



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

Security Council High-Level Open Debate on “Addressing the issue of linkages between terrorism and organized crime”

6 August 2020

Madam President,
Excellencies and Distinguished Representatives,

I would like to thank the Security Council under the presidency of the Republic of Indonesia for convening this open debate on addressing the linkages between terrorism and organized crime.

I am especially pleased to be here with Ms. Ghada Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Madam President,

The report of the Secretary General sets out how the ability of terrorists to draw on organized crime, whether domestic or transnational, online or offline, can exacerbate the threat posed by terrorism to international peace and security.

Last month, we discussed this complex threat during the first Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations on the “Strategic and Practical Challenges of Countering Terrorism in a Global Pandemic Environment”.

Over 1,000 people participated in ten interactive sessions during the week, including representatives of 134 Member States, 88 civil society and private sector organizations, 47 international and regional organizations and 40 United Nations entities.

I am delighted that we were also joined by Ms. Waly and Ambassador Djani, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations and Chair of the Security Council’s 1267 Sanctions Committee in some of the Week’s most important sessions.

The Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week helped maintain the momentum we built over the last year through eight Regional High-level Conferences on critical counter-terrorism issues covering all four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

It improved our collective understanding of the impact and potential consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on the terrorism landscape, as well as Member States’ counter-terrorism needs, priorities and expectations, and other key stakeholders’ views, including civil society organizations and the private sector.

Our discussions showed there is a shared understanding and concern among Member States that terrorists are generating funds from illicit trafficking in drugs, goods, natural resources and antiquities, as well as kidnapping for ransom, extorting and committing other heinous crimes. This concern is clearly reflected in the report of the Secretary-General.

Speakers highlighted a significant rise in cybercrime in recent months, with a 350 per cent increase in phishing websites in the first quarter of this year.

Many of these digital attacks have been against hospital and healthcare systems, hindering their vital work in responding to the pandemic.

Speakers also noted the importance of ensuring that efforts to address the nexus between terrorism and organized crime are proportionate to the threat and fully respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

These views will feed into our postponed second, in-person counter-terrorism week next year, which will coincide with the seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Madam President,

We are yet to fully understand the impact and consequences of the pandemic on global peace and security, and more specifically on organized crime and terrorism.

We know that terrorists are exploiting the significant disruption and economic hardships caused by COVID-19 to spread fear, hate and division and radicalize and recruit new followers. The increase in internet usage and cybercrime during the pandemic further compounds the problem.

We heard from Executive Director Waly about how Member States are tackling the nexus between terrorism and organized crime.

The report of the Secretary-General also includes a number of examples of how United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities are providing capacity-building support and technical assistance to Member States to address the linkages between terrorism and organized crime, as requested by Security Council resolution 2482.

The General Assembly mandated the Office of Counter-Terrorism to lead the United Nations System counter-terrorism efforts by enhancing coherence and coordination, including through the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact. We also continue to work closely with the subsidiary bodies of the Security Council that are mandated to enhance the capacity of Member States to prevent and respond to terrorist acts.

The Global Compact leverages the expertise of each entity in supporting legislative, policy and operational measures to fight organized crime and terrorism financing.

For example, UNODC chairs the Global Compact working group on criminal justice, legal responses and countering the financing of terrorism.

CTED chairs the Global Compact working group on border management and law enforcement relating to counter-terrorism.

And INTERPOL chairs the Global Compact working group on emerging threats and critical infrastructure protection, using its analytical capacity and access to international law enforcement databases.

My Office works closely with UNODC, CTED, INTERPOL and other entities to assist Member States in anti-money laundering and counter-financing of terrorism; interdiction and border security; law enforcement; prison management; combatting illicit trafficking, and other efforts to address threats to international peace and security.

Together with UNODC, OICT, CTED, and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, my Office is also developing a project to enhance criminal justice responses to prevent and combat the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons and disrupt their illicit supply to terrorist groups.

The United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme – led by my Office in partnership with CTED, UNODC, OICT, ICAO, and INTERPOL – supports Member States in building detection capabilities through the provision of legislative assistance, establishment of Passenger Information Units, and installation of the required hardware and software systems.

To date, 36 Member States are formally participating in this programme, contributing to their efforts to map and identify links between suspected terrorists and serious criminals.

The management of violent extremist prisoners is also crucial in addressing the nexus between terrorism and organized crime.

UNOCT, UNODC and CTED are supporting Member States in building the capacity of their prison services to prevent radicalization to violence among prisoners.

UNOCT, UNODC, UNICRI, and INTERPOL also work together to support Member States' efforts to prevent organized crime and terrorist groups from gaining access to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials and dual use equipment, including through the Darknet.

Madam President,

The adoption of Resolution 2482 underscores the importance of Member States working together to strengthen the global response to the linkages between international terrorism and organized crime.

More work needs to be undertaken to study how these linkages evolve, without automatically conflating both threats.

Member States are rightly focused on tackling the health emergency and human crisis caused by COVID-19. But we must not forget or be complacent about the continuing threat of terrorism.

In many parts of the world, terrorists are exploiting local grievances and poor governance to regroup and assert their control.

The pandemic has the potential to act as a catalyst in the spread of terrorism and violent extremism by exacerbating inequalities, undermining social cohesion and fuelling local conflicts.

We must continue our fight against terrorist groups and criminal networks to deny them the opportunity to exploit the COVID-19 crisis.

Collective action and international cooperation are needed now more than ever.

Thank you for your attention.