



# UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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## **“Our Common Agenda” and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Efforts**

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### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning, good afternoon or good evening to all of you, from wherever you may be joining us. My thanks to the Permanent Missions of Norway and the United Arab Emirates as well as our partners from INTERPOL and the Global Center on Cooperative Security for organizing this timely event.

This has been a year of deep reflection regarding the international response to terrorism. Twenty years have passed since the Security Council adopted resolution 1373 and galvanized international counter-terrorism efforts in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

This past June, we held a successful Second UN Counter-Terrorism Week, during which Member States agreed on the most substantive and comprehensive review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy since its adoption 15 years ago.

The General Assembly also noted in its declaration on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, that terrorism remains a serious threat to international peace and security and a priority for Member States.

As we just heard from Assistant Secretary-General Turk, the Secretary-General shares these concerns. His report on *Our Common Agenda* identifies terrorism as a ‘strategic security risk’ that requires continued cooperation as part of a *New Agenda for Peace*.

While the Secretary-General has often noted that terrorist groups are present in many of the protracted conflicts with which the international community is grappling, it is useful to pause for a moment to consider what this means.

First of all, when referring to terrorism in protracted conflicts, we are speaking mainly of Al-Qaida, Da'esh and their affiliates or splinter groups that have grafted themselves onto local insurgencies, often increasing their lethality, profile and their regional or even international reach – phenomena presaged in 2009 by John Mackinlay's *Insurgent Archipelago* and David Kilcullen's *Accidental Guerrilla*.

As a result, strategies that were effective for countering relatively small terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida as it was in 2001 proved to be of limited value against a terrorist insurgency like Da'esh. At its height Da'esh included not only huge numbers of Iraqi and Syrian nationals, but also attracted an estimated 40,000 plus fighters from over 80 countries.

It was in response to this "foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon" that the Security Council adopted resolution 2178 in September 2014 obliging all Member States to criminalize acts related to traveling for the purposes of engaging in terrorist activity. But resolution 2178 also included several operative paragraphs related to all-of-society approaches to counter violent extremism as a means of addressing the factors pushing and pulling recruits to join Da'esh.

Subsequent resolutions addressed related issues such as countering terrorist narratives or rehabilitating and reintegrating former terrorist offenders, themes which the General Assembly went on to address this year's biennial review of the 2006 Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the first pillar of which is addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

In my view, these resolutions collectively have moved counter-terrorism from a field originally designed to defeat the use of terrorist tactics by small groups into an enterprise that is more akin to counter-insurgency, which to be conducted effectively requires a comprehensive political, economic, social, military and law enforcement response conducted in a human rights compliant manner. Which is how we conceptualize counter-terrorism today, despite the fact neither insurgency nor terrorism has an internationally agreed upon definition. The lines between peacebuilding and peacekeeping set down in the original Agenda for Peace have now become thoroughly blurred.

So how does this relate to *Our Common Agenda* and a *New Agenda for Peace*? Well, a successful 'traditional' counter-insurgency—which historically may take a decade or more—addresses whatever *legitimate* grievances may be fueling popular support for the insurgents. Winning "hearts and minds," a term used in the successful Malayan counterinsurgency of the 1950s, is fundamentally about rebooting the social contract, which is at the root of *Our Common Agenda*.

So in developing the *New Agenda for Peace*, we need to ask ourselves whether the threat landscape in 2023, shaped by transformative technologies, will require another step change like the one from represented by UNSCR 1373 to UNSCR 2178? Or how to adapt today's whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to stay relevant to the evolving nature of the terrorist threat?

That is because while terrorists and violent extremists exploit growing polarization, dissatisfaction and distrust within societies, the interplay between terrorism, weak governance, armed conflict, and organized crime adds complexity to an already difficult challenge.

Yet we also cannot simply artificially conflate these challenges. They each require appropriate instruments, the right amount of attention, and counter-terrorism needs to be integrated as part of sophisticated and comprehensive responses.

Counter-terrorism intersects with big public policy objectives for Member States and the United Nations, including sustainable development, sustaining peace, and human rights, objectives that are at the heart of the Secretary-General's report on *Our Common Agenda*.

Therefore, countering terrorism is not only *a part* of the Common Agenda, but it is also intertwined with progress *across* the Common Agenda. In this vein, there are strong synergies between the vision set out by the Secretary-General in his report, in terms of both objectives and methods, and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and its review.

Indeed, there are strong synergies with the efforts we are already undertaking to reinvigorate multilateral and inclusive counter-terrorism cooperation.

Since its establishment in 2017, UNOCT has prioritized the development of partnerships and breaking silos to better address terrorism and its underlying drivers through such a holistic and inclusive manner.

The Secretary-General's Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact is one of the largest coordination frameworks at the United Nations, across the Organization's three pillars of work, geared towards delivering as "one UN" in support of Member States, by bringing together 43 entities, and connecting them with focal points from over 130 Member States.

We have further strengthened our long-standing work on victims of terrorism; taken concrete action to mainstream human rights and a gender perspective across our mandated functions; and enhanced our engagement with civil society and the youth towards a better, more sustainable and effective paradigm to prevent and counter terrorism.

The High-Level Conference on Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism and the Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism that we will convene next year will further advance this important work, as will the new Human Rights and Gender Section we are standing up next month within UNOCT.

Consistent with the United Nations 2.0 proposed by the Secretary-General, we have positioned ourselves to leverage behavioural sciences and innovation for cutting edge policy and programming, including through our International Hub in Doha.

UNOCT is embracing the opportunities offered by new technologies to connect, collaborate and deliver more efficiently and effectively – while supporting Member States to both mitigate the vulnerabilities caused by transformative technologies and harness responsibly their potential.

So there is much already achieved and much ongoing upon which to build, but still so much more is needed in our collective pursuit of a world free from terrorism.

The Counter-Terrorism Weeks and series of regional high-level conferences convened by UNOCT since 2018 have spurred renewed policy dialogue with Member States, parliamentarians, regional organizations and civil society to foster cooperation and guide capacity-building.

The third Counter-Terrorism Week, including the next review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, will be in June 2023 just a few months ahead of the *Summit of the Future* proposed by the Secretary-General.

In the run-up to these next milestones, UNOCT looks forward to working with Member States, the UN family under the Secretary-General's leadership, and other partners to make progress in preventing and countering terrorism as part of a *New Agenda for Peace*.

Thank you.