



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

Statement of the Under-Secretary General UNOCT

Mr. Vladimir Voronkov for
2021 International Women's Day

8 March 2021

Topic: *"Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world."*

Aligned with the topic for CSW: *"Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls",*

Today we celebrate International Women's Day, which this year is dedicated to women in leadership. Gender equality and women's human rights are values that are not only right up front in the UN Charter, they are also part of the DNA of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, which works to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism.

For this International Women's Day, I would like to start by acknowledging that COVID 19 has disproportionately burdened women and set back decades of advancements in gender equality and seen an increase in gender-based violence. I am particularly concerned that women victims of terrorism have seen their ability to access justice, legal, financial, and psychosocial support restricted even further than it was before the pandemic. To address these issues, my Office, working closely with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, is developing for Member States model legislative provisions that emphasize the specific rights and needs of women victims of terrorism in national legislation, and the inclusion of women in decision-making processes at all levels within these processes.

In these troubling times, women are also central to the fight against the pandemic. They stand at the front lines of the crisis as effective national leaders, health care workers, caregivers, innovators, and community organizers. Time and time again, we witness women stepping up and showing resilience, leadership, and strength. This is true not only in our fight against COVID, but also in our efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism (PCVE/CT). Women are experts across all spheres of PCVE/CT, and UNOCT is dedicated to amplifying their voices.

In 2020, we ensured the substantive participation of women in all of UNOCT high-level events. For example, 42% of the panelists, speakers and moderators and 45% of the participants in last year's Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week were women. Having diverse and gender-balanced panels, as well as engaging gender experts, lead us to greater understanding about, and consideration of, the status of women and gender in PCVE/CT. In these events, we discussed among other topics the impacts of terrorism and counter-terrorism in terms of gender, misogyny and sexual violence as part of terrorists' nefarious agendas, and the multiple roles women play as supporters, perpetrators, victims, and preventers, while also ascertaining the need for commensurate responses that reflect reality, not misleading stereotypes.

Women were also key participants in our programmatic activities in 2020. Hundreds of women attended our training sessions in technical areas of counter-terrorism, such as cyber and border security. We strive to support them in becoming leaders in these traditionally male-dominated fields, and it is with pleasure that I announce that some of our women trainees from 2020 are now expert trainers themselves. Also, recognizing and supporting the critical role of women human rights defenders and peacebuilders, UNOCT has made significant strides in ensuring that a wide range of women groups and leaders were integrated into developing PCVE/CT policies and programming. In the rolling out of my Office's Civil Society Engagement Strategy, we initiated a series of dialogue sessions with civil society leaders from around the globe. UNOCT also supported UN Women to undertake global consultations with women-led civil society organizations from the Global South on behalf of the Global Compact Gender Working Group. We have made it possible for Member States to take their voices and recommendations into consideration during the 7th review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

We also support young women to make a difference in their communities and in the world. In 2020, my Office piloted peer-to-peer youth engagement in Australia, Sudan and Sweden, creating 'safe spaces' for young people to discuss, develop and exchange ideas around difficult topics, and to build social cohesion. We focused on grassroots and hard-to-reach communities, and well over half of our trainees were women. This shows their willingness to share their voices and their desires to impact change. In the words of some of our young women participants, they felt empowered to be part of this process and enjoyed being engaged in the conversation and part of the solution.

These are much needed advancements and UNOCT will continue to strengthen these engagements and initiatives. I am aware that much more needs to be done. In 2021 my Office will adopt a Gender Policy to ensure a systematic and coherent approach to gender

mainstreaming, women's leadership and women's meaningful participation within all levels of PCVE/CT initiatives. We are committed to furthering gender equality and the empowerment of women in all our functions, be it in our coordination role within the United Nations, or in the support we offer to Member States with policy advice and capacity-building.

In 2021, UNOCT will continue to be a strong advocate for women in their fight against violent extremism and terrorism, and hereby renews its commitment to support and amplify women's voices.