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

VIRTUAL **COUNTER-TERRORISM** WEEK

6–10 JULY 2020

Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week, 6-10 July 2020

Webinar V: Civil Society and Media Perspectives on Preventing and Countering Terrorism in a Pandemic

10 July, 9 AM EST

Concept note

As the COVID-19 virus spreads, so does misinformation. The Secretary-General has warned that the world is facing a catastrophic epidemic of misinformation, or 'infodemic'. He recommended that "the antidote to this pandemic of misinformation is fact-based news and analysis," which can only be found through strong collaboration between the public and the private sectors. Terrorists are also exploiting the pandemic to spread disinformation to spread terror, conspiracy theories, and hate to push their propaganda and incite violence.

While the primary responsibility to prevent and counter terrorism lies with Member States, public-private partnerships are essential to address the misuse of information and communication technologies by terrorists to radicalize, recruit, plan and fund their activities. Inclusive collaboration is needed and should involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders in addition to governments, such as civil society, academia, the private sector, new and traditional media. A 'whole-of-society' approach is needed to scale up prevention efforts, and ensure they resonate with local contexts around the world and a variety of target audiences.

The United Nations has recognized the important role civil society can play in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism, as reflected in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Security Council resolutions, as well as the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Accordingly, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism launched in March 2020 its own strategy to strengthen its engagement with civil society. Civil society actors have first-hand understanding of the challenges confronting communities, local capacities and resilience factors. They are uniquely placed to help identify vulnerabilities and risks of terrorist radicalization, online and offline. They have shown resourcefulness in providing services to communities affected by terrorism, for example by supporting victims; partnering in prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes; and pioneering gender-responsive approaches against terrorist radicalization and the targeting of women's human rights by terrorists.

VIRTUAL **COUNTER-TERRORISM** WEEK

6–10 JULY 2020

In response to the COVID-19 'infodemic', the international community has mobilised new partnerships to prevent and counter the misuse of the Internet—from the UN "Verified" initiative to tech companies committing to promote reliable sources of information on COVID-19 at the top of search results and on their user feeds.

Addressing the coverage of terrorism in the formal news media and in social media was already challenging before the pandemic. Terrorist attacks around the world are not only designed to kill but to play into sensationalistic media strategies and audience bubbles to maximise attention. At the same time, legislative and other measures introduced in some States to counter terrorist propaganda have raised concerns of violations of freedom of expression and the media.

Some traditional media have adopted codes of conduct as part of self-regulation efforts. Large Internet companies have also stepped up their engagement and efforts to work with governments, civil society and academia to prevent terrorist misuse of their platforms and services more effectively, for instance through the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online.

This webinar will examine the challenges and opportunities to build more effective partnerships between governments, civil society and tech companies to prevent and counter terrorism while upholding human rights in a pandemic environment. The discussion will explore how governments can better leverage civil society and private sector perspectives, knowledge, expertise and experience in their efforts to address this threat.

Key issues to be discussed:

- *What is the impact of the COVID-19 'infodemic' on violent extremism conducive to terrorism, in terms of trends, narratives and platforms?*
- *What is the role of civil society and its contributions on the frontline of prevention?*
- *What are the legal and technological challenges in content moderation for online efforts to tackle violent extremism conducive to terrorism?*
- *How does media coverage impact terrorism?*
- *What are the spaces and dynamics of radicalization and recruitment of men, women and youth?*