



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

**Tenth “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”**

7 February 2020

Mr. President,  
Excellencies and Distinguished Representatives,

Let me begin by expressing my sincere condolences to Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Nigeria, Somalia and all Member States which have recently suffered terrorist attacks. My heartfelt thoughts and sympathy go to the survivors and the families of the victims.

Mr. President,

I thank you for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the tenth 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 this threat, as mandated by Security Council resolution 2368 (2017).

As members of this Council are aware, the report was prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), led by Ms. Coninx, and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the ISIL and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, led by Mr. Fitton-Brown, in close collaboration with my Office, with contributions from other United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities.

Mr. President,

ISIL lost its last stronghold in the Syrian Arab Republic in March last year and has seen a change in leadership after the death of al- Baghdadi in October, but this report shows that the group remains at the center of the transnational terrorism threat. We must stay vigilant and united in confronting this scourge.

ISIL has continued to seek resurgence and global relevance online and offline, aspiring to re-establish its capacity for complex international operations. ISIL’s regional affiliates continue pursuing a strategy of entrenchment in conflict zones by exploiting local grievances.

Due to their high number, Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) who travelled to Iraq and Syria are expected to continue to pose an acute short, medium and long-term threat, with estimates of those alive ranging from 20,000 to almost 27,000.

The situation of ISIL fighters and associated family members in detention and displacement facilities in Iraq and Syria has worsened since I presented to this Council the 9<sup>th</sup> report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by the group. Their fate remains a major challenge to the international community. ISIL has become increasingly focused on freeing them. Meanwhile, most Member States have not yet assumed responsibility for the repatriation of their nationals.

The report of the Secretary-General also highlights relevant activities of United Nations entities in support of Member States over the past six months, especially in light of the requirements under Security Council resolutions 2396 (2017), 2462 (2019), 2467 (2019), and 2482 (2019).

Mr. President,

In the Middle East, ISIL's reconstitution as a covert network in Syria follows a similar pattern as in Iraq since 2017. The north-east of Syria has seen a spike in attacks targeting the international counter-ISIL coalition and local non-state armed groups. Along the Syrian-Iraqi border, the crossing of fighters in both directions presents a challenge.

The most pressing challenge, however, is the untenable situation of over 100,000 people still stranded in detention and displacement facilities in the north-east of Syria, of which more than 70,000 are women and children in the Al Hol camp. Their situation has short to long-term implications that require urgent attention and action of all concerned Member States. The humanitarian crisis on the ground, along with issues related to physical security, risk of escapees and potential radicalization to violence in the facilities, must be addressed.

Reports of children deprived of their liberty and interned in pre- and post-trial detention camps for their actual or alleged association with ISIL remain of concern. Children, including those with links to United Nations-listed terrorist groups, should be treated primarily as victims, and any prosecution should be conducted in accordance with internationally recognized standards.

The best solution is to get the children out of harm's way and back to their home countries, with the rest of their families, as soon as possible.

I urge Member States to regain their primary responsibility for their nationals in terms of protection, repatriation, gender-sensitive and age-appropriate prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies, consistent with all their obligations under international law, including human rights, humanitarian and refugee law.

I commend Member States that have repatriated or are in the process of repatriating their nationals suspected of having links with United Nations-listed terrorist groups from Iraq and Syria.

Regarding Africa, in my previous briefing I reported a "striking increase in ISIL and Al-Qaida-linked recruitment and violence in the West of the continent." Unfortunately, the situation has further deteriorated,

and this trend is of even greater concern today as the Islamic State in West Africa Province in the Lake Chad Basin reinforces its links to the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara.

In Europe, there are concerns over the anticipated release this year of approximately 1,000 terrorism-related convicts, including “frustrated travelers” and returned foreign terrorist fighters, which is compounded by persisting concerns over the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes. The continued threat of online terrorist radicalization and ISIL-inspired attacks by lone actors are also of concern.

In Asia, ISIL’s affiliate in Afghanistan suffered a major setback in November last year, with its virtual expulsion from what had been its Afghan headquarters in Nangarhar province. Nonetheless, ISIL remains active, ambitious and threatening in the country, and has established informal contacts with other terrorist groups.

In South-East Asia, securing porous maritime borders to prevent the movement of foreign terrorist fighters is a challenge. Another persisting concern is the role of women in the operational planning, financing and execution of terrorist attacks in the region.

Mr. President,

I would now like to highlight a few important activities of my Office which are mentioned in the report.

These efforts are only possible thanks to the generous financial support from all our donors, including our three largest donors, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Qatar and the European Union.

You will recall that in our previous briefing I reported on the development by the United Nations System of “Key Principles” to support Member States with regard to the protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children with links to UN-listed terrorist groups.

The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in my Office is now finalizing a project with UNODC and CTED to support requesting Member States in this area based on those principles and the Addendum to the Madrid Guiding Principles.

The report also shows that countering the financing of terrorism should remain a key focus area. ISIL may still have as much as 300 million US dollars in financial reserves.

The need to cut access to funds for terrorists was reiterated by the Council in resolution 2462 (2019). In response to this resolution, and in consultation with CTED, UNCCT has expanded its capacity-building efforts by developing a comprehensive global counter-terrorism financing programme.

In the area of law enforcement and border security, the implementation of the multi-agency United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme led by my Office to support Member States in implementing Security Council resolutions 2178 (2014), 2396 (2017) and 2482 (2019), has gained momentum. We currently have 33 confirmed beneficiaries in different regions, and are at different stages of implementation in several pilot countries, including Azerbaijan, Ghana, Sudan and Togo.

The Secretary-General's report also emphasizes that the diversion of small arms and light weapons, materials, and improvised explosive device components and precursors continues to aggravate the situation in conflict zones.

In this regard, the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) is launching a pilot project in Central Asia in collaboration with CTED as well as UNODC and ODA on the nexus between organized crime and terrorism with a focus on the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their supply to terrorists, in line with Security Council resolutions 2370 (2017) and 2482 (2019).

During the reporting period, my Office has also continued to collaborate with partners to further the implementation of other relevant Security Council resolutions. Just a couple of days ago, Ms. Coninx and I briefed the Counter-Terrorism Committee on the increasing cooperation between UNOCT and CTED, and our efforts to ensure that our capacity building activities respond to CTED recommendations.

Last week, the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre presented its work on strategic communications during an Open Briefing of the Counter-Terrorism Committee on countering terrorist narratives in line with Security Council resolution 2354 (2017).

CTED, INTERPOL and the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre have organized regional expert workshops to enhance the implementation of Security Council resolution 2341 (2017) on the protection of critical infrastructure and resolution 2396 (2017) on "soft" targets.

My Office has also developed a global programme on the protection of vulnerable targets, in close coordination with CTED and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. On Monday we launched a new global programme on the security of major sporting events and the promotion of sports and its values to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism, in partnership with CTED, the UN Alliance of Civilizations, UNICRI and ICSS based in Qatar.

Mr. President,

As both this Council and the General Assembly have repeatedly emphasized, international counter-terrorism cooperation, at all levels and with all relevant stakeholders, is indispensable. I therefore welcome your initiative to invite a civil society briefer to this meeting. Civil society has an active role to play in efforts to prevent and counter terrorism, as indicated in resolutions 2178 (2014) and 2396 (2017).

The Madrid Guiding Principles and Addendum thereto also emphasize the importance of community engagement and civil society participation in addressing the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon, particularly women and youth organizations, as civil society's views are crucial to effective, context-specific rehabilitation and reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their families.

Mr. President,

My Office continues to sustain the momentum from the first United Nations High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States held in 2018, through the organization of regional high-level conferences addressing priority issues under the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Security Council resolutions.

Since my last briefing, we have held successful regional conferences in partnership with the Governments of Belarus, Hungary and the United Arab Emirates, with strong participation from Member States, civil society and regional and international organizations.

Next week, we will convene a joint conference with the Government of Switzerland and the OSCE in Vienna, under the theme “Foreign Terrorist Fighters – Addressing Current Challenges”. In mid-March, we will organize a regional conference with Trinidad and Tobago and CARICOM on the implementation of the regional counter-terrorism strategy.

At the same time, preparations are gaining speed for the second “Counter-Terrorism Week” at the United Nations from 29 June to 2 July 2020, including the 7<sup>th</sup> biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The Counter-Terrorism Week, which will contribute to the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of our Organization, will focus on building social and institutional resilience to terrorism. During those days, we will also hold the first-ever Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism and the Second United Nations High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States.

Mr. President,

At a time of heightened divisions among Member States, we cannot afford to jeopardize the global fight against terrorism.

I am encouraged by recent reports about the death of the leader of the Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, one of its deadliest regional affiliates.

I urge this Council and Member States to maintain and reaffirm their unity in the face of the persisting threat posed by ISIL, Al-Qaeda, their affiliates, and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

I urge the international community to maintain the sense of urgency and solidarity needed to save lives and support the victims and survivors of terrorism.

The United Nations System will continue, with determination, to play its role in support of Member States.

Thank you, Mr. President.