



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

Remarks by Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov

**“Rehabilitation, and Reintegration of Women Formerly Associated with
Terrorist Groups”**

**Side-event on the occasion of the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women
11 March 2019**

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the leadership of Qatar, Pakistan and Canada in bringing us together today.

I would like to take a moment to remember and pay tribute to the victims and survivors of the terrorist bombings in Madrid, Spain, which took place 15 years ago today, on 11 March 2004. 193 people were killed and over 2000 injured in this tragedy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the territorial collapse of ISIL, large numbers of women associated with the group, many with young children, are trapped in camps or being detained in Iraq and Syria.

In Africa, Boko Haram and Al Shabab have destroyed entire communities and recruited and kidnapped women and girls into their ranks.

We like to think in binary terms. Are these women victims or perpetrators? Are they guilty or innocent? The reality is rarely, if ever, that simple.

At one extreme, some women actively sought to join terrorist groups. Others were subjugated and coerced into joining. Some may be guilty of the most flagrant crimes – others have been bystanders and did not, or could not, escape their situation.

Many have been subject to violence and are left stigmatized, rejected by their own communities.

This tragic situation is now presenting the international community with a daunting and complex challenge, to deliver on multiple objectives:

First, addressing the immediate humanitarian crisis where many women and children are held in camps and detentions without access to basic services and with an uncertain future;

Second, ensuring individualized screening to identify victims and possible perpetrators;

Third, supporting repatriation of those who wish to return to the countries of their origin, in compliance with the non-refoulement principle;

Fourth, ensuring accountability for terrorist crimes, based on due process and fair trials principles;

And fifth, supporting rehabilitation and reintegration of women, men and children – over the long term, which will be essential to break the vicious cycle of violence.

Addressing this challenge is not only about international counter-terrorism but also human rights and humanitarian obligations.

Indeed, it is a challenge for all of us to effectively support the countries where these women and girls are present, as well as those countries who need to take them back home.

This issue will demand political leadership and a long-term vision to mend divisions and build inclusive and peaceful societies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The resolutions of the Security Council and the revisions of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the General Assembly reflect a growing awareness that we need gender analysis and we need to ensure women's leadership and participation to be effective in preventing and countering terrorism.

I am encouraged also by the growing research and body of evidence available to policy-makers, such as the report recently published by UNDP and the International Civil Society Action Network on "Invisible Women – the Gendered Dimension of Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration from Violent Extremism".

However, we still have a long way to go to translate rhetoric into practice and to ensure that this dialogue over global policy translates into viable solutions on the ground.

Effective reintegration and rehabilitation will require more trained professionals, including psychologists, health care providers and child protection workers.

These workers will have to be able to function in a gender-sensitive manner. They also have to be able to address a high likelihood of trauma and the consequences of sexual and gender-based violence.

At the same time, civil society organizations, including women's organizations, are playing a key role in facilitating individuals' rehabilitation and reintegration back in to their communities.

It is critical that we also protect and promote this space for civil society, so they can effectively operate and contribute to stamping out the scourge of terrorism. This includes policy and legal frameworks which provide the necessary room for such organizations to effectively operate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mainstreaming gender and promoting gender equality will continue to remain a high priority in the work of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, with a dedicated interagency working group to be chaired by UN Women.

My Office, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, is committed to integrating a gender perspective and promoting women's empowerment and gender equality. This includes strengthening support for capacity building projects dedicated to these efforts.

As violent extremist groups exploit gender dynamics and manipulate stereotypes and norms to advance their objectives, it is critical to ensure that every strategy, policy, programme, and project established to prevent and counter this violence integrates a gender perspective throughout.

In this regard, the Office will continue mainstreaming gender in its activities and advocating for this to be addressed by Member States, including through the development of national plans of action to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

We are also actively engaged with UN Women, CTED and other Compact entities on gender-sensitive programming around the world. I would like to mention the very important role of our close ally UNODC in this regard.

I look forward to hearing today other ideas and concrete proposals how the United Nations could step up its efforts to help Member States address the situation of women associated to terrorism.

Thank you.