



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

**First 2021 Ambassadorial-level Quarterly Briefing to Member States
28 January 2021**

Thank you Under-Secretary-General Voronkov.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Colleagues,

Good morning. I would like to share with you efforts by the United Nations to address the multidimensional challenges affecting third country nationals held in camps in Syria and Iraq.

This issue remains a top priority for the Secretary-General and for the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

The situation in the camps in northeast Syria and Iraq, holding mostly women and children, some of whom have suspected links to – or in some cases are even victims of -- United Nations-listed terrorist groups, continues to deteriorate.

The humanitarian conditions in these camps are dire. Poor sanitation, lack of basic services and overcrowding make the risk of a large-scale health crisis dangle like a Sword of Damocles.

Besides humanitarian concerns, there are serious security challenges, both in terms of ensuring the protection and safety of camp residents and humanitarian workers, and limiting violent extremist activity, as the conditions in camps can provide a fertile ground for indoctrination to violence, militant infiltration and terrorist recruitment.

In recent months, we have witnessed an increase in violence in the Al-Hol camp, where a significant number of assaults and assassinations have taken place, including several just since the beginning of this year.

Fortunately, a number of Member States have been leading by example and have worked to repatriate their nationals from camps in Syria and elsewhere, while others remain confounded by multifaceted diplomatic, political, security and logistical challenges associated with taking responsibility for one's nationals.

In recent months we have been seeing more countries open to repatriating children, but the national responses are generally slow and limited, often limited only to certain

categories like orphans. Much more needs to be done to repatriate the thousands of people that still remain in camps and rehabilitate and reintegrate them in a way that reduces the challenges they would otherwise pose.

Dear Colleagues,

The United Nations stands ready to serve as a reliable partner to Member States in addressing the complex political and operational challenges related to third country national returnees from Iraq and Syria.

In September last year, UNOCT and UNICEF, working with 13 other UN entities, finalized a Global Framework to address the urgent needs of Member States to ensure human rights-based and age- and gender- responsive protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration of their nationals.

The Global Framework provides a whole-of-UN approach that responds to the humanitarian assistance and protection needs of children and adults in camps, while supporting requesting Member States to promote security and address accountability in the repatriation and post-repatriation processes.

The implementation of the Global Framework will soon begin in Central Asia and Iraq.

To this end, UNOCT, through its Counter-Terrorism Centre, is already working with Member States in Central Asia to ensure that United Nations' support meets the needs and gaps on the ground.

To implement the Global Framework in Iraq, UNOCT, UNICEF and participating Global Framework entities, including IOM, UNODC, UNDP, OHCHR, UNHCR and UN Women, in consultation with the Government of Iraq, will conduct a joint scoping exercise to determine the capacities, needs and gaps to support the eventual return of Iraqi nationals from northeast Syria.

Currently, the Global Framework is financed through a pooled fund, but requires an additional \$10.9 million over the next three years.

I would like to thank the current donors of the Global Framework, namely, the European Union, the United States and the Netherlands, and appeal to all our partners to provide additional support to this important initiative.

We see the repatriation of third country nationals as a key responsibility of Member States and call on all countries not to abandon their nationals. Leaving them behind will only cause further human suffering and loss of lives, risk radicalizing a generation of girls and boys, and jeopardize the gains we have made in our common fight against violent extremism and terrorism.

Thank you very much. Thank you Ambassador Voronkov.