



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM
UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT)**

**Statement by Mr. Raffi Gregorian
Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General and Director
United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)**

**UNDP PVE Digital Conference (Oslo III), *Tides of Change: Emerging trends in violent extremism and the future of prevention*, Session: ‘One Plan, Seventy-nine Recommendations, Five years: The UN Secretary General’s Plan of Action’
14 June 2021**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Experts,
Dear Colleagues,

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, wherever this finds you.

I would like to commend UNDP and Norway for organising this discussion at such a critical time for the international counter-terrorism system. This Conference helps set the stage for the second United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week that starts next Monday with the General Assembly’s biennial review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and concludes on June 30 with the closing session of the High-Level Conference for Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies.

The debate caps nearly four months of intense negotiations among Member States on a draft resolution which will give us guidance for the next two years. As was evident from Member States’ views in last July’s Virtual CT Week and during the General Debate of the UN General Assembly in September 2020, the need to prevent and counter violent extremism, or PCVE, remains high on the international agenda five years after the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, or PVE, was presented to the General Assembly.

Twenty-sixteen was also the 10th anniversary of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2006, which was itself adopted five years after the attacks of 9/11.

But it is worth remembering the context in which the PVE Plan of Action was developed. The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) had already developed several doctrinal memoranda in the early 2010s, and in 2014 the Security Council had included a number of operative paragraphs under the heading countering violent extremism in resolution 2178, but work on the UN Plan of Action kicked into high gear in 2015, prompted by attacks in Paris in January and the White House summit on countering violent extremism, and against the backdrop of the new Sustainable Development Goals.

But preventing and countering violent extremism took on a special urgency in response to the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon in which in little more than a year more than 40,000 mostly young people from over 100 countries headed to Syria and Iraq to join the so-called

ISIL caliphate was declared after the fall of Mosul. Policy makers and practitioners were at a loss to understand let alone what made people go in such large numbers, or why frustrated FTFs and other ISIL adherents would heed the call to crowd-source terror by killing at home.

So now five years after the Plan of Action was presented and two years after the territorial defeat of ISIL, what have we learned? How do we ensure we understand the emerging risks and threats, and what do we know about preventative measures that work?

The United Nations PVE Plan of Action builds out Pillars I and IV of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by focusing on measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, and to ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law, as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism. It is overseen by a High-Level Action Group chaired by the Secretary-General, while a PCVE working group under the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, chaired by UNOCT with UNAOC, UNDP, and UNESCO as vice-chairs, helps coordinate the UN's wide range of PCVE activities. As indication of how active the UN has been in this area, in 2020 UNOCT was able to collect data on 450 PCVE projects benefiting 98 countries across all priority areas of the United Nations PVE Plan of Action.

One of the Plan's key recommendations is for Member States and regional organizations to consider developing their own National and Regional Plans of Action.

Since the plan's roll-out, the number of regional, national and local action plans inspired by Plan of Action has grown rapidly thanks to the United Nations and a National Action Plans task force with Hedayah, UNDP, the Commonwealth Secretariat and several GCTF members. We have been able to establish, with support from UNDP, the status of PCVE strategies and national action plans in 63 countries and five regional organizations, of which 25 countries and two regional organizations that have prepared them with support of the United Nations, with many others seeking assistance. But plans are outputs, not outcomes.

UNOCT together with UNDP, UNESCO, UN WOMEN, UNODC and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations have been at the forefront of the UN's PCVE efforts. The UN's interventions have included work in counter and alternative narratives, youth engagement and empowerment, work focused on gender and human rights, interfaith dialogue and the use of education as a tool for prevention.

This work is diverse, going from small, grassroots, hyper-local projects, to large, complex, multiyear programmes. Many of these programmes and projects are genuinely innovative, tailored to local context and able to be sensitive to changes in the terrorist threat profile.

Importantly, the number of collaborative projects – jointly implemented by two or more United Nations entities – increased from 57 by the end of 2018, to over 145 projects in 2021. UNOCT and UNDP are close partners in two major joint initiatives in this regard, both with the generous funding support of the European Union: the STRIVE Asia project and phase II of a joint EU-UNDP-UNOCT PCVE Programme in South East Asia.

An important new development is the integrated approach of the new Global Framework on United Nations Support on Syria/Iraq Third Country National Returnees, coordinating actions of 15 United Nations entities.

Although we have made good progress supporting Member States' prevention efforts, we need to do more to accomplish the vision of the PVE Plan of Action.

I would like to suggest five points that will help us build upon the success of the PVE Plan of Action together in overcoming the threat of violent extremism and terrorism.

First, we must continue to emphasise the Plan's key recommendation- that Member States and regional organisations consider developing whole-of-society PCVE Action Plans in a multidisciplinary manner. This requires broadening our engagement with civil society organizations, religious actors, academia, and the private sector.

Secondly, we need to build more resilient societies together. This is particularly important in light of societal strains revealed or exacerbated by the pandemic. That is why we have been engaging closely with the co-facilitators of the current review of the Global Counterterrorism Strategy to ensure Member States maintain consensus on PCVE in general, but particularly on the need for resilience.

Third, we must ensure that the United Nation systems is able to respond to the evolving threat of violent extremism, such as transnational neo-Nazism, white supremacy and other racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist movements; the exploitation of new technology by terrorist groups; and the evolving, decentralised threat of ISIL and Al-Qaeda in Africa, among others.

Such efforts require evidence-based and cutting-edge research and analysis on the transnational linkages, underlying drivers, and gender and social media dimensions of violent extremism. UNOCT's new Behavioural Insights Hub in Doha should be able to help inform better design for PCVE programmes, which for many years have been based largely on trial and error. We need to build on studies like those UNDP conducted on violent extremism in Africa and South-East Asia, while taking advantage of the work done by researchers in the RESOLVE and Radicalization Awareness Networks, as well as various GCTF initiatives, the activities of its inspired institutions—Hedayah and GCERF—as well as Etidal, the Sawab Centre, Tech Against Terror, and others.

Fourth, we can and will do more to enhance the protection and promotion of human rights in our efforts aimed at countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism, while pursuing sustainable development. As the Secretary-General commented when presenting the Plan of Action in January 2016, “countering violent extremism should not be counter-productive.” That is why in UNOCT we are working to mainstream both human rights and gender dimensions into all our capacity-building programmes.

Lastly, a critical focus of my Office moving forward is enhancing UN coordination and cooperation to better address the needs of Member States implementing the United Nations PVE Plan of Action.

The 43 entities that make up the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact should continue working towards a coordinated ‘One-UN’ approach in PCVE, which I believe will attract further support among Member States and our civil society partners.

UNOCT remains fully committed to realising the comprehensive, inclusive and inspiring vision of the United Nations PVE Plan of Action in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

Thank you.