



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

**Remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov,
Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**

**Briefing to the Security Council on the 14th report of the Secretary-General on
the threat posed by Da'esh**

9 February 2022

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

I thank the Security Council for the opportunity to brief you today.

Just over 20 years ago, the footage of planes crashing into the Twin Towers – here in downtown New York – was seared into the minds of millions of people, as Al-Qaida terrorists killed in a short span of time nearly 3,000 people from the United States and more than 90 other countries.

Only two weeks later, on 28 September 2001, the Security Council demonstrated decisive leadership and resolve with the adoption of its resolution 1373 and the establishment of its Counter-Terrorism Committee.

International peace and security and support for the victims of terrorist attacks around the world are the core values for the United Nations counter-terrorism efforts.

I wish to offer my sincere condolences to the governments and people who have suffered from acts of terrorism. My heartfelt thoughts and sympathies will forever be with the survivors and the families of victims.

Today, Al-Qaida and Da'esh, and their various affiliates remain serious threats, while terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism and intolerance are increasing.

As we begin a new decade of counter-terrorism, it is time to ask ourselves difficult questions and search for honest answers.

It is in this context that I present the fourteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by Da'esh to international peace and security, and the United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering this threat, as mandated by Security Council resolution 2610 (2021).

I am pleased to be joined today by Mr. Weixiong Chen, Acting Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee's Executive Directorate, to present this report, which our offices prepared jointly with the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team.

I welcome the recent mandate extensions by the Council of two United Nations counter-terrorism entities: the Counter-Terrorism Committee's Executive Directorate and the Monitoring Team, through resolutions 2610 (2021) and 2617 (2021).

I also take this opportunity to commend the excellent work of the Monitoring Team, aptly led by Mr. Edmund Fitton-Brown, which recently produced its 29th report on the threat posed by Da'esh and Al-Qaida, informing the Secretary-General's 14th report on Da'esh.

Mr. President,

The threat posed by Da'esh and its affiliates to international peace and security remains significant.

Two weeks ago, I briefed the Security Council on the terrorism landscape in the northeast of Syrian Arab Republic, following Da'esh's jailbreak attack on al-Sina'a prison in al-Hasakah city.

The assault on the prison was one of the group's most significant operations since Da'esh's defeat in Syria nearly three years ago.

The attack was also a shattering and sober reminder of the Da'esh's extreme brutal violence.

I was particularly disturbed by the group's use of children as human shields during the intense fighting that occurred in and around the prison.

This deeply distressing event also took a heavy toll on the civilian population in nearby neighborhoods, and was denounced around the world.

It is encouraging to note that, according to reports, a targeted attack last week resulted in the death of Da'esh's leader, Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Salbi – also known as Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Quraishi.

While this is perhaps the most significant in a series of blows against its leadership in recent months, Da'esh is known for its ability to re-group despite similar losses in the past, maintaining and intensifying its activities in conflict-afflicted regions across the world.

We have learned over the past two decades that counter-terrorism is a long-term game and that there are no quick fixes.

Military counter-terrorism operations may be necessary, but comprehensive measures with a strong focus on prevention are required to address the dynamics that fuel the appeal of terrorism.

I therefore urge the Council and all Member States to use every available tool at their disposal to sustain important gains against the threat posed by Da'esh to prevent its regional expansion, and curtail its capabilities to launch attacks and recruit new members to its ranks.

Starting in Iraq and Syrian Arab Republic, where its operational leadership is still concentrated, Da'esh continues to operate as an entrenched rural insurgency, exploiting the porous borders between the countries where it retains between 6,000 and 10,000 fighters.

During the reporting period, the group maintained its ability to launch attacks at a steady rate, including hit-and-run operations, ambushes and roadside bombs in both countries. It also continued to attack government forces and civilians with the apparent aim of instigating panic and increasing pressure on the authorities.

It is crucial to build on the momentum following the recent death of Al-Quraishi. Now is the time to address the grievances that Da'esh and other terrorist groups exploit with their propaganda to attract new followers.

We must focus on restoring human dignity, trust and social cohesion.

This must start with addressing the desperate situation in displacement camps and detention facilities across Syria and Iraq.

I remain profoundly disturbed by the humanitarian hardships of thousands of people, especially children with presumed family links to Da'esh members, who through no fault of their own, remain stranded in this precarious limbo, at a growing risk of further radicalization and recruitment.

It is essential to ensure humanitarian access to these locations to alleviate their suffering, and reduce security concerns. While I welcome the efforts of those Member States that have repatriated their citizens, the current pace does not demonstrate the requisite urgency and is likely to exacerbate conditions conducive to terrorism.

Repatriation alone is not sufficient. Comprehensive responses in countries of nationality that include protection, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration, as appropriate, are crucial. In this regard, I note that most of the individuals held in these camps and detention centers are Syrian and Iraqi nationals.

It is essential that these efforts are grounded in human rights and the rule of law, including due process and fair trial guarantees, promoting accountability, and bringing justice to the victims and survivors of crimes by Da'esh.

I wish to highlight in this regard the Global Framework that my Office coordinates together with UNICEF, which assists requesting Member States with these efforts, and I urge the international community to support the Global Framework's Multi-Partner Trust Fund that was launched in September.

Mr. President,

During the reporting period, Da'esh's regional affiliates beyond Syria and Iraq continued to expand at an unsettling scale and pace, partly enabled by the proliferation of conventional arms and weapons, especially in fragile conflict settings.

While the interplay between terrorism and conflict, and the threat of spill-over is a global strategic challenge, it's particularly pronounced in Central, Eastern, and West Africa, where the expansion of Da'esh affiliates would have serious and lasting repercussions well beyond the continent.

In Cabo Delgado and the border area between Mozambique and Tanzania, the Da'esh affiliate has suffered setbacks following the deployment of foreign troops. There has been an increase in sporadic violent attacks on civilians in more remote areas.

The group appears displaced rather than defeated, and its fighters have continued to regroup into smaller, more autonomous cells.

The deteriorating situation and intensification of Da'esh activity in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Uganda is another cause for serious concern, and tactical gains in these regions may also increase the group's revenues.

In North Africa, terrorist activity of Da'esh affiliates declined in Egypt, Libya and Morocco during the reporting period, following counter-terrorism gains, defections, and public investments in development initiatives.

The security landscape in Afghanistan changed dramatically on 15 August, following the Taliban take-over. Member States are concerned that Da'esh and other terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom in Afghanistan than at any time in recent history.

I reiterate Secretary-General Guterres's repeated calls to work together to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorist activity.

Outside conflict zones, in Europe, online terrorist radicalization and recruitment has remained a foremost concern over the reporting period, possibly inciting terrorist attacks by lone actors or small groups, inspired by, but unaffiliated with, Da'esh.

European Member States identified a common pattern in ongoing investigations of homegrown terrorism cases - typically involving young individuals who had underlying vulnerabilities, and who combined a fascination for extreme violence with personal grievances, making them receptive to terrorist propaganda.

Mr. President,

My Office has continued to work closely with partners across all sectors.

I am very proud that we ensured business continuity during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and intensified the implementation of our global programmes and projects to address the needs of Member States.

These efforts have been bolstered by our growing presence in the field, as requested by Member States.

This includes our new Programme Office in Nairobi – and I thank Ambassador Kimani and the Government of Kenya for the close collaboration in this regard – and the Programme Office for Counter-Terrorism and Training in Rabat, in which context I thank the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Mr. President,

This past June, the General Assembly adopted by consensus its most comprehensive and forward-looking resolution during its seventh review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

We need to nurture this consensus and work together towards stamping out terrorism, including groups like Da'esh, who continue to evolve, finding new and malicious ways to spread fear.

In his report on “Our Common Agenda”, Secretary-General Guterres identified terrorism as a strategic global risk and pointed to the need for continued international counter-terrorism cooperation as part of a *New Agenda for Peace*.

The guidance from this Council remains instrumental to our collective fight against terrorism.

I count on continued consensus on this matter.

That is the spirit of the United Nations Charter, which comes with a blueprint for peace and security, and for a world free of terrorism.

The United Nations system, through the Secretary-General’s Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, led by my Office, stands ready to support all Member States in their fight against terrorism.

I thank you, Mr. President.