



**UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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

**Joint United Nations - OSCE - Switzerland Regional Conference  
On Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Addressing current challenges**

**11 February 2020  
Vienna, Austria**

*Your Excellency, Mr. Johannes Matyassy, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Switzerland;*

*Your Excellency, Mr. Thomas Greminger, Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe;*

*Your Excellency Ambassador Igli Hasani, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council;*

*Your Excellency Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of UNODC;*

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Allow me to start by remembering the victims of terrorism around the world. I respectfully request all of you to stand for a minute of silence in their honour. Thank you.

Let me begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the Government of Switzerland and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for partnering with my Office to organize, in close coordination with the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship, this joint High-Level Regional Conference on the evolving threat from foreign terrorist fighters--or FTFs.

I also welcome you all to this Conference which I know will allow practical and informative exchanges among senior representatives of governments, international and regional organizations, and civil society actors.

As a former diplomat to the OSCE, it is a pleasure for me to be back in this room, now for the second time in my capacity as United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism.

The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), is proud to have the OSCE as a close regional partner. Building stronger counter-terrorism partnerships has been one of the top priorities of my Office.

Today's Conference is an excellent example of the United Nations and its regional partners joining hands to promote the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and relevant Security Council resolutions.

It is also one of the concrete deliverables of the joint biennial Action Plan for 2019-2021 that I was delighted to sign with OSCE Secretary General Greminger last September in New York.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following the territorial defeat of ISIL in Iraq and Syria, foreign terrorist fighters have been trying to return home, relocate to safe havens, or to undermine other regions and countries often already destabilized by conflict.

In its most recent report, the Monitoring Team of the United Nations Al-Qaida and ISIL Sanctions Committee warns that ISIL foreign terrorist fighters continue to pose a terrorist threat over the short, medium and long terms on a scale many times greater than it was the case with Al-Qaida.

As the threat from terrorism endures and continues to evolve, we must adapt and learn from what has worked and what has not. Our response needs to be as agile and multifaceted as the threat.

Supporting Member States in building resilient institutions and societies and delivering meaningful and sustainable results to prevent and counter terrorism on the ground is a top priority.

Through high-level regional conferences, such as this one today, we are bringing Member States, international and regional organizations, and civil society together, to help strengthen global, regional and national counter-terrorism efforts under the auspices of the United Nations.

This is the seventh regional conference we have organized to build on and sustain the momentum created by the first United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, which was convened by the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, in June 2018.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me outline what I hope we will jointly achieve through this conference over the next two days.

First, I hope this Conference will provide an opportunity to discuss practical ways to assess and mitigate the risks posed by returning or relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

Investigating and trying suspected foreign terrorist fighters in accordance with due process and human rights, and rehabilitating and reintegrating former offenders, is essential to deterring further crimes, reducing the risk of recidivism and allowing societies to heal, without creating new grievances that terrorists could exploit.

The Addendum to the Madrid Guiding Principles, which was adopted by the United Nations Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) in 2018, is a key tool to assist Member States in addressing the tail-end of the foreign terrorist fighters' phenomenon.

In this context, my Office, in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) is implementing a programme to support Member States in developing comprehensive and tailored screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for persons with links to United Nations-listed terrorist groups.

Moreover, my Office is also developing a project to support Member States that have repatriated or wish to repatriate their citizens from conflict areas with the protection, prosecution, repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters, their associates and families.

Human rights and gender considerations will be critical components of these initiatives.

Second, I hope this conference will address the particularly complex situation of women and children associated with foreign terrorist fighters.

The United Nations Secretary-General has been deeply concerned with the plight of ISIL-associated women and children who are stranded in Iraq and Syria. He has directed the United Nations System to support requesting Member States on this issue, through an "all of UN" approach.

The international community must reaffirm and be guided by the principles of individual criminal responsibility, presumption of innocence, right to appeal, and the internationally recognized standards of justice.

As I told the Security Council just last week, 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.

The United Nations has developed a set of "Key Principles for the Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women and Children with Links to United Nations Listed Terrorist Groups." These principles have been disseminated across the United Nations System, including in the field, have been shared with Member States, and are accessible in our UNOCT website.

Third, I hope this conference will take stock of existing efforts to identify and detect returning or relocating FTFs, and discuss how the United Nations, the OSCE and other international and regional actors can further support Member States in addressing this significant challenge to law enforcement and security agencies, including border security and management authorities.

UNOCT is helping Member States in developing state of the art aviation and border security programmes, fully compliant with human rights standards, which can only succeed in an environment of international and regional cooperation.

We are implementing, in 33 countries, the flagship, multi-agency United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme, thanks to the generous support of the Netherlands, the State of Qatar, the European Union and the United States among other donors, to assist requesting Member States in meeting their obligations under relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Security Council Resolution 2396 calls on Member States to notify other countries of the travel, arrival, deportation or detention of individuals they believe to be terrorists, and urges Member States to use Passenger Name Record data (PNR), and Advance Passenger Information (API), to detect and interdict the transit of terrorists.

We must prioritize the implementation of this resolution, ensuring that the countries most affected by terrorism have the capacities and resources to do so. I would like to recognize here the long-standing work of the OSCE in the area of travel document security, as well as in promoting the use by participating States of API/PNR.

Fourth, this conference will provide an opportunity to discuss principled criminal justice responses related to relocating or returning FTFs and their affiliates, or those inspired or directed by them.

National criminal justice systems have been challenged to collect and share admissible evidence, including from the battlefield, cyberspace and financial investigations, to effectively prosecute foreign terrorist fighters.

They have also been challenged to ensure gender- and age-sensitive criminal justice, to account for the fact that perpetrators could also be victims, and to observe due process and fair trial standards.

I would like to recognize the role of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in this regard, and also express my appreciation for the work of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD), which is supporting domestic efforts in Iraq to hold ISIL accountable by collecting, preserving and storing

evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity and possible genocide committed by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq.

Jointly with INTERPOL, my Office has also launched a project to enhance information-sharing among Member States on foreign terrorist fighters. Together, we also developed a joint handbook on Using the Internet and Social Media for Counter-Terrorism Investigations, which we are using for capacity-building.

Fifth, I hope this conference will help promote the important role of civil society in addressing current challenges posed by foreign terrorist fighters, including those related to human rights, gender and youth considerations

Civil society organizations, in their diversity, have unique insights and understanding of their communities and local circumstances. They play a critical role in building social cohesion and understanding and laying the groundwork to prevent terrorist recruitment and support their communities in the event of a terrorist attack.

This conference was preceded by a civil society workshop, that my Office organized with the Global Center on Cooperative Security and the OSCE yesterday. We heard many excellent examples of effective and successful partnerships between civil society organizations and competent national authorities.

Civil society representatives have proposed valuable recommendations and innovative ideas. We look forward to make the best use of these recommendations.

This brings me to my final point, which is to update you on the preparations for the second United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week, which will be held from 29 June to 2 July 2020 in New York.

“Building Institutional and Social Resilience to Terrorism” will be the overarching theme of this year’s Counter-Terrorism Week, which will also contribute to the commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations by reflecting on the role of the Organization, and that of multilateralism, in addressing the global scourge of terrorism, one of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century.

The programme of the Counter-Terrorism Week will consist of three main elements. First, the conclusion of the seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, with the adoption—I hope—of a consensus resolution by the General Assembly.

Second, the first-ever Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism, on 30 June. This event will be a historic global gathering of Member States, civil society organizations and other key stakeholders to lift up the voices of victims and strengthen our collective commitment to address their needs and uphold their rights.

Third, the Second United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States on 1 and 2 July which will benefit from the outcomes of all the regional conferences we have held. This High-Level Conference will address a broad range of counter-terrorism priorities under the four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

I look forward to the active and high-level participation of all Member States and that of our international and regional partners.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude with a simple but strong call for a continued sense of vigilance, urgency and solidarity to address the evolving threat of terrorism.

The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has acknowledged that geopolitical tensions are at their highest since the turn of the century.

Divisions and the unpredictability of the political situation risks jeopardizing the global fight against terrorism.

We cannot afford to give ISIL, Al-Qaida, their affiliates, or any other terrorist group, opportunities to gain strength, create divisions, and spread terror.

Terrorists are playing a long game; they adapt quickly and have strategic patience as they look how to exploit our vulnerabilities. Similarly, our efforts need to be multifaceted, long-term oriented and express unity.

I urge Member States to be steadfast in assuming all their obligations and responsibilities under international, human rights and humanitarian law and to help those regions, countries and communities most affected by terrorism.

I thank you all for your attention and wish you fruitful discussions during the next two days.