



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues,

On behalf of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, I welcome you to this final Quarterly Briefing of 2023.

As some of you know, I am resigning from the United Nations and will step down as UNOCT's first director and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General of UNOCT at the end of this month. As I also had a key role as a Member State official in the creation of UNOCT, I would therefore like to take this opportunity to reflect on the progress the Office has made in supporting Member States to address the evolving terrorism threat.

The General Assembly's consensus decision to establish UNOCT in 2017 was one of the first institutional reforms proposed by Secretary-General António Guterres. It came at a time when the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon and Da'esh's exploitation of social media demanded collective action by Member States and the United Nations.

During my time in this position, national and international counter-terrorism efforts have inflicted serious losses on Al-Qaida and Da'esh leadership, seen the territorial defeat of Da'esh, and a reduction in the total number of deaths from terrorist attacks since their peak in 2015. However, while the threat posed by Al-Qaida and Da'esh in non-conflict areas is assessed as low, the groups have morphed, and the threat posed by their regional affiliates remains high in conflict zones and countries neighbouring them.

Da'esh maintains an ambition to project a global threat and is focused on reconstituting and regaining lost capabilities, while Al-Qaida is demonstrating strategic patience.

Moreover, the situation remains concerning in parts of Africa, particularly in the Sahel and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where contrary to the general downward trend globally,

terrorist violence from Al-Qaida and Da'esh affiliates is actually increasing. The interconnected nature of these developments with existing conflicts and local grievances exacerbates the threat, with the conflict between Israel, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza likely serving to inspire terrorists, violent extremists and lone actors, including those with Al-Qaida and Da'esh links.

Successful counter-terrorist operations in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Mozambique may have limited terrorists' capabilities and affected their operations. However, the risk of resurgence remains, particularly if security-centered responses are not part of broader political strategies, anchored on international law and accompanied by comprehensive preventive efforts.

We have also seen how terrorism and violent extremism based on xenophobia, racism, or intolerance, including on the basis of religion or belief have developed or resurged as threats to international peace and security. On a personal note, I am deeply worried about such groups, in part because of the way their growth has coincided with the fraying of the social contract and the rise of authoritarianism in certain countries, but also because the diffuse ways in which they are organizing is intended to stay below the radar.

In short, now is not the time to dial back our efforts to counter terrorism.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues, let me now highlight several developments since the last briefing:

Policy leadership and coordination:

Alongside the co-leads for *A New Agenda for Peace* (DPPA, DPO and ODA), UNOCT continues to work with the Secretary-General and his office to support Member States with the process.

Preparations for the September 2024 *Summit of the Future* are underway, with *A Pact for the Future* expected to be adopted on the occasion.

I am pleased that during recent consultations, many of your delegations highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Pact considers measures to address the threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism.

We will continue to work with Member States to that effect.

Through the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact and its eight working groups, we have fostered a comprehensive approach, working with partners from across and beyond the UN system. You'll hear more about this later.

We have continued to strengthen our engagement with the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate, CTED. This includes fostering information exchange before and after CTED's assessment visits, and developing internal guidance, processes, and practical tools

to systematically incorporate CTED's recommendations and analysis in the design and delivery of UNOCT's capacity-building programmes.

We have also increased our cooperation with the UN System in the field, thanks to our close working relationship with the Development Coordination Office and Resident Coordinator System.

This month, Under-Secretary-General Voronkov signed the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2024-2028 for the Philippines, marking the first instance of UNOCT's integration into the UN Country Team cooperation instrument.

As one of its core mandated responsibilities, UNOCT coordinated the preparation of 14 of the 17 reports of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat.

The Office also led the preparation of other reports related to CT and PCVE, including the Secretary-General's report on "Terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief" issued in August 2022, and the report on Progress of the UN system in supporting Member States to assist victims of terrorism.

Furthermore, since its establishment, UNOCT has also prepared reports on the Activities of the United Nations system in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and is mandated to prepare the next one in 2026.

2. Human Rights, Gender Mainstreaming and Engagement with CSOs:

I am pleased to report that we have achieved significant progress in strengthening human rights and gender mainstreaming, engaging with civil society in countering terrorism, and preventing violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism.

UNOCT has developed a framework for human rights mainstreaming and due diligence tools, ensuring compliance with the UN's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. The prevention of human rights violations in the use of digital technology remains a key priority of UNOCT.

Moreover, UNOCT's efforts to implement our Gender Mainstreaming Policy have increased gender-responsive approaches in our programming and contributed to a considerable increase in our compliance with the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN SWAP 2.0).

In 2022, UNOCT exceeded 4 of the 17 performance indicators and met 11 others, representing 89 percent of ratings in this category, compared to 71 percent in the UN Secretariat and 67 percent in the UN system.

Our Civil Society Engagement Strategy already focuses on protecting human rights and involving youth and women in counter-terrorism policies and programmes. I have continued the practice of holding roundtables with CSOs from across the globe, with a particular emphasis on including more grass-roots organizations.

In preparation for the Abuja Summit, we have had interactions with 66 civil society organizations in 2023, particularly African ones, including last week's 'Digital Safety for Youth'.

Despite facing resource limitations, we are expanding our efforts, especially in Africa, through regional consultations and digital community platforms, reinforcing our dedication to diverse and collaborative counter-terrorism endeavors.

3. Financial and other resources:

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,

Sustainable and predictable funding is crucial for UNOCT to fulfill its mandated core, continuing functions of policy, leadership, and coordination. We are grateful that the General Assembly last year agreed to the first half of the Secretary-General's request to convert 49 positions from XB to RB in response to its 2017 decision to give UNOCT the resources required to fulfill its mandate and its 2021 decision related to the Secretary-General's technical assessment of those needs.

With those 25 positions converted, we went from having just three percent of our budget paid from the regular budget to nine percent in 2023. However, we still rely on voluntary contributions from funding partners for 91 percent of our annual budget.

We hope Member States will support the Secretary-General's request for 2024 to convert the remaining 24 posts, thereby allowing us to use voluntary contributions to support our capacity-building and technical assistance activities.

Looking ahead, a high priority for our Office is the Summit that we are organizing on the theme "Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Institutional Building to Address the Evolving Threat of Terrorism in Africa," under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General and the President of Nigeria, to be held in Abuja next year.

It will form an essential part of our efforts to galvanize more international support for African Member States affected by terrorism and violent extremism and to reverse the worrying terrorist trend in parts of the continent.

Its outcomes will support the implementation of the Malabo Declaration and key strategic objectives in line with the Pre-Summit African Union Ministerial Meeting held on the margins of the 78th General Debate of the United Nations General. To this end, our Programme Offices in Nairobi, Kenya, and Rabat, Morocco, as well as our Rabat-based EU-UN Global Terrorist Threat

Facility, will be essential in facilitating capacity-building and technical assistance for African Member States.

In conclusion, I am very proud of the progress achieved by UNOCT in strengthening support to Member States in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism and I am deeply grateful to all of you for your support and collaboration in our efforts.