## Concept Note

## Addressing Terrorism through Reinvigorated Multilateralism and Institutional Cooperation

This will be an in-person event held in **Conference Room 4** at the UN Headquarters
in New York with side events planned from 19 to 23 June 2023

**Introduction**

1.      This note provides information on the context and specific thematic sessions of the Third United Nations High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States. The United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, will convene the Conference at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 19-20 June 2023. The overarching theme for the Conference is "*Addressing Terrorism through Reinvigorated Multilateralism and Institutional Cooperation.*" The Conference will provide a timely opportunity to consider the practical implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy ([A/RES/60/288](#)) and its review resolutions, in line with Member States' priorities, including those on human rights, gender equality, engagement with youth and civil society, as well as 'whole-of-society' responses. Moreover, the Conference will provide an important platform for Member States, United Nations entities, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, and the private sector to exchange information, experiences, and good practices while exploring further cooperation. Conference preparations have continued the practice of engaging civil society organizations in line with the outcomes of the first High-Level International Conference on Human Rights, Civil Society and Counter-Terrorism, co-organised by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) with Spain in May 2022 in Málaga.

2.      The Conference will build on the outcomes of previous High-Level Conferences of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, which were convened by the Secretary-General in 2018, 2020, and 2021, each of which generated renewed impetus to the efforts of the United Nations, Member States, and other partners to strengthen international counter-terrorism cooperation.

3.      Since 2019, UNOCT has also partnered with Member States to organize High-Level Regional Conferences in Mongolia, Tajikistan, Kenya, Belarus, Hungary, the United Arab Emirates, and Austria. In 2022, as the international community gradually transitioned back to in-person events, UNOCT maintained the momentum on multilateral counter-terrorism cooperation by partnering with the Governments of Uzbekistan, the State of Qatar, Spain, and Tajikistan to deliver four high-level events, as well as the first-ever United Nations Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism that took place in September 2022 in New York.

4.      The four thematic sessions of this in-person Conference will focus on key counter-terrorism priorities under the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Following panel presentations, each session will provide time for interventions from the floor. Member State Heads of Delegation and representatives of civil society organizations are invited to make a maximum of three-minute remarks during the thematic sessions. Please see the Logistical Note of the Conference for more details.

**Context and Conference Theme**

5.      Terrorism is a complex, evolving and multi-faceted threat that requires a comprehensive, inclusive, and effective multilateral response. Terrorists continue to exploit underdevelopment, conflict-related fragilities, inequalities, discrimination, marginalization, human rights violations, lack of the rule of law and good governance, while seeking to undermine public trust in governmental institutions to expand their influence and control. As the threat continues to evolve, it has become more ideologically diffuse and geographically widespread, affecting all regions of the world, either directly or indirectly. Terrorists

have honed their tactics and strategies and are misusing new and emerging technologies to spread disinformation, foment discord, recruit and radicalize, mobilize resources, and plan and execute attacks.

6.      The General Assembly adopted the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by consensus in September 2006 to help Member States prevent and counter terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and guide the implementation of the international framework against terrorism – including through international conventions and protocols against terrorism, and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The Strategy further underscores that respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are complementary and mutually reinforcing, and therefore are an essential part of successful counter-terrorism efforts. Since then, the General Assembly has conducted seven biennial reviews of the Strategy, each time adopting consensus resolutions that provided additional guidance and set priorities for the following two years. Its eighth review is currently underway and will be concluded with the General Assembly's plenary meeting set to begin on 22 June.

7.      The role of the United Nations system is to help promote the Strategy and provide capacity-building and technical assistance to requesting Member States that have primary responsibility for its implementation. Forty-one United Nations entities, as well as INTERPOL, the Financial Action Task Force, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the World Customs Organization, and International Monetary Fund, are collaborating in this common effort through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, which the Secretary-General established in 2018 and is led by UNOCT.

8.      Strengthening multilateralism to comprehensively address terrorism and other global challenges, while ensuring respect for human rights and gender sensitive approaches, has been the Secretary-General's priority since assuming office in 2017 and the reason he called for the creation of UNOCT. In his report on *Our Common Agenda*, he proposed a *New Agenda for Peace*, which will examine ways the United Nations can adapt its efforts to better address strategic risks including terrorism. During the ninth meeting of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact on 25 January 2023, the Secretary-General called on Compact entities "to strengthen multilateral collaboration and confront transnational terrorist threats that are more persistent, diverse, and complex than ever." This requires enhancing action-oriented collaboration and horizontal cross-fertilization to address the underlying conditions that can lead to terrorism together with concurrent and converging threats, including climate emergency, armed conflict, organized crime, as well as regulatory challenges in cyberspace and the uneven recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

9.      During the first two High-Level Conferences and subsequent Regional Conferences, participants underlined the importance of strengthening multilateralism and institutional cooperation. The transnational nature of terrorist threats require much closer counter-terrorism cooperation across countries and regions, both at strategic and pragmatic levels, including in new and emerging areas. In the seventh review resolution of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/75/291), Member States renewed their "unwavering commitment to strengthening international cooperation to prevent and combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations." They also underscored "the importance of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, stressing the importance of cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism." The growing trend of developing regional counter-terrorism strategies is strong evidence of political will in different regions to collectively address the threat of terrorism.

2023 **COUNTER-TERRORISM** WEEK

Concept Note

10.     The Third High-Level Conference will provide the international community with the opportunity to renew and build upon the existing multilateral, results-oriented and balanced efforts to preventing and countering terrorism under the auspices of the United Nations.

## High-Level Opening Session: Addressing Terrorism through Reinvigorated Multilateralism and Institutional Cooperation

11.     The opening session will set the context of the Conference by focusing on reinvigorated multilateralism and institutional cooperation, as well as explore new trends in regional and subregional cooperation that can serve as good practices for addressing current global challenges. UN Secretary-General António Guterres and the President of the United Nations General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, will address the opening session along with eminent speakers representing Member States and regional organizations. This session will open with introductory remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. It will also include a presentation by the co-facilitators of the eighth review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, H.E. Mr. Robert Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations and Mr. Tarek Ladeb, Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations. Additionally, special guests of this session – returnees from conflict zones will share their personal stories of radicalization, reversal, return and rehabilitation.

## Session I: Multistakeholder Engagement in Countering Terrorism while Ensuring Compliance with Human Rights and the Rule of Law

12.     Inclusive, networked multilateralism can leverage the comparative advantages of the United Nations, regional organizations, civil society, academic institutions and the private sector in support of the responsibility of Member States to prevent and counter terrorism. Security responses should be complemented by effective long-term prevention efforts that address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism. This requires meaningful engagement and partnerships between governments, youth, women, civil society, including religious and community actors, the media, academia, and the tech industry. As Pillar IV of the Strategy makes clear, human rights and the rule of law must underpin all such efforts, not only in law, but also in practice. Experience has demonstrated time and time again that ensuring security and respect for human rights are mutually reinforcing imperatives. Respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights, including advancing gender equality, are not an operational or strategic impediments, but a requirement for successful—and sustainable—efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

13.     Civil society, in its diversity, has contributions to make when it comes to the whole-of-society approaches for which the General Assembly has called. And as with its support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the private sector has a vested interest in preventing terrorists from harming communities and disrupting economies.

14.     The landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions forming the Women, Peace and Security Agenda stress the importance of the full, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in peace and security efforts. Through the sixth and seventh reviews of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the General Assembly

4

underscored the important role of women in countering terrorism and violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism, while avoiding their instrumentalization, and encouraged Member States, United Nations entities and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to ensure their participation and leadership in these efforts, as well as to consult with women's organizations to inform their counter-terrorism work.

15.     This session will address existing strategies and tools to ensure systematic, coherent and structured engagement between Member States, United Nations entities, international and regional organizations, academia, civil society, and private sector. Participants will explore new ways to strengthen multilateralism and engagement of civil society, local communities and the private sector in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism. The importance of this theme is reflected in several General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. In its resolution 75/291, the General Assembly recognizes the role that civil society organizations can play in confronting the challenges of recruitment and radicalization to terrorism, encourages Member States to enhance engagement with civil society to support its role in the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and to maintain an enabling environment for civil society, including a legal framework that protects and promotes human rights, in accordance with international human rights law. The session will also touch upon challenges and risks faced by CSOs and Member States' in implementing its obligations "to create and maintain an enabling environment for civil society, including a legal framework that protects and promotes human rights, in accordance with international human rights law".[1]

16.     This session will also consider challenges and good practices for ensuring full respect for human rights and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism, including supporting and protecting the victims and survivors of terrorism, in accordance with Member States' obligations under international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law.

17.      Several General Assembly and Security Council resolutions underscore Member States' human rights obligations under international law in the counter-terrorism context. Pillar IV of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy reaffirms that the promotion and protection of human rights for all and the rule of law is essential to all components of the Strategy. It recognizes that effective counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights are not conflicting goals but complementary and mutually reinforcing, and stresses the need to promote and protect the rights of victims of terrorism.

18.     This thematic session will address the following key questions:

- How can Member States, international and regional organizations, civil society, local actors and the private sector contribute to respecting, promoting, and protecting human rights, promoting gender equality, full, equal, and meaningful participation of women, empowering youth, and supporting victims and survivors of terrorism while preventing and countering terrorism?

---

[1] Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 7 review, A/RES/75/291// https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/175/70/PDF/N2117570.pdf?OpenElement

**2023 COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK**

Concept Note

- What are some of the main challenges that civil society organizations and other local actors face in their efforts to contribute to preventing terrorism and violent extremism, including countering terrorist narratives, building societal resilience, supporting victims of terrorism, and promoting gender equality and youth engagement?
- What are some of the main challenges that civil society organizations and other local actors face due to measures adopted to prevent terrorism and violent extremism and how can these best be addressed?
- How can the United Nations, international and regional organizations, and Member States strengthen their support to and empower civil society organizations and other local actors to meaningfully and safely engage in the development of counter-terrorism laws and policies without fear of reprisal, with efforts to prevent terrorism and violent extremism, including addressing their impact?
- How can the private sector support civil society organizations and other local actors in their efforts aimed at preventing and countering terrorism and addressing the impacts of terrorism and violent extremism?
- How can research and capacity-building support efforts to uphold human rights, protect civic space, promote gender equality and full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women, and support and protect the victims and survivors of terrorism in the context of preventing and countering terrorism?

**Session II: Building Effective, Resilient and Accountable Member State Institutions in the Evolving Global Terrorism Landscape**

19.     The second thematic session will focus on good practices to unite communities and build resilient societies. In its resolution 75/291, the General Assembly recognized that "there are a number of drivers underlying radicalization to terrorism and that development based on the principles of social justice, inclusion and equal opportunities, including the building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, can contribute to the prevention of terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism and to the promotion of inclusive, open and resilient societies, notably through education, and affirming the determination of Member States to work towards conflict resolution, to confront oppression, to eradicate poverty, to promote sustained economic growth, sustainable development, global prosperity, good governance, human rights, and fundamental freedoms for all and the rule of law, to improve intercultural understanding and to promote respect for all."

20.     Preventing terrorism and violent extremism requires harmonized national and multilateral responses that respect international law and the Charter of the United Nations and is responsive to contemporary issues in a globalized and interdependent world. Such an approach needs to be principled, inclusive, comprehensive, forward-looking, and grounded in the rule of law and human rights, as provided by the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. This requires building or expanding systems to prevent, detect, and respond to threats as they develop – including by strengthening law enforcement and judicial systems, improving threat information sharing, enhancing border security, countering terrorist financing, enhancing preventive efforts and disengagement programming, and preventing online and offline terrorist recruitment and mobilization to violence. It also demands addressing the underlying

6

conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism by supporting effective governance, promoting stabilization and economic development, and resolving ongoing conflicts.

21.     The session will examine the importance of Member States having strong, rule of law-based institutions that function in a transparent manner and are accountable for upholding human rights and the fair delivery of public services. As highlighted in the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, Member States are better positioned to address the underlying drivers and triggers of violent extremism by embracing international human rights norms and standards, promoting good governance, upholding the rule of law and eliminating corruption. The session will further tackle the need for effective coordination and collaboration between different agencies and actors. It will also highlight best practices, success stories and lessons learned of PCVE efforts and their impact on the local communities and practices in different parts of the world.

22.     This thematic session will address the following key issues:

- The role of law enforcement agencies, intelligence services, and other security institutions in PCVE efforts, and their relationship with other agencies such as social services and community organizations, including the need to ensure social, educational and other relevant services are not unduly securitized in the process.
- The importance of building trust and working with local communities in PCVE efforts, and the role of civil society actors in promoting resilience.
- The use of different prevention approaches, including soft power, to address the underlying drivers of violent extremism such as social exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination.
- The role of international and regional cooperation in enhancing PCVE efforts and the importance of sharing best practices and lessons learned.
- The need for a multi-stakeholder approach to PCVE efforts and the importance of involving different sectors, including academia, private sector, and media.
- How can targeted research contribute to our understanding of the drivers of terrorism, and what gaps remain?

**Session III: The Global Threat Landscape: Assessment of Current and Emerging Trends [Open to Member States only]**

23.     This session, which is open to Member States only, will feature presentations by heads of counter-terrorism agencies of Member States, representatives of United Nations entities with counter-terrorism mandates, as well as international, regional and sub-regional organizations. As indicated in the latest report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by Da'esh, "the threat increased in particular in conflict zones and neighbouring countries. The geographic spread and incidence of terrorist violence by Da'esh increased across Africa , where Da'esh, its affiliates and other terrorist groups continued to exploit local conflict dynamics and fragilities in order to advance their agendas. The situation in the Sahel, in particular, deteriorated significantly, with increased terrorist violence, especially against civilians, and armed confrontations between government forces and non-state armed groups. In Afghanistan, the

Da'esh affiliate Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan remained the Taliban's main antagonist, demonstrating an ability to mount operations in a variety of areas."[2]

24.     In the last few years, the terrorism landscape has become increasingly diverse and complex, partly due to linkages with transnational organized crime, climate change, political instabilities linked to unconstitutional changes of government and development related issues.

25.     Terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other new forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief are of increasing international concern. Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly exacerbated the threat of terrorist attacks on this basis. While such acts of terrorism remain primarily domestic in focus, the motives, inspiration, and goals underpinning such attacks are increasingly shared transnationally.[3]

26.     This thematic session will address the following key questions:

- How will terrorism evolve over the next two years? What factors and dynamics will shape this evolution?
- Which States or regions will be most impacted by terrorism in the future?
- How will terrorists' modus operandi evolve over the next couple of years?
- What are some effective approaches for leveraging new technologies to prevent and counter terrorism, in line with international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law? And in particular, what risks and challenges of human rights harms and discriminatory outcomes arise in the context of the use of new technologies in the counter-terrorism arena?
- How can strategic foresight, data and knowledge help Member States to understand and better respond to these threats?

**Session IV: Strengthening Capacity Building Programmes – Making Them Better Fit for Purpose to Meet Resilience Gaps**

27.     This session will explore strategies for strengthening capacity building programmes focused on countering terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) with a specific focus on meeting the resilience needs of individuals and communities. It will feature a brief overview of the main stakeholders involved in the capacity building efforts and address the issues of impact analysis and sustainability. It will then explore a range of strategies for strengthening capacity building programmes in this context, including: new methods of needs assessments; ensuring sustainability and local ownership; as well as utilizing innovative approaches such as e-learning, mobile technologies, and social media to reach and engage with a wider audience.

---

[2] Sixteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2023/76// https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/031/22/PDF/N2303122.pdf?OpenElement

[3] Report of the Secretary-General "Terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief", A/77/266// https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/450/52/PDF/N2245052.pdf?OpenElement

28.     The UN Secretary-General has repeatedly expressed concern over the dire and unsustainable situation faced by individuals with suspected links to United Nations-designated terrorist groups, who remain stranded in holding facilities in conflict zones. Addressing the protracted issue of Da'esh members, including foreign terrorist fighters and their family members in camps and detention facilities, remains an urgent, strategic imperative for international peace and security. As of 23 January 2023, nearly 42,000 foreigners remained held along with more than 23,000 Syrians, while nearly 37,000 foreign nationals were detained in al-Hol and Roj. Nearly 27,000 foreigners in the camps are from neighboring Iraq, while nearly 10,000 others are from about 60 other countries. More than 60 percent of the camp detainees are children, approximately 80 percent of whom are under the age of 12, and 30 percent are 5 years or younger[4].

29.     UNOCT provides technical assistance and capacity building support to Member States through the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT), Special Projects and Innovation Branch (SPIB) and Behavioral Insights (BI) Hub in Doha. Such assistance and support is provided at global, regional and national levels across all four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. UNOCT capacity-building work focuses on countries and regions most susceptible to the threat of terrorism, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, and Central and South Asia. These programmes and projects focus on key thematic areas in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism, including foreign terrorist fighters, counter-terrorism/PCVE strategies, border security, cyber security, WMD/CBRN terrorism, human rights, victims of terrorism and behavioral insights. Several Global Compact entities, including UNODC and UNDP, as well as UNICEF, have both individual and joint programmes with UNOCT. The implementation and impact of their programmes in the field of PCVE and CT will be in focus during the session.

30.     This session will address the following key questions:

- How can UN entities and other concerned stakeholders improve their capacity building efforts in support of Member States to achieve better impact on ground?
- What are some existing good practices and lessons learned for strengthening counter-terrorism and PCVE capacity-building programmes in compliance with international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law and consistent with the whole of society approach to countering terrorism endorsed by the General Assembly?
- What are the respective roles of national agencies, international and regional organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector, in implementing capacity-building programmes at the national, regional and international levels?
- Based on the experience of the last few years of return, what specific issues should Member States consider when protecting, prosecuting (as appropriate), rehabilitating and reintegrating their nationals with alleged or actual links with designated terrorist groups?
- What role can national agencies, international and regional organizations, the private sector and civil society organizations play in supporting the return?

---

[4] Human Rights Watch// https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/27/revictimizing-victims-children-unlawfully-detained-northeast-syria

**Plenary Wrap-Ups and Closing Session**

31.　　At the end of the High-Level Conference, Under-Secretary-General Voronkov will provide a summary of the Conference's key conclusions and deliver a closing message. Following the Conference's conclusion, UNOCT will produce a detailed report on the Conference's key outcomes.