



# UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

### **Faculty of International Relations, Belarusian State University**

#### **‘Combating the Evolving Threat of Terrorism’ 8 October 2018**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful for the invitation from Professor Shadurski to speak to you today.

Before joining the United Nations as Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism in September last year, I was serving as Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the United Nations and Austria in Vienna.

Having lived a long diplomatic career, it is always a pleasure to engage with students who will become the next generation of diplomats or experts in other fields such as business or academia.

This Faculty has a deserved reputation for producing highly skilled graduates who go on to have impressive and fulfilling careers.

As someone who has served abroad several times and now spends most of the day speaking English, I particularly welcome the emphasis here on learning foreign languages.

I joined the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1989, six years before this Faculty was established.

The start of my diplomatic career coincided with a turning point in political history with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

It was a turbulent period of instability and change.

There was no blueprint to follow, and little idea what would happen next.

Nearly thirty years on, many parts of the world are moving through similar turbulent times again, although thankfully not on the same scale as those Immanuel Velikovsky wrote about last century!

Globally, people are enjoying the highest standards of living in human history.

And yet, an ever-expanding economically, socially and environmentally interconnected system is pushing the capacities of institutions, communities and individuals to their limits.

The world has moved into a new and unsettling geopolitical phase.

Multilateral rules-based approaches have been fraying.

Re-establishing the state as the primary locus of power and legitimacy is the most attractive strategy of our times, but one that leaves many smaller states squeezed as the geopolitical sands shift.

International relations now play out in increasingly diverse and complex ways, which creates new risks and uncertainties.

That is why your studies here are so important - to provide you with the skills and knowledge you need to deal with the countless challenges you will face in your future careers.

This morning I want to talk about one of the most pressing global issues of our time - combatting the evolving threat of terrorism.

I plan to talk for about fifteen minutes to allow plenty of time for questions and discussion afterwards.

Terrorism remains a major threat to international peace and security. It hinders our efforts to promote and protect human rights and foster sustainable development.

It exacerbates conflicts, destabilizes entire regions and tries to drive a wedge between and within societies.

It is a complex and evolving global challenge that affects Belarus and every other country around the world.

The military defeat of Da'esh in Iraq and Syria last year means foreign terrorist fighters, often with their families, are on the move, returning home or relocating to old and new theatres of conflict.

While some may be disenchanted and ready to renounce violence, others are passing on expertise from the battlefield, recruiting new followers and carrying out attacks.

Homegrown terrorists, who have been prevented from travelling overseas, are testing the capacities of domestic security and intelligence agencies.

In some countries, the majority of terrorist plots and attacks are perpetrated by right-wing violent extremist groups.

The way terrorists operate, and the methods they use, have also evolved.

Today, the frontline against terrorism is increasingly in cyberspace - on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, VKontakte and many other alternatives.

Terrorists continue to exploit social media, encrypted communications and the dark web to spread propaganda, radicalize new followers and coordinate attacks.

There has been a shift towards less sophisticated attacks against softer targets that are more difficult to detect.

As the threat from terrorism continues to evolve, we must also adapt and learn lessons from what works and what does not.

The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was developed in 2006 to provide a comprehensive framework to address the scourge of terrorism.

The United Nations General Assembly reviews the Strategy every two years, making it a living document that reflects the counter-terrorism priorities of Member States.

In June, the General Assembly adopted a new resolution following the sixth review of this strategy, which sets a clear direction for the counter-terrorism efforts of the United Nations and Member States over the next two years.

The transnational nature of terrorist groups such as Da'esh, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram means we need multilateral cooperation more than ever before to address this challenge.

That is why the United Nations Secretary-General convened the first-ever High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States in New York at the end of June this year.

Over 1,000 participants from 150 Member States, 51 civil society organizations, 31 international and regional organizations and 25 United Nations entities came together to discuss practical and operational counter-terrorism issues.

Belarus was ably represented by Mr. Pavel Chichko, Secretary of the Inter-Ministerial Commission on Countering Extremism and Combating Terrorism under the auspices of the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus, and Ambassador Valentin Rybakov, Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

They told me how Belarus is tackling the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, especially by countering terrorist activities on the Internet and social media.

Apart from eating draniki and kholodnik, I am here in this beautiful city to attend a conference tomorrow on "Preventing and Countering Terrorism in the Digital Age", jointly hosted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Government of the Republic of Belarus.

These conferences enable those of us working on counter-terrorism issues to share best practices, build new partnerships and agree common goals.

Our collective work to tackle the scourge of terrorism cannot be effectively implemented if it is devoid of priorities and direction.

I would therefore like to set seven priorities for the international community to combat the evolving threat of terrorism, which I hope will also prompt an interesting discussion afterwards.

**First**, we need to strengthen international counter-terrorism cooperation and build new partnerships at global, regional and national levels.

Regional organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation have a key role to play.

There are many coalitions and networks that share actionable information to detect, identify, disrupt and prosecute terrorists.

There are several recent examples of terrorist plots that have been foiled through the sharing of information between security services.

But there is more that can be done to expand these networks and ensure that information is shared in a consistent, timely and secure way, especially in the regions and sub-regions most challenged by terrorism.

For example, we need to be better at sharing information on the identities of returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

United Nations Security Council resolution 2396, which was adopted last December, called on Member States to notify other countries of the travel, arrival, deportation or detention of individuals they believe to be terrorists.

We must prioritize the implementation of this resolution and ensure that countries most affected by terrorism have the capacities and resources to do so.

The United Nations Secretary-General has called for the establishment of a Network of Counter-Terrorism Coordinators to share information, expertise and best practices.

We are consulting Member States on how this network can add most value to existing mechanisms.

**Second**, we need to adopt comprehensive and inclusive “all-of-society” and “all-of-government” approaches to countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism.

There needs to be strong coordination between a broad range of partners, including law enforcement, security and intelligence agencies, civil society, the private sector, religious groups, health and education providers, academia and the criminal justice system.

We need to strengthen the resilience and cohesion of our societies, joining families, communities and the state together with a common purpose - to withstand terrorist ideologies and challenge those who espouse them.

We need to ensure that women play leading and meaningful roles in developing and implementing counter-terrorism policies and programmes.

We must tap into their expertise and ensure a gender inclusive approach to everything we do.

We also need to increase our support to civil society and other non-government organizations, who make a unique contribution to tackling terrorism and preventing violent extremism in their communities.

The United Nations Secretary-General has announced that we are considering establishing a new mechanism in the Office of Counter-Terrorism to ensure that the views of civil society are fully reflected in counter-terrorism policies and programmes.

**Third**, we need to make a strategic investment in young people to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism.

Terrorist groups made this strategic investment thirty years ago and continue to do so.

They have exploited the tendency in young men and women to look for a sense of purpose that feels unique and distinct from the social norm.

Most new recruits to terrorist organizations are between 17 and 27 years old.

Young people are often drawn to terrorism because of a lack of hope or feelings of economic or cultural marginalization. Terrorist recruiters prey upon their grievances.

But it does not have to be this way. We must redouble our efforts to win the hearts and minds of your generation and the generation after that.

Young people such as you are inspiring agents of change. We need to harness the energy of the 1.8 billion young people around the world by investing in their futures through increased education and employment opportunities.

Nelson Mandela was right when he described education as “the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”.

We also need to empower young people by giving them the tools they need to combat oppressive extremist narratives, xenophobia and hate speech.

**Fourth**, there needs to be a renewed and sustained focus on preventing terrorism and violent extremism.

Over the past fifteen years, the international community has mostly been focused on countering terrorism and responding to attacks.

Principled military and law enforcement measures are indispensable if we are to be effective in protecting the lives of citizens. But terrorism will never be defeated by military means alone.

We need to combine both “counter” and “prevent”.

This means focusing our efforts on the underlying conditions that cause young men and women to be lured by terrorism.

No one is born a terrorist, but we know that factors such as prolonged unresolved conflicts, lack of the rule of law and socioeconomic marginalization can all play a part in transforming ideas and grievances into terrorist acts.

Preventing and resolving conflicts and promoting the rule of law are our first lines of defence against terrorism.

**Fifth**, we must ensure that counter-terrorism measures fully respect human rights.

As the Secretary-General said in his landmark speech in London last November, “terrorism is fundamentally the denial and destruction of human rights, and the fight against terrorism will never succeed by perpetuating the same denial and destruction.”

**Sixth**, we need to highlight the tragic human cost of terrorism.

We must never forget the tens of thousands of people that have been injured, traumatized or lost their lives during terrorist attacks.

We all have an obligation to respect and uphold the rights of terrorism victims.

These victims include the children of foreign terrorist fighters, who will have to live with this stigma as they grow up.

We must offer practical, emotional and psychological support to the survivors of terrorist attacks so they can rebuild their lives as best they can.

We must also give a voice to the victims of terrorism, who are often overlooked and quickly forgotten.

They can play a vital role in countering the warped narratives of terrorists and violent extremists.

The first annual International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism in August was a fitting way to remember the communities around the world that are showing resilience in the face of terrorism every day.

**Lastly**, we must work more closely together to anticipate and prevent the threats of tomorrow.

Terrorists remain determined to find a weakness in our defences and exploit new technologies for their own twisted purposes.

We know they are researching new and devious ways to carry out attacks, such as the misuse of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, self-driving cars, or drones to commit chemical, biological or radiological attacks.

We must stay at least one step ahead of the terrorists.

So the international community, the private sector and academia need to share knowledge, expertise and resources on how we can prevent these innovative technologies becoming lethal terrorist weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The threat from terrorism is likely to be with us for many years to come. While some terrorist groups may be defeated, others will emerge.

But terrorism can never be accepted. We must fight it together, with methods that do not compromise our respect for the rule of law and human rights.

Member States have the primary responsibility for countering terrorism. National ownership of counter-terrorism efforts is essential if they are to succeed.

But the United Nations has a unique international convening role. We can help find multilateral solutions to complex global problems.

Countering terrorism is one of the top priorities of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres.

He has agreed a United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact with 38 United Nations entities, plus INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization, to enhance and improve coordination.

The United Nations is also delivering practical capacity-building support to Member States on key issues such as youth empowerment, border management, aviation security, prisoner de-radicalization and the needs of child returnees.

Terrorists want to provoke hatred and spread division. They want us to turn against each other. They cannot and must not be allowed to succeed.

Our refusal to be defeated by terrorism is our greatest asset in the fight against it.

We need to focus on what unites us, rather than what divides us, if we are to rid the world of the scourge of terrorism.

I understand there is a popular Belarusian proverb that says “who talks little hears better”. I have spoken long enough.

I would now welcome any comments or questions you have.

The floor is open. Thank you.