



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

**Remarks by Mr. Raffi Gregorian, Director and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General,
United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**

**Strong Cities-United Nations roundtable: “Unlocking the Potential of Cities to Address
Hate Speech”**

20 September 2023

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank Mr. Rosand and Ms. Nderitu for inviting UNOCT to partner in the organization of this roundtable.

The Secretary-General’s first-ever report on terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief, outlined Member States’ recognition of the role hateful content and narratives on racial supremacy play as motivations behind terrorist attacks carried out in line with these narratives.

Indeed, incitement to hatred, as well as structural discrimination, whether on racial, religious, or other prohibited grounds, are often the basis of these terrorist attacks.

While unjustifiable, hateful narratives do not appear out of nowhere. They frequently serve as precursors of violence by undermining democratic values, social stability, and cohesion, as well as by stigmatizing and dehumanizing those who are already marginalized or discriminated against.

For this reason, countering these narratives requires comprehensive, whole-of-society approaches that are relevant to the local context, gender-sensitive, age-appropriate, and firmly grounded in international law, including international human rights norms and standards.

Yet the application of frameworks and measures aimed at preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism may not be the right ones to address such hateful narratives. These frameworks should be restricted to conduct that is truly terrorist or violent extremist in nature.

Where such frameworks are indeed the most appropriate to counter hateful narratives, they must be fully compliant with international law, including international human rights law. This means that responses should focus on narratives that are inciting terrorism.

Counter-terrorism should never be used as a pretext to persecute minorities, silence dissent, stifle criticism or block challenging debate.

Indeed, the application of counter-terrorism measures that violate human rights and limit civic space often aggravate, rather than address, the very grievances exploited in violent extremist and terrorist narratives.

UNOCT continues to work with Member States to develop strategies and plans of action to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism. While we primarily engage with stakeholders at the national level, we recognize that solutions to counter this complex challenge require buy-in from sub-national actors, including civil society and the private sector.

One example of our engagement with such actors is the work of our Global Programme on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in the Philippines. In efforts to support the Bangsamoro peace process, UNOCT has supported the inclusion of representatives from the leadership of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Mindanao in the development of the Strategic Communication plan for the Philippines National Action Plan on PCVE since 2018.

In other contexts, UNOCT has worked to build trust between media and governments and build the capacity of religious leaders and young people to effectively amplify their own messages to counter narratives of hate and division.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

UNOCT is committed to continuing our engagement with municipal and other stakeholders to help Member States better respond to the challenges posed by terrorism and violent extremism, including incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence that may lead to violent extremism and terrorism.

You can count on the UN's Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact and its 46 UN and related entities, to support your and your countries' efforts to prevent hate speech becoming an onramp to terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

Thank you.