies are human rights and gender responsive. If the international community continues to respond to terrorism and violent extremism without adequately addressing these structural flaws, we risk further embedding discriminatory practices as we continue to adopt the use of transformation technologies.

Before turning to the possible gendered and human rights impacts of transformative technologies, I think it is important to recap some of the key gender related trends that we have seen with counter terrorism and countering violent extremism laws and policies, some of which intersect with the use of transformative technologies:

Firstly, the direct targeting of women under counter-terrorism policies in circumstances which fail to appreciate the vulnerability of those women and/or the reasons for their conduct. For example, there has traditionally been a failure to consider the gendered nature of certain ancillary offences where female family members are expected to provide, or coerced into providing, support for male offenders. Furthermore, we have seen states introduce administrative measures, such as citizen deprivation, against women without consideration of the unique circumstances and vulnerabilities that may have led them to take certain actions. For example, the UK Government has deprived a number of women in the camps in NE Syria of their citizenship, despite the fact that there are cases, such as Shamima Begum, where it is likely that she was groomed online and trafficked as a minor.

Secondly, the collateral consequences for women of the counter terrorism policies directed at male family members. While the majority of restrictive counter terrorism measures, from criminal offences to administrative measures such as control orders the imposition of counter terrorism financing laws, are directed at men, there are significant collateral economic, social and familial consequences for their families that have been largely ignored.

The increasing securitization of social services, and the differential burden placed upon women. For example, in some countries, service providers including in the education, health and social care sectors, have been required to implement CT policy which may limit women's access to services or what they are willing to share.

The gendered impact of government surveillance policies used in respect of persons subject to counter-terrorism and counter-extremism monitoring. Government's counter-terrorism and

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counter-extremism policies, which explicitly and implicitly cite surveillance of persons displaying visible signs of identity, including women, have had the effect of discouraging women, in particular Muslim women, from full participation in civic life.

Turning now to transformative technologies:

Firstly, it should be recognised that access, the way that technologies are used and reliance of technology for different functions is divided along gender lines. Accordingly, it is important to note that because of this the use of transformative technologies to counter terrorism and extremism are likely to have a differential gendered impact. For example, women may use technology and rely on certain online functions to do things that might not otherwise be possible or easy for them, offline. By introducing counter terrorism and extremism policies and practices online, it may interfere with their ability of women and girls to exercise certain rights.

Secondly, while it provides positive opportunities for engagement the online space can also provide unique opportunities for women to engage in terrorism and extremism. Given the fact that women may disproportionately rely on online spaces, it is also important to note that the online space can reproduce and in fact enhance gender and age-related vulnerabilities. For example, a number of women, including some younger women, that were recruited to IS were likely groomed online without the knowledge of their family or friends. Counter terrorism laws and policies need to be responsive to the gender and age-related vulnerabilities that transformative technologies can reproduce or enhance.

Finally, it is important to consider the gendered and more general human rights impacts of algorithms and automated decision making. An artificial intelligence (AI) system operates on the data it's given and thus, when the data is generated by and collected from humans, it carries human biases, including gender and racial biases. The result can be to reinforce inequalities and discriminatory practices. Accordingly, those using algorithmic decision making in the context of counter terrorism and extremism need to be extremely careful, and there needs to be adequate oversight and checks and balances, to ensure that it is not reinforcing gender, racial and other forms of biases.

A strong commitment to gender sensitive and human rights compliant counter terrorism laws and policies is essential as reliance on transformative technologies increases. This requires the UN and members states to address structural as well as substantive barriers that prevent this from happening and proactively putting human rights and gender responsiveness at the centre of counter terrorism and extremism policy creation and implementation, and ensuring that

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there is adequate regulation, oversight and accountability for both Government and private actors.

Thank you for your time.

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