



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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Side-Event on Countering the Transnational Threat of Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first thank the United States of America, Sweden and our colleagues from the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, for organizing this timely side-event on racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism.

It has been very encouraging to see momentum for action and cooperation building up to tackle this pressing, transnational threat, and concrete initiatives starting to bear fruit, as example, the launch in July of the *IJJ Criminal Justice Practitioner's Guide for Addressing REMOVE* which we are highlighting here today.

The United Nations system looks forward to stepping up engagement and cooperation with Member States and all our partners in this regard, including the Global Counterterrorism Forum and its inspired institutions.

In February this year, the Secretary-General called for global, coordinated action to tackle this threat. The General Assembly has now given the international community a clear and strong signal for this in the comprehensive resolution 75/291 that it adopted by consensus at the end of June for the seventh review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The General Assembly called upon Member States to take appropriate measures to address the 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.

And it requested the United Nations system help Member States develop effective counter- narratives, capacities and strategies to tackle this threat.

The relative importance and the manifestations of this specific phenomenon vary around the world, and Member States had long discussions to strike compromise terminology, given their respective legal, cultural and political traditions and contexts.

It is especially important for the credibility of international counter-terrorism efforts that Member States displayed such unity, and the outcome of the negotiations is clear, and true to one of the basic tenets of the Strategy: terrorism should be combated in all its forms and manifestations:

So we should leverage the solid normative framework and practical tools that we developed over the past 20 years to prevent and counter this resurgent form of terrorism through a holistic and whole-of-society approach, anchored into the rule of law, human rights, and gender equality.

The General Assembly has mandated the Secretary-General to submit a dedicated report by the end of August next year on the phenomenon of terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, which UNOCT looks forward to preparing in consultation with Member States and with insights from civil society.

Among United Nations partners, we have already held numerous rounds of discussions on this growing threat, including a meeting of the Secretary-General's High-level Action Group on Preventing Violent Extremism in December last year.

The objective 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.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we look at today's global terrorism landscape, Da'esh, Al-Qaida and their affiliates remain the predominant threat, particularly in conflict zones. The threat persists in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, while the security situation in many parts of Africa is deteriorating at an alarming rate.

But the threat from other hateful movements such as neo-Nazism and white supremacy, has been on a clear upward trend for a number of years. It stems from a resurgence of the type of violent, racist, supremacist worldview against which the United Nations was founded more than 75 years ago after the defeat of Nazism, fascism and militarism.

Terrorism based on xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance is today the fastest growing and even the most serious threat for several Member States in Western Europe, North America and Oceania.

The underlying surge in alienation and radicalization can be traced back to the socio-economic and cultural anxieties and grievances in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008. For some countries this was followed by the so-called migrant crisis that peaked in 2015. In some societies, it is rooted in even deeper, unresolved legacies of colonialism and slavery.

Over the past two years, we saw how racially, ethnically or ideologically motivated individuals and groups have sought to exploit the COVID-19 crisis and the related tsunami of misinformation and hatred to increase and diversify their support base.

They have taken advantage of an increasingly polarized mainstream discourse over the years to hijack legitimate public debate over societal challenges.

These groups are both organizationally and ideologically fragmented. They are more like a fluid and leaderless 'milieu' of unaffiliated individuals, inspired by key figures they hold as icons and stirring up each other's', and sometimes coalescing into small groups.

And when they mobilize into action, some resort to terrorist tactics, mostly in the form of low-cost, low-tech, copycat attacks targeting soft and symbolic targets – a modus operandi popularized by Da'esh. The difficulties this pose to prevent, detect and disrupt plots are well known to intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

These hateful groups and individuals exhibit a smorgasbord of ideological motivations, which to varying degrees include xenophobia, neo-Nazism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racial supremacism, ultranationalism, intolerance related to sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.

They recruit among disaffected individuals and often exploit anti-government or anti-establishment sentiments; youth culture – including online video-games and adjacent platforms, mixed martial arts or hard rock music; and gender dynamics, combining toxic masculinities and misogyny with specific efforts to recruit women and girls to proselytize and legitimize in a dizzying cocktail of cognitive dissonance.

The transnational dimensions of this phenomenon have become increasingly clear as Member States step-up intelligence, investigations and exchange information. This includes not only international travel and networking, but also connections and mutual and reinforcing inspiration in cyberspace, through which like-minded individuals link up and hate speech and terrorist content spread across borders.

Their savvy use of the Dark Net and digital technologies presents frontier challenges, including the use of cryptocurrencies for financing; gamification in recruitment efforts; an ecosystem of social media platforms and websites resilient to take-down operations; and narratives that use ambivalent and coded language to avoid being classified as unlawful speech.

Dear Colleagues,

As a contribution to our discussions today, I want to also highlight two overarching challenges to confront terrorism based on xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, which have been raised in the many exchanges I have had with practitioners on this topic in recent months.

First, legal clarity and policy consistency: Member States must have a clear definition on terrorism in full compliance with international law, including human rights.

We need to be mindful that overly broad definitions of terrorism in domestic law can negatively affect human rights. Also, we must avoid conflating 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 and counter-terrorism approach consistently in similar situations, irrespective of the background and perceived motivations of the individuals or groups involved, not to create impressions of double standards.

This might actually be one of the most important lessons from 20 years of counter-terrorism: the failure to uphold human rights, especially violations committed by security forces, give terrorists recruitment tools for free.

Second, dedicated focus and tailored approach: More expertise needs to be developed, partnerships built with academia, civil society, and the private sector, and in-depth research conducted to get a solid grip of the threat.

This is necessary not only to detect and disrupt attacks and bring offenders to justice, but, more importantly perhaps, to take decisive, preventive action, so the threat does not metastasize to the levels we have seen with Al-Qaida and Da'esh.

The best way to fight this violent extremist fringe is not through suppression alone but by making society more resilient and less vulnerable to its appeal. This requires preventive efforts, such as counter-narratives and community-engagement, to be based on

solid empirical analysis to address the underlying grievances and challenge hateful narratives.

UNOCT now has a clear mandate on this pressing issue and our Global Programme on PCVE is a good example of how UN entities are already leveraging their existing work to address the rise in terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance.

As part of these efforts we are seeking to spearhead research and collaboration on countering the increasing use of online gaming platforms by neo-Nazi, white supremacist and other such violent groups.

Dear Colleagues,

The United Nations is fully committed to working with and helping requesting Member States, as mandated by the recent review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

We invite Member States to fully leverage the United Nations' comparative advantages on preventing and countering terrorism to contribute to tackling the rise in terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance.

Helping foster a shared understanding of the threat, harmonized, approaches based on human right and the rule of law, and joint action to tackle transnational dimensions are key to a global, coordinated approach.

More can be done, and more should be done and we look forward to engaging in additional projects and programmes with interested Member States, partners and donors.

Taking action against this threat will save lives and demonstrate that the fight against terrorism is not targeted against any religion, nationality or ethnicity, but against the most abhorrent form of violence and the hateful ideologies that drive them.

Thank you.