



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**

Integrating Gender into Cybersecurity and New Technologies in the Fight Against Terrorism

**29 June 2021
8.00am – 9.30am**

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this discussion on integrating gender perspectives into our counter-terrorism efforts in the context of cybersecurity and new technologies.

I would like to thank CTED for co-organizing this important event, as well as Canada and Norway for their support on this crucial topic. My appreciation also goes to the National Security Council of Thailand and UNDP Thailand, for sharing their invaluable regional expertise and good practices.

Despite their many benefits for promoting development and improving the quality of life, cybersecurity and new technologies such as unmanned aerial systems, artificial intelligence, social media, quantum computing, and blockchain are also things which violent extremist and terrorist groups can use to recruit, raise funds and operate.

Terrorist groups are quick to adapt to new technologies such as ISIL's use of unmanned aerial systems for reconnaissance and attack purposes. There is also evidence that terrorists and other criminals are seeking to use cryptocurrencies to avoid detection in financing their operations.

Such terrorist exploitation of technology is perhaps not surprising for groups that pursue asymmetric warfare.

But ISIL has also demonstrated a sophisticated use of gendered messaging in online recruitment. Its tactics are not only gendered in their design and in the way they instrumentalize gender roles and notions of masculinity, but also in the way women and girls, men and boys, and other gender identities experience and react to them. These differences in impact must be measured and accounted for in counter-terrorism and PVE responses.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The use of new technologies and cybersecurity tools in counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism is also important for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of initiatives to combat violent extremism and terrorism.

Through big data, we have new ways to analyze and predict trends in violent extremism, while cybersecurity tools can strengthen the protection of vital infrastructure. However, in the context of counter-terrorism and PVE, the use of approaches based on cybersecurity and new technologies carries the risk of missing opportunities or perpetuating gendered harms through new means.

For example, the criteria used to differentiate civilians from combatants in the strike-zones of unmanned aerial systems may over-stigmatize young men, as well as deeply disrupt the community, familial relationships and social cohesion of the affected areas.

Similarly, if only men write the algorithms for watchlists and traveler screening systems, then Member States may be missing at least half the picture of what is actually going on.

Furthermore, artificial intelligence has been shown to contain gender and racial biases, and can lead to disproportionate misidentification of women, and especially women of color.

We must not forget how the access to new technologies and the advantages that they offer is not equal across different demographics. There is a real risk of creating a digital divide that perpetuates structural inequality across wealth, racial and gender lines, which may in turn contribute to or even create conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In addressing the challenges to countering and preventing violent extremism and terrorism in the new decade, it is imperative that we integrate gender perspectives in our efforts. That is why in UNOCT we have taken a number of measures to mainstream a gender perspective for all our programming.

As we will discuss at length during the upcoming panels, understanding the gendered impacts of cybersecurity and new technologies in the fight against terrorism is essential to avoid the sorts of bias that lead to ineffective or even counter-productive responses.

It is through applying gender analysis to our efforts, and in ensuring that they encompass and address relevant gender-specific needs, that we can leverage the efficacy and efficiency of new technologies in countering terrorism and building sustainable peace.

Excellencies,

Technology is an incredible tool to support us in our common goal to further peace, security, and gender equality in line with the United Nations Charter. I am therefore pleased to be able to open this event, in which we bring awareness to the challenges, good practices and substantive entry points for the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in policies and programmes that counter and prevent violent extremism and terrorism through cybersecurity and new technologies.

Thank you.