



Remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov

Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism

Briefing to the Security Council on the 15th report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by Da'esh

9 August 2022

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

As we approach the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism on 21 of August, allow me to start by expressing my deepest condolences to the people and governments of Member States who have suffered from terrorist attacks.

Regrettably, the scourge of terrorism remains a significant threat, affecting the lives of innocent civilians across the globe. My personal thoughts and sympathies go to the survivors as well as to the bereaved.

I thank the Security Council for the opportunity to present the Secretary-General's fifteenth report on the threat posed by Da'esh to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, as mandated by Security Council resolution 2610 of 2021.

It seems like every time I appear before this Council to deliver the Secretary-General's report, something big happens just before it. This time it's the death of Al-Zawahiri; in the winter it was Da'esh attack in Al-Hasakah; and last August it was the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan.

I am pleased that Mr. Chen, Acting Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, is joining me to present the report, which our offices prepared jointly with the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, under the leadership of Mr. Edmund Fitton-Brown.

Following the completion of his term, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for Mr. Fitton-Brown's dedicated service and constructive collaboration with my Office during the past five years.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

Despite its territorial defeat and subsequent leadership losses, Da'esh has continued to pose a threat to international peace and security, one that has been rising ever since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Da'esh and its affiliates continue to exploit conflict dynamics, governance fragilities and inequality to incite, plan and organize terrorist attacks. They continue to exploit pandemic-related restrictions and misuse digital spaces to intensify efforts to recruit sympathizers and attract resources.

The group has also significantly increased the use of unmanned aerial systems in the past year, including reported in northern Iraq.

Da'esh has managed to do so partially by resorting to a largely decentralized internal structure that is revealed in the present report, thanks to the information provided by Member States to the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team.

This structure centred around a so-called "general directorate of provinces" and associated "offices", means to manage terrorist operations and finances across the globe. Such "offices" operate not only in Iraq and Syria, but also outside the core conflict zone, with the most active ones being reported in Afghanistan, Somalia and the Lake Chad Basin.

Through this structure, Da'esh leadership incites followers to carry out attacks and retains the ability to direct and maintain control over the flow of funds to affiliates worldwide.

While the existence of such structures may not be surprising, it provides a worrisome reminder that Da'esh has long term goals and aspirations.

Better understanding and continued monitoring of this structure are indispensable for countering and preventing the threat posed by Da'esh. Strengthened international and regional cooperation, including through information-sharing mechanisms, remain crucial in this regard.

Mr. President,
Dear Colleagues,

The threat posed by Da'esh and its affiliates remains higher in societies affected by conflict. The border between Iraq and Syria remains highly vulnerable, with up to 10,000 fighters estimated to operate in the area. From there, the group launched in April a global campaign of enhanced operational activity to avenge senior leaders killed in counter-terrorism operations.

In Afghanistan, the number of attacks claimed or attributed to the local Da'esh affiliate has decreased. However, since the Taliban took control last year, their presence has expanded into the north-east and east part of the country.

In Africa, the situation has deteriorated further since the Secretary-General's last report, with the expansion of Da'esh in Central, Southern and West Africa. From Uganda, a Da'esh affiliate has widened its area of operations into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while another affiliated group, after being knocked out by military action last year, has intensified small-scale attacks in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province.

This expansion also affects countries that had until recently been largely spared from attacks, such as littoral countries in the Gulf of Guinea.

The potential impact of climate-related challenges and global food insecurity are of particular concern in West Africa, notably the Sahel, where they may exacerbate fragilities and further fuel local conflict dynamics that could catalyse the spread of terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

Although their active presence and activity are observed mostly in societies affected by violent conflict, Da'esh and its affiliates also seek to inspire or direct attacks in non-conflict zones to incite fear and project strength.

In Europe, Da'esh has called on sympathizers to carry out attacks by exploiting the easing of pandemic-related restrictions and the conflict in Ukraine.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

Despite the persistency of the threat, joint efforts by Member States continue to yield positive results.

Da'esh and its affiliates have continued to suffer significant losses in leadership, including the loss of the Da'esh leader in February, as noted in my last briefing.

Moreover, while Da'esh leadership still manages between 25 to 50 million dollars in assets, this amount is significantly less than the estimates of three years ago.

The diversity of sources, both licit and illicit, that are used by Da'esh to finance terrorist activities and exert control over affiliated groups and fighters, underlines the importance of sustained efforts to counter the financing of terrorism.

In this regard, I am most pleased that the Financial Action Task Force and the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh joined the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact in April this year.

I also welcome the Government of Iraq's repatriation of more than two thousand and a half Iraqi nationals who had been stranded in camps and other facilities in the north-east of Syria, as well as Tajikistan's and France's repatriations last month of, respectively, 146 and 51 women and children.

However, I remain deeply concerned that the limited progress achieved so far in repatriating foreign terrorist fighters and their family members from these camps is far overshadowed by the number of individuals still facing a precarious and deteriorating situation.

Tens of thousands of individuals, including more than 27,000 children from Iraq and some 60 other countries, remain subject to enormous security challenges and humanitarian hardship, which are further compounded by recent reports of increased violence, including dozens of assassinations. Those individuals, many of whom are children who did not choose to be there, also remain deprived of basic rights and are at a very real risk of radicalization and recruitment.

It is imperative that Member States urgently consider the long-lasting implications of not taking prompt action to address this dangerous situation.

And I reiterate the Secretary-General's repeated calls for Member States to further their efforts in facilitating the safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation of all individuals who remain stuck in those camps and other facilities. My Office, together with UNICEF, lead the Global Framework of 15 entities organized to support Member State efforts regarding the accountability, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of nationals returned from Syria and Iraq. We would welcome contributions to the multi-partner trust fund that allows this work to go forward.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

The persistence of the threat posed by Da'esh, as well as the magnitude of the challenges it poses, underline the importance of non-military measures to counter terrorism and to address its consequences.

Resolving the conflicts in which Da'esh and its Al-Qaida forebear thrive is necessary for creating the conditions to bring about their defeat. But if we are to rid ourselves of this scourge, we must also address the vulnerabilities, social grievances and inequality exploited by the group in the first place, as well as promoting and protecting human rights and the rule of law.

I thank you.