



# UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

**Mr. Raffi Gregorian**

**Director and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**

**CT Week Side Event: “Addressing the Challenges of Fighters and Families Returning from Conflict Zones”**

**Opening Statement**

**21 June 2023, 15.00 – 16.30**

**at UN Secretariat - Conference Room 11 and online**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to be with you here today.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Republics of Iraq, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan; the Kingdom of the Netherlands; the United States of America; and the Bulan Institute for co-organizing this important and timely event.

More than four years after the fall of Baghouz, the repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals held in camps and places of detention in northeast Syria continues to demand our urgent attention.

Nearly 50,000 women and children, as well as 10,000 fighters are held in camps in northeastern Syria. Many adult males are also languishing in prisons and detention centers in substandard conditions without access to fair trials or due process. We cannot turn a blind eye to their plight.

You all heard on Monday the Secretary-General's and Under-Secretary-General Voronkov's clarion calls to repatriate, rehabilitate, and reintegrate. And you heard the moving accounts by the mother-daughter pair of returnees to Uzbekistan. So, there is not much I can usefully add about what goes on in—or even, in at least one case, under—Al Hol and other camps.

Frankly, I know I am supposed to talk about adults, but children come from adults. And depriving children of their liberty and education ought to be enough of an affront to our consciences that we don't need to also talk about what many in have described as a ticking time bomb in terms of security concerns.

In response to the Secretary-General's call to leverage and coordinate existing UN mandates and capacities in support of Member States, UNOCT and UNICEF launched in September 2021 the Global Framework for UN Support on Syria/Iraq Third Country National Returnees.

The Global Framework involves 15 UN entities and operates on two interconnected pillars.

The first pillar, led by UNICEF, focuses on the assistance, protection, and humanitarian needs of children and caregivers. The second pillar, led by UNOCT, promotes human rights-based security and accountability for offences committed by adults returning from conflict zones, as well as their rehabilitation and reintegration back into society.

Over the last two years, we have rolled out the Global Framework in various regions. As a first step, we completed two Joint Scoping Exercises in Iraq, with support from the Netherlands, and in the Maldives.

UNOCT also provided technical assistance under the security and accountability pillar to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, with the generous support of the European Union, and in support of national efforts in dealing with returnees and laying the groundwork for future returns.

While good progress has been made, the fact is that we moving too slowly. At the current rate it could take a decade or longer to repatriate everyone, while children continue to be born in the camps and boys entering puberty begin to be treated like adult fighters.

Moreover, it is imperative that we ensure accountability for crimes. I commend those Member States that have taken steps to repatriate their nationals and brought to justice those who have committed crimes.

As outlined today, some Member States have already implemented effective custodial and non-custodial rehabilitation programmes and post-release monitoring for adult offenders to prevent recidivism and facilitate community-based reintegration. While more needs to be done, these successful practices should serve as models for others to follow.

We must adopt a comprehensive approach that includes legal frameworks, criminal justice processes, and human rights-compliant screening and risk assessment procedures. This will ensure that justice is served and offer individuals a chance to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to society.

I implore our funding partners to contribute toward these efforts.

In conclusion Mr. Chair, let us come together, united in our commitment to ensuring accountability, and rehabilitate and reintegrate those who have returned from camps and places of detention in northeast Syria.

You can count on the continued support of UNOCT in this regard.

Thank you.