



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

“Promoting Interfaith Pluralism and Understanding for Prevention”

19 February 2019

**Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I would like to express my deep condolences to the Government and the people of Egypt for the terrorist attack perpetrated yesterday in Cairo.

We need to work closely together to prevent terrorism.

I would like to thank the Permanent Missions of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Spain for organizing this event in partnership with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

Fostering interfaith dialogue and spreading a message of peace through education and positive narratives, are key tools to prevent violent extremism and prejudice, which are ultimately rooting out terrorism.

The World Interfaith Harmony Week and other similar events help to promote the conditions where people of different faiths, identities and cultures can agree to respect views and beliefs different from their own intellectual and spiritual choices.

These initiatives are more necessary than ever to address the growing polarization and intolerance around the world.

We are witnessing an alarming rise in hate speech, xenophobia and other forms of bigotry, which can incite violence.

Sexual and gender-based violence continue to break societies.

Intolerance today spreads at lightning speed across the Internet and social media, compounded by mis-information and dis-information.

Perhaps most disturbingly, hate is moving into the political mainstream.

Hatred is easy to get out of the bottle but it's very hard to put it back.

That is why we must all work together to build societies that are truly respectful and inclusive, where diversity is seen as positive and enriching, rather than a threat.

This approach will help to achieve our 2030 Agenda objective of building more peaceful, just and resilient societies.

It will also help prevent terrorism and push back on the spread of violent extremism conducive to it.

All of this is in line with the United Nations' overall emphasis on "prevention", which the Secretary-General has emphasized the "golden thread" in the work of the entire Organization.

So how can we achieve this goal?

First, we must reject every attempt to target people because of their spiritual choice, their ethnicity, race or nationality, or any other form of identity.

At the same time, our efforts must fully respect universal human rights. This includes respect for freedom of beliefs, freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination of any kind.

Second, we should promote positive narratives, which spread a culture of peace, as persuasive alternatives to the oppressive propaganda of violent extremist groups.

This is a critical aspect where the United Nations can play a useful role in supporting Member States. My Office is now working with the Mission of Jordan to create a high-level opportunity where Leaders can provide strategic guidance on this important issue of addressing terrorist narratives.

Separately, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in my Office is also providing training for Member States to enhance their strategic communication capacities to prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism, for example on data-driven social media analytics and on dissemination channels on the Internet.

Third, we need to strengthen the resilience and cohesion of our societies, joining families, communities and the state together with a common purpose - to withstand the narratives of hate, violence and terror, and challenge those who espouse them.

We must also ensure that women are fully involved as drivers and leaders of our efforts on this track.

We should increase our support to civil society and other non-government organizations, which make a unique contribution to tackling violent extremism in their communities.

As we have just heard from my colleague Mr. Miguel Moratinos, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and other UN bodies are supporting Member States to deliver a range of programmes and policies that promote tolerance and respect for diversity.

The Secretary-General's Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng has been leading UN efforts to follow-up on the Plan of Action launched by the Secretary-General in July 2017 for religious leaders and actors to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.

Fourth, we need to harness the creativity and energy of young people to tackle intolerance and violent extremism.

My Office is now working to strengthen our engagement with youth through the development of a global youth programme.

We have already been working with UNESCO and the League of Arab States on Promoting Dialogue, Tolerance and Openness through Media to Counter Narratives Associated with Terrorism in the Arab Region to increase the resilience of youth communities against radicalization.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I wish you fruitful discussion.

Thank you.