



Launch of the UNOCT International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism in Doha, Qatar

PRESS RELEASE

New York, 7 December 2020 - The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), in partnership with the State of Qatar, launched today the International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism, established as a UNOCT Programme Office in Doha. Member States, including representatives of Diplomatic Missions in Doha, international and regional organizations, civil society organizations, and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities attended the virtual event.

In his welcoming remarks, **Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism, Vladimir Voronkov**, noted that *“today marks a major milestone in the strategic partnership between the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the State of Qatar. Thanks to the strong political and financial support of Qatar, UNOCT is able to provide significant assistance to Member States and other actors that are tackling the scourge of terrorism.”*

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, the State of Qatar, H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, noted in his opening remarks that *“The State of Qatar's keenness to host the International Hub on Behavioural Insights stems from its unequivocal policy based on the values, culture, and teachings of the real Islam, which reject terrorism in shape or form and regardless of its causes or motives and its belief that combating this abhorrent phenomenon cannot be achieved individually but requires a holistic and comprehensive approach, combining national, regional and international efforts, to address the root causes of terrorism and confront violent extremist ideologies.”*

Major General Abdul Aziz Abdullah Al-Ansari, Director of the Department of International Cooperation and Chairman of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee, Ministry of Interior, the State of Qatar, noted that *“In view of its uniqueness on the global level, the International Hub aims to conduct and develop research in the field of behavioral sciences to better understand the motivations and factors that contribute to radicalization leading to violent extremism and terrorism, and to provide capacity-building assistance to member states, regional organizations, and partners in the civil society, with a view to developing and implementing programs, projects and initiatives that integrate behavioral insights to counter terrorism based on scientific foundations and theoretical tenets”.*

The ‘International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism’ has been established as a UNOCT Programme Office in Doha, the State of Qatar, through an Agreement signed between UNOCT and the State of Qatar on 15 December 2019, as well as a contribution agreement signed on 8 December 2020, to



perform three core functions: (conduct and advance research in behavioural sciences to better understand the drivers and factors contributing to radicalization leading to violent extremism and terrorism; provide capacity-building assistance to Member States, regional organizations and civil society partners to develop and implement programmes, projects and initiatives that integrate behavioural insights to counter terrorism; and promote communication, outreach and partnerships to share knowledge, expertise, experiences and lessons learned on behaviourally informed counter-terrorism interventions.

The event also included remarks from Achim Steiner, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Ghada Fathi Waly, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); Miguel Ángel Moratinos, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC); Michèle Coninsx, Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED). ([Quotes from their statements below](#))

Participants discussed the concept and application of behavioural insights in the counter-terrorism context, including how research-based and empirically validated behavioural interventions can help support the development and delivery of counter-terrorism policy and programming. Heads of the [Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact](#) provided perspectives, experiences and good practices on the integration of behavioural insights to prevent and counter terrorism.

UNOCT also delivered a presentation on the future plans for the Doha Hub, including its programme of work on integrating behavioural insights into counter-terrorism through research, capacity-building, and the promotion of information sharing and partnerships. Fahad Al Kuwari of Hamad Bin Khalifa University, the State of Qatar, and Paul Daniell, Executive Director of the Strategy and Capability in the New South Wales Government, also delivered programmatic presentations at the event.

QUOTES FROM DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS AT THE SOFT LAUNCH

Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of UNOCT:

“The hard work to develop and implement a global behavioural insights agenda to counter terrorism starts now. We will work in collaboration with Member States, international and regional organizations, civil society, the private sector and other counter- terrorism partners—especially our Global Compact partners who shared their views today—in this long, innovative and very promising journey.”

H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, the State of Qatar

“Realizing the important role of this Hub in combating terrorism, the State of Qatar provided a financial contribution of US \$5 million to be used for the establishment of this Hub and the implementation of its programme of work over a period of three years.”

Major General Abdul Aziz Abdullah Al-Ansari, Director of the Department of International Cooperation and Chairman of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee, Ministry of Interior, the State of Qatar

“Rather than relying on assumptions based on traditional models to explain behaviour, the International Hub is designed to rely on research in social, cognitive, behavioural and psychological sciences to



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understand what actually affects people's decisions and behaviours. This will help ensure that policies and programs respond to the actual motivations and are thus more effective."

Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

"Conventional policy design, policy making, and policy debates often ignore behavioural sciences and insights, hereby ignoring that context matters; be they geographical, historical, political or cultural contexts. These approaches fail to recognise citizens as agents of change who are driven by more than stimulus and incentives. [...] We have to rethink our policy making"

Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

"UNODC research draws on insights from the behavioural sciences, for example for our flagship World Drug Report, and our longstanding experience with implementing surveys in a number of countries and contexts can contribute to the development of research methodology."

H.E. Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

"The concept itself is a forward-looking approach into means of countering and preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism based on science and research. Let us agree that no one is born as a terrorist. Nor that all terrorists are essentially religious extremists. Therefore, it is important to understand the precursors of a terrorist's action and the characteristics of a terrorist's mind. ."

Ms. Michèle Coninx, Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate

"Behaviours that contribute to radicalization leading to violence can't be considered in isolation, but must be understood through a gender lens and connected to the environment in which they occur. [...] The findings of the International Hub will, add a vital new dimension in our understanding of the threats of terrorism and violent extremism, and we look forward to applying those findings in our own ongoing engagement with Member States."

Mr. Muhammad Rafiuddin Shah, Chief of Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch of UNOCT

"Our partnership with the State of Qatar is allowing us to pursue innovative and cutting-edge ideas to counter the scourge of terrorism around the world. [...] UNOCT, Members States and other partners will benefit from having the Doha Hub in close proximity to beneficiaries and providers of technical assistance."

Mr. Fahad Al Kuwari, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, the State of Qatar

"We are confident that the rich and advanced academic landscape in the State of Qatar will be the perfect incubator for the nascent International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism. Over the past two decades, Qatar has built a unique academic ecosystem fostered by cross-sectoral collaborations with leading universities, firms and international organizations."

Mr. Paul Daniell, Executive Director, Strategy and Capability, New South Wales Government Education Standards Authority & Instructor, The University of Sydney, Australia

"The best behavioural insights interventions are those that are forensically clear about quite distinct behaviours, and in what situation we want what sort of person to behave differently from the way they



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currently do. Behavioural insights techniques are often impactful at a tactical level. But over time, and when employed across a number of interventions, they can add up to significant shifts in behaviour.”

For more information:

- For all materials and full statements, please visit:
<https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/behavioural-insights> (English)
<https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ar/behavioural-insights> (Arabic)
- Contact: Ms. Laurence Gerard (gerardl@un.org) and Ms. Yuli Yang (yuli.yang@un.org)
- Follow us on Twitter @UN_OCT and through the event’s key hashtags: #UNOCTDohaHub #UNiteToCounterTerrorism



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