

Press Release

Launch of the UN Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Threats against Vulnerable Targets

New York, 19 January 2021 (virtual event)

Today, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), in partnership with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), and in consultation with the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and INTERPOL, launched a “Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Threats against Vulnerable Targets”.

The virtual event was attended by over 250 representatives from Member States, international and regional organizations, and United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact entities, and featured discussions on the alarming rise of terrorist attacks against vulnerable targets and the need to elaborate collaborative strategies involving public authorities, law enforcement and private operators.

During the welcoming remarks, UN Under-Secretary-General Mr. Vladimir Voronkov stressed that “terrorist killings in urban centres have increased sharply since 2011, and that attacks against religious sites are becoming more lethal.” He added that the Global Programme launched today “illustrates a fundamental objective of our counterterrorism agenda: ensuring that our citizens can safely enjoy and exercise their fundamental freedoms and socio-economic rights in their daily life without fear.”

Over the last years, terrorists have increasingly targeted public spaces such as touristic resorts, urban centres, shopping malls or places of worship. Such attacks aim to exploit the intrinsic vulnerabilities of open public spaces to inflict mass casualties, spread fear and disrupt daily life and socio-economic activities. The UNOCT-led Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Threats against Vulnerable Targets, funded by the State of Qatar, seeks to strengthen the capacity of Member States to prevent, counter, respond and investigate terrorist attacks against vulnerable targets through the development of collaborative strategies, including public-private partnerships, and the provision of technical assistance in the form of operational trainings, upon request.

H.E. Ms. Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani, Ambassador Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations noted at today’s launch event that “the State of Qatar is proud to contribute funding for this new program. This is part of our commitment to support UNOCT’s strategic priorities as a leading financial contributor, and our solid and growing partnership with all UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities.”

“The Global Programme constitutes an essential component of the implementation of the UN Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, as it will help strengthen Member States’ capacity to develop comprehensive and collaborative strategies in the protection of religious sites and prevent and respond to attacks against religious sites, among other vulnerable targets,” said High Representative Miguel Ángel Moratinos of the UNAOC.

Assistant Secretary-General Coninx recalled that “CTED has taken a proactive approach to help States counter the terrorist threat to soft targets and critical infrastructures. Through its assessments CTED has identified the need for States to develop or expand national strategies and action plans to consider the threat to “soft” targets, working together with all relevant stakeholders, including through public-private partnerships.”

Ms. Antonia de Meo, Director of UNICRI, noted that “After 9/11, UNICRI applied its expertise in criminal justice and crime prevention to counter terrorism with a specific focus on security of major events and protection of vulnerable targets. We assist Member States to develop effective policies and resources to counter these threats. Drawing on the expertise and experience of each of us here today, we can build a comprehensive action plan to move forward together to counter terrorist attacks against vulnerable targets.”

“The protection of vulnerable targets against terrorist attacks is critical for the international community,” said Mr Stephen Kavanagh, Executive Director of Police Services of INTERPOL, “and law enforcement’s role is clear: analyze the intelligence, prepare for incidents, and build operational capabilities. When it comes to protecting vulnerable targets, we must work together across law enforcement and the larger international community or risk devastating consequences.

The opening ceremony was followed by a thematic discussion on the protection of religious sites, in which high level representatives and security experts from Member States exchanged lessons learned and good practices to protect places of worship.

For more information: Ms. Laurence Gerard (gerardl@un.org)
<https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/vulnerable-targets>