**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM
UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT)**

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**Expert Roundtable on the Intersection
Between Video Games and Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism**

**6 December 2021
09:30am-11:30am EST**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this Expert Roundtable on the Intersection between Video Games and Violent Extremism.

There are more than two and a half billion active gamers worldwide today, and the number is increasing. It is a booming industry and an ever-expanding community. Video games bring people together online across national borders, languages, gender, ethnicity, and age.

The sheer scale and exponential development of video games is an indication of the potential and reach that these games hold.

Since the revolutionary –now quaint – Nintendo Game Boy of the 90s we have come to stand on the threshold of full-fledged, integrated virtual universes. What was fictionalized three years ago by Steven Spielberg in the movie "Ready Player One" – will become real sooner rather than later.

Augmented and virtual reality blur the boundaries between the tangible and synthetic world; it pushes us towards a seemingly irresistible integration of the online and offline dimensions of our lives.

Among many possible uses, this virtual reality can be leveraged as immersive tools for education, intercultural dialogue, even treatment of PTSD. It can foster a greater sense of community, belonging and social cohesion.

Unfortunately, over the past decade terrorists and violent extremists have also recognized these attributes and begun exploiting them.

We have seen terrorists infiltrate, modify, misuse, and even create video games and gaming adjacent platforms to spread violent extremist narratives, radicalize, incite and interact with potential recruits, or even plan or train for their next attack.

Terrorist use of the digital gaming space is not limited to one group or ideology. There is a broad range of terrorist and violent extremist actors and their supporters active on these platforms, especially those motivated by on xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance.

Al-Qaida and Daesh for instance developed video games adapted from popular first-person shooter games.

The situation has gone from bad to worse during the COVID-19 pandemic as a growing number of people, especially young people, have spent time online for entertainment and social interaction.

All the anxieties and frustrations have provided a fertile ground for conspiracy theories, hate speech and violent extremist propaganda to spread online and offline.

The exploitation of the digital gaming space transcends national borders by its very nature and can only be addressed through multilateral and multistakeholder cooperation with the industry, academia, think tanks, and civil society.

This has become a matter of great and urgent international concern given the sheer number of online users, including millions and millions of young women and men, active in this largely unmonitored space.

Some good initiatives have started, such as the launch in October of an *Extremism and Gaming Research Network* by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) or the efforts of the European Union's Radicalization Awareness Network.

However, there is a lack of global policy dialogue and discussion on this topic, and a dearth of systematic programmatic approaches to address this threat. And without appropriate action, terrorists and violent extremists will continue exploiting the digital gaming space.

We also need to have a better picture of the positive aspects of gaming. We need to know more about the resilience and prosocial benefits that these networks and communities can have. We know, for example, that there are already gamers and gaming platforms that are speaking out against narratives of hate and division- and we need to harness that in our efforts.

This is why the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism has convened this Expert Roundtable today as a starting point to expand our engagement, including through our capacity-building efforts, to address digital gaming spaces and their adjacent platforms.

We have a full and exciting line-up of experts with us, including behavioral and psychological experts, that will share insights and the latest research on this topic. We will hear from members of academia, civil society, the private sector, and members of the gaming community itself.

We hope to foster a rich and diverse dialogue on the intersection between video games and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

It will also help inform a high-level event that we will organize at the beginning of 2022 as a next step towards a coherent, inclusive, and multilateral response to a critical emerging terrorist threat.

Thank you.