

Keynote speech by Mr. Raffi Gregorian,

**Director and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office
of Counter-Terrorism**

“Regional and International Challenges” – 14th Amman Security Colloquium

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Your Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to represent the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres at this august forum.

My remarks will focus on the persistent global terrorist threat, which regrettably remains significant.

Successive reports by the Secretary-General, as well as the Security Council’s Al-Qaida and Da’esh Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team describe the current terrorist threat landscape as geographically more diffuse, ideologically more diverse and tactically more varied.

Geographically, we see terrorist groups exploit structural fragilities and leverage local grievances and inequalities to make territorial gains in parts of Africa. A clear example is how such groups in the Sahel are expanding to Gulf of Guinea littoral states and the Lake Chad Basin, where Da’esh has one of its most active affiliates.

The situation in Afghanistan, in all its aspects, has deteriorated since the Taliban takeover in August last year. The dire humanitarian situation and the restrictions imposed on human rights have been felt particularly by women and girls.

And terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, with whom the Taliban has not severed ties, now enjoy greater freedom in Afghanistan than at any time in recent history, posing concerns for stability in the region and beyond.

Ideologically, while groups such as Al-Qaida and Da’esh remain the most significant terrorist threat globally, Member States are also raising concerns about what the General Assembly describes as terrorist attacks perpetrated on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief. Although these attacks are not a new phenomenon, there has been an increase in their frequency and lethality.

Individuals and groups resorting to such attacks are increasingly making transnational connections, exploiting digital platforms and online video games to attract new recruits, share tactics and fundraise, which calls for stronger regional and international cooperation against this threat.

Turning lastly to tactics, terrorism today ranges from insurgencies in and near conflict zones, to lone individuals inspired online and acting with varying degrees of autonomy, planning and sophistication.

Member States have expressed concern over the potential use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, including but not limited to artificial intelligence, 3D printing and virtual assets. And the increased use of commercially available drones and other unmanned aircraft systems by terrorist groups is deeply worrisome, as it gives them access to a third dimension of attack previously reserved only to states.

There are also concerns about the connection between some forms of transnational organized crime and terrorism, with increasingly blurred lines and symbiotic relationships between criminal networks and terrorist groups.

While the threat remains low – owing primarily to technical challenges and complexity around access, production, storage, logistics, and delivery – Al-Qaida, Da'esh and their affiliates retain an interest in the use of weapons of mass destructions. This region has witnessed first-hand the horrors of such violence, and between 2015 and 2017 there are reports of 15 separate incidents in Iraq where Da'esh had used a sulfur mustard agent that it had produced indigenously in captured university laboratories in Mosul.

Because the potential for such attacks remains, we should stay attentive to the risk of acquisition by terrorists of nuclear, chemical and biological material, and prevent them from acquiring weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. A more immediate concern is that stolen or uncontrolled stockpiles of small arms, light weapons and of ammunition may end up in the hands of terrorists. Think of all the weaponry of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces that fell into Taliban hands last year. This continues to be a risk in ongoing armed conflicts around the world.

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The Secretary-General has prioritized the need to address the threat posed by terrorism to international peace and security since taking office in 2017. His first structural reform was to establish the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism in that same year.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism has five main functions, following its mandate from the UN General Assembly.

First, to provide leadership across the United Nations system on General Assembly counter-terrorism mandates. Second, to enhance coordination and coherence across the United Nations system to ensure the balanced implementation of the four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Third, to strengthen the delivery of United Nations counter-terrorism capacity-building assistance to Member States. Fourth, to improve visibility, advocacy and resource mobilization for United Nations counter-terrorism efforts. And fifth, to ensure that due priority is given to counterterrorism across the United Nations system and that the important work on preventing violent extremism is firmly rooted in the Strategy.

This is an extensive and comprehensive mandate that involves multiple stakeholders across the United Nations system.

To ensure coordination across these stakeholders, the Secretary-General established the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact in 2018. The Compact brings together 45 entities as members or observers, including 41 United Nations entities, as well as INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Financial Action Task Force, the Compact is the largest coordination framework in the United Nations system and has contributed significantly to eliminating unnecessary redundancies, leveraging the different areas of expertise within the system and building synergies with partners.

But the core of our work is advancing the implementation of the 2006 Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which was last reviewed by the General Assembly in June 2021 and is the cornerstone of multilateral counter-terrorism efforts. The Strategy is updated every second year with its eighth review expected to take place next summer.

UNOCT is preparing the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Strategy, which will be published in February 2023 and will form the baseline for negotiations between Member States during the review.

The Strategy has four broad pillars: first addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, second measures to prevent and combat terrorism, third measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations in that regard, and fourth measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism. It is a comprehensive document, which together with the General Assembly resolutions adopted after each review, includes provisions on a range of issues and considerations, from gender and the role of civil society to the root causes and emerging threats in the terrorism landscape.

There is one issue in particular that I would like to highlight here today.

Terrorist groups spend a lot of time targeting young people with their violent extremist narratives and propaganda, exploiting existing youth grievances with a

view to radicalize and recruit, and taking advantage of the worldwide breakdown of trust among and between peoples and institutions that the pandemic only worsened.

That is why efforts to prevent and counter terrorism must include a strategic investment in youth, including their meaningful participation in conversations about how to tackle this issue. Young people are a force to be reckoned with and a key partner in both terrorism prevention and counter-terrorism policy.

I note with appreciation the efforts to engage youth in this Colloquium in the NEXTGEN youth track – which should come as no surprise as Jordan was spearheading the Youth, Peace and Security agenda in the Security Council in 2015, under the leadership of the Crown Prince himself.

UNOCT also actively engages youth in policy dialogues and empowerment activities. This year, we are co-chairs of the United Nations Interagency Network on Youth Engagement, which has helped define and articulate prevention responses better tailored to the reality that young people face today, including in digital spaces.

Successfully addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism should include efforts to engage youth in schools, sport clubs and behind the electronic screens in their homes. We should promote a culture of peace, equal opportunities, inclusion, dignity and hope for a better tomorrow for the younger generation.

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Terrorism poses a grim and challenging reality that we must face together. As emphasized by Secretary-General Guterres, a networked multilateral response is essential in this regard.

Together with our Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact partners, UNOCT is ready and committed to support Member States in their implementation of the Strategy, to counter the threat of terrorism with full respect for human rights and the rule of law.

I look forward to engaging with you today and hearing your thoughts on how we could work together to build a future without terrorism.

Thank you.