



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

**Statement by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov
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**2021 OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference on
“Reinforcing a Comprehensive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism and
Violent Extremism and Radicalization that lead to Terrorism (VERLT) in a
Changing Landscape”**

20 April 2021

Dear Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to address the opening session of the annual OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference on Reinforcing a Comprehensive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Radicalization that lead to Terrorism in a Changing Landscape.

I am grateful to the Swedish Chairpersonship of the OSCE for convening this important event and for inviting me to speak.

OSCE remains the largest intergovernmental body mandated to engage on critical issues pertaining to regional peace and security. I'm proud of the close partnership between the OSCE and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism in advancing our common goal of preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism.

Dear Colleagues,

As the theme of the today's conference suggests, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected each and every aspect of our lives. Beyond global health, it has affected economies, human rights, global peace and security as well as how we work and engage with each other on a daily basis.

Despite the significant restrictions due to lockdowns, terrorism continues to pose a grave threat to international peace and security.

The pandemic has magnified some of the terrorist trends and exacerbated its underlying drivers, because of its political and socio-economic consequences.

ISIL and Al-Qaida continue to operate as resilient, covert transnational networks and still have substantial financial resources at their disposal, as well as access to weapons.

Their regional affiliates are seeking to expand their reach – especially in Africa and Central Asia. They are trying to exploit grievances and prolonged conflicts to fuel instability.

Thousands of terrorists remain at large and could seek to relocate to other conflict zones and fragile areas in seeking opportunities to create sleeper cells, plan and inspire attacks, and recruit new individuals to their ranks.

At the same time, fuelled by the COVID-19 infodemic of hate and conspiracy theories, transnational threats stemming from neo-Nazism, white supremacy and other racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist movements, laced with misogyny, remain an increasing concern.

Fragmented and leaderless, terrorists are resorting to often low-cost, low-tech, copycat attacks by lone individuals or small groups, aiming at soft and symbolic targets.

The threat transcends borders through xenophobic narratives, networking and mutual inspiration online, terrorist mobility, and growing nexus with transnational crime.

It creates frontier challenges, including addressing the use of cryptocurrencies for financing, online video games for recruitment, fringe social media platforms for communication, and ambivalent or coded language to hide hate in plain sight and evade prosecution.

Dear Colleagues,

We must emerge from the COVID-19 crisis stronger and more unified in our collective fight against terrorism. Respect for human rights and rule of law, engagement with civil society are inalienable parts of our efforts.

The United Nations is committed to strengthening its inter-agency coordination under the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, which brings together more than 43 UN entities and international partners.

Outside of the UN family, we are building strong and sustainable counter-terrorism partnerships, including with the OSCE.

The OSCE-UNOCT partnership is built on a solid foundation, including the 2019-2021 Joint Action Plan.

Last year the OSCE and UNOCT joined efforts with Switzerland to organize a Regional High-Level Conference in Vienna on addressing current challenges related to foreign terrorist fighters.

I am grateful for OSCE-UNOCT practical collaboration on countering terrorist travel and border security management.

We have been organising annual Passenger Data Seminars since 2019, and are now also jointly establishing an informal working group on passenger data for the Eastern European region. This will support States to share information on good practices and lessons learned on passenger data.

Together with my good friend and OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid, we have discussed increasing cooperation and coordination between our organizations on countering the financing of terrorism, the role of civil society, gender mainstreaming and the use of new technologies and the Internet. I am looking forward to deepening the institutional dialogue between us on these issues.

I would also like to mention our excellent cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE and its Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism.

Dear Colleagues,

In his recent report to the General Assembly on the United Nations' activities in implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, issued ahead of the 7th review of the Strategy this June, the United Nations Secretary-General Guterres presented his vision on preventing and countering terrorism during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the need for a sustained, reinvigorated and networked multilateral response.

At the Second United Nations High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States in June, we will discuss the imperative of strengthening international and regional cooperation to counter terrorism in the coming decade. I look forward to hearing insights from the OSCE alongside other regional organizations.

The United Nations is investing in partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations. I am convening, together with the Kingdom of Spain, a Virtual Dialogue with Human Rights and Civil Society Partners on Building a Better Paradigm to Prevent and Counter Terrorism on 25-26 May, and I look forward to your participation.

Later this year, my Office will hold the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism to promote dialogue between different stakeholders on the rights and needs of victims, and to provide victims with a platform for their voices and concerns. I also look forward to your active engagement.

Dear Colleagues,

One of the most pressing problems, requiring urgent action, is the untenable situation of tens of thousands of individuals, mostly women and children, associated with terrorist groups designated by the Security Council, who continue to live in precarious conditions in camps and facilities in northeast Syria.

As delivered

I commend the leadership of a number of the OSCE participating States which have repatriated their nationals from Syria and Iraq, and I reiterate the call of the United Nations Secretary-General to all concerned States to follow this example.

The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in my Office leads, jointly with UNICEF, a Global Framework to coordinate support from 15 United Nations entities to requesting Member States regarding individuals returned from or remaining in Syria and Iraq.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by commending the Conference's comprehensive approach to addressing the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. I hope today's event will lay the foundation for a new phase of collaboration between the United Nations and the OSCE.

Thank you.