



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

**Remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov
Under-Secretary-General, UNOCT**

European Union Working Party on Terrorism - International Aspects (COTER)

**EU/UN cooperation on counter-terrorism, with a focus on emerging threats and challenges,
as we mark the 20th anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1373 and the 15th anniversary of the UN
Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy**

Virtual, 29 April 2021, 8:30 EST

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for inviting me to brief COTER on activities of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and EU-UN cooperation, alongside my dear colleague Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninsx.

Allow me, at the outset, to give my thanks to the continuing strategic partnership between the European Union and United Nations for the promotion of international peace and security through multilateralism.

These efforts are linked to the other two pillars of the United Nations: human rights and sustainable development.

I am pleased that our joint efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism are reaching new heights, despite the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic environment.

I was delighted to convene the third United Nations-European Union Leaders' Dialogue on Counter-Terrorism in December last year together with the European External Action Service.

The Dialogue brought together 16 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities, including UNODC, UNDP, OHCHR and UN WOMEN, for a very productive and substantial exchange of views, including on our efforts to address terrorists use of new technologies and improve monitoring and evaluation of projects.

We continue to implement the priorities identified in the first UN-EU Framework on Counter-Terrorism signed in 2019.

This includes the United Nations-European Union Countering Terrorist Travel Partnership—which now has 40 beneficiaries--, the UN-EU Counter-Terrorism partnership for Sudan, the project in support of implementing the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (ICSANT), and prevention of violent extremism efforts, including UN STRIVE Asia.

Under the ICSANT project, UNOCT delivered capacity-building activities in South East Asia in November 2020 and held advocacy events for Parliamentarians from Tajikistan.

In the framework of the United Nations-European Union partnership for Sudan, UNOCT deployed a small project team in Khartoum this past November. We are currently delivering trainings in priority areas such as countering terrorism financing, border security, counter-terrorism legislation and human rights.

EU Member States such as Belgium, Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden are also partnering with UNOCT on a number of relevant initiatives related to foreign terrorist fighters and accompanying children, WMD/CBRN terrorism, cyber security and digital forensics, countering terrorist travel and aviation security, youth and civil society engagement, human rights and support to victims of terrorism.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am particularly grateful for the new partnership we developed to support Member States with returnees from camps in Syria and Iraq through the Global Framework, developed by my Office jointly with UNICEF, to coordinate support from 15 United Nations entities.

We hope to start implementation soon in Central Asia with the support of the European Union and the United States, and we are beginning implementation of a scoping exercise for Iraq funded by the Netherlands.

The Global Framework was designed to help Member States address the urgent situation of thousands of ISIL-associated foreign nationals, mostly women and children, who remain in precarious conditions in camps and facilities in northeast Syria, through ensuring the accountability and protection of returnees as appropriate.

It is critical that the protection, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees is conducted effectively to enable a conducive political and social environment for returnees. In this regard, the EU support will enable the implementation of these activities in accordance with human rights, and support the collection and dissemination of best practices in the Central Asia region.

I am also encouraged by the increasing numbers of European children being repatriated from the al-Hol camp who can benefit from such reintegration services in their home countries. The Secretary-General and I urge your governments to continue this good practice.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The UN-EU Framework on Counter-Terrorism is due to be renewed this year. In line with the Seventh Biennial Review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, it will be an important occasion to take into account the rise of “politically motivated” terrorism and violent extremism,

as the EU referred to in the June 2020 Council Conclusions, as well as other trends that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among those are the misuse of new technologies and cyberspace, 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.

It will also be important to strengthen the UN-EU partnership in Africa, where ISIL and Al-Qaida are increasingly active through emboldened regional affiliates, as demonstrated by the recent escalation of violence in northern Mozambique.

At the request of Secretary-General Guterres, my Office is coordinating an “all-of-UN” assistance package to support the Government of Mozambique in addressing this threat comprehensively and stands ready to deploy staff as soon as requested. Thank you, Chair, for the support of Portugal to UNOCT in that regard.

I am confident that the new UNOCT programme offices in Budapest, Doha, Madrid, Nairobi and Rabat can serve as additional platforms for our cooperation, as we relocate certain positions from New York to be closer to beneficiaries, strengthen coordination and coherence with partners and lead to more impactful and cost-efficient delivery.

I hope that we can also achieve deeper cooperation on victims of terrorism, as you called for in the June 2020 Conclusions. The launch this year of new model legal provisions for victims of terrorism, which my Office is developing jointly with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNODC, could present an important opportunity.

I would like to thank the European Union for its role in supporting the Group of Friends of Victims of Terrorism, and welcome the efforts of European Union Member States to share

valuable lessons learned on improving victims' access to medical and psychosocial support, rebuilding livelihoods and occupations, facilitating justice, as well as restitution.

United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism also continues to coordinate closely with the EU on countering the financing of terrorism, and I greatly appreciate the support of the EU Member States' financial intelligence units for their support to the United Nations efforts to develop the goFINTEL software as a more secure and capable tool for dealing with today's challenges to counter the financing of terrorism.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I will now brief you on plans for the Second United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week.

It will consist of two main elements: the General Assembly debate on the seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy on 21 and 22 June, and the Second United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter- Terrorism Agencies of Member States from 28 to 30 June under the auspices of the Secretary-General Guterres, who will make his remarks in person.

The success of CT Week will again depend on your support and joint ownership of all Member States. I am grateful for the constructive inputs already provided by EU Member States and the European External Action Service.

We are keen to make the Conference more interactive to facilitate genuine dialogue, including through a number of panels and breakout sessions on key thematic issues of interest to Member States such as responding to new and evolving counter-terrorism challenges in the new decade. I hope that Ms. von der Leyen, Mr. Borrell and my dear colleague Mr. Gilles de Kerchove will be able to join us.

I also expect full participation by civil society organizations in the High-Level Conference and in the nearly 30 virtual side events that will be held on the margins of the Counter-Terrorism Week.

The High-Level Conference will also be informed by the outcomes of the regional conferences organized by my Office in partnership with Member States over the past two years.

This includes the conferences in Tajikistan, Mongolia, Kenya, Belarus, Hungary, the United Arab Emirates and Vienna. I am grateful to all of you who attend these conferences and provided expert contributions.

Ahead of a planned physical conference in Malaga, which has been pushed back to early 2022, I very much look forward to convening with the Kingdom of Spain a virtual dialogue on 25 and 26 May with civil society and human rights partners as part of our efforts to build a better paradigm to prevent and counter terrorism.

While originally envisaged to be part of United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week, the Global Congress of Victims has been postponed to December to enable the kind of in-person participation that is so incredibly valuable to the victims. It will be a landmark global gathering of victims, Member States, civil society organizations and other key stakeholders to build on recent milestones in our collective work to support victims and survivors of terrorism.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am also hoping for the strong support of the European Union and its Member States for the seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

My Office is supporting the President of the General Assembly and the Permanent Representatives of Spain and Oman, whom he appointed as co-facilitators, in their efforts to ensure a strong, consensus outcome.

I am pleased that Ambassador Santos, my good friend Agustin, is here today to brief on the negotiations, and I encourage you to support his quest for a consensus document, as in the past six previous reviews of the Strategy.

There are two aspects of the resolution that are important to UNOCT being able to carry out its mandated functions.

The first is related to providing UNOCT grant-making authority to enable our direct cooperation with civil society. Such authority has no budget implication for the UN but it would help lower our costs when we work with other UN entities on projects involving civil society.

The second is sufficient regular budget support that will allow us to provide sustainable and predictable funding for our core functions. You are aware that my Office so far depends on voluntary contributions for more than 96 percent of its budget. Only eight posts, including my own, are funded from the regular budget.

Today our policy, coordination, and administrative staff, as well as parts of our leadership, are funded only by Qatar as part of a pledge that will expire in 2023. We also lack dedicated funding for human rights and gender staff.

By adding these 49 positions to the regular budget over the next two years, we will finally be on a sustainable path to executing our mandated functions, thus freeing up additional donor resources for programming.

The development of the UN Counter Terrorism Centre into a Centre of Excellence will enable us to leverage convening power, and link capacity building to cutting edge research implemented by other Centres.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by stressing that UNOCT attaches great importance to continued cooperation with the European Union. We have strengthened our partnership by building institutional links, exchanging information at many levels, and collaborating on capacity-building activities. I am proud of what we have achieved together in recent years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented profound challenges in many UN member states, especially for women and girls, with structural factors such as increased unemployment and misinformation, increasing conditions conducive to violent extremism.

It is therefore critical that we continue to jointly mobilize and deploy financial and technical resources to assist the countries and regions most affected by terrorism and coordinate our engagement to achieve the required impact.

Thank you for your attention.