



PRESS RELEASE

The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism held a workshop in Qatar for African diplomatic missions on behavioural insights to counter terrorism

Doha, Qatar, 20 September 2021 – The International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism, a Programme Office of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism in Doha, held a day-long workshop for African diplomatic missions in Qatar on behavioural insights to counter terrorism. The Workshop was attended by ambassadorial-level representatives from 23 African diplomatic missions in Qatar.

Held in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Qatar, the UN workshop was the first in a series of awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives organised by the International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism.

In his opening remarks, **H.E. Paddy C. Ahenda, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Kenya to Qatar**, presented an overview of the counter-terrorism landscape in African, noting that the continent “continues to suffer the brunt of violent terrorist attacks from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa and most recently in Mozambique.” Ambassador Ahenda emphasized that “The International Hub on Behavioural Insights uses different tools to prevent terrorism. The tools they use are based on how humans make decisions. Behavioural insights have been applied to various social problems, from obesity to pension funds. But preventing terrorism is a new application.”

Dr. Aynabat Atayeva, Chief of the International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism (UNOCT), pointed out in her welcoming remarks that the purpose of the workshop is to identify how the International Hub can best assist each country present: “In order to build the capacity of Member States, the Hub needs to understand how we can collaborate with Member States.”

Dr. Fadi Makki, Advisor to the Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, Director, B4Development Foundation, Qatar & Founder, Nudge Lebanon, provided an interactive introduction to biases and the behavioural insights approach.

The Workshop featured presentations by four behavioural insight experts:

- “The Application of Behavioural Insights to P/CVE and Conflict Reduction Programs in Africa” by **Dr Mareike Schomerus, Vice President, Busara Center**
- “Behavioural Insights Framed for Diplomatic, Political and Security Personnel in the African Context” by **Mr. Josh Martin, Executive Director, Beyond Conflict**
- “Mainstreaming the Behavioural Insights Approach within the South African Government” by **Dr. Ammaarah Martinus, Director of Policy, Research and Analysis, Department of the Premier, Western Cape Government, South Africa**
- “Psychological Vaccination and Gamification” by **Mr. Nabil Saleh, Vice President, Nudge Lebanon**

In the afternoon Q&A sessions, the experts addressed questions and exchanged views with participating representatives from African diplomatic missions.

At the conclusion of the workshop, **Dr. Aynabat Atayeva, Chief of the International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism (UNOCT)**, noted that the workshop helped the International Hub to understand how it can better tailor its programmes to the needs of Member States. She reiterated the readiness of the United Nations to support countries in Africa to address the scourge of terrorism.

In the coming months, the International Hub will continue to hold individual workshops in Doha for diplomatic missions from Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and East and Central Europe.

About International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism

The International Hub on Behavioural Insights to Counter Terrorism, a UNOCT Programme Office in Doha, was established by UNOCT in partnership with the State of Qatar in 2020.

The International Hub will serve as a **global platform** for creating knowledge around behavioural insights to prevent and counter terrorism, disseminating lessons learned and good practices, and creating a professional network of experts, academics, practitioners, and policymakers. The Hub will provide innovative, results-oriented, and impactful **capacity-building support** that meets the needs and priorities of Member States to address evolving terrorist threats, leveraging its field presence for closer support to beneficiaries seeking technical assistance. It will also provide **outreach opportunities** to strengthen coordination among various counter-terrorism actors on behaviourally informed interventions and mobilise synergies and resources for joint programming.

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

Dr Mareike Schomerus, Vice President, Busara Center

“It is complicated to unravel a chain of things that might have led one particular person to make the decision that they will turn violent. But I would argue that we owe it to the people who have and continue to be victims of violence. We owe it to the governments that are trying to deliver a peaceful society for their people. I would argue we also owe it to the people who committed violence, and we owe it to the better solutions to protect humans much more seriously and scientifically.”

Mr. Josh Martin, Executive Director, Beyond Conflict

“If you look around your country's public diplomacy efforts, you will start to see communications, that are being put out into the world, that were not done with a lot of intentional thinking about how the human brain works. And every single one of those things is an opportunity to create greater impact and to innovate.”



Dr. Ammaarah Martinus, Director of Policy, Research and Analysis, Department of the Premier, Western Cape Government, South Africa

“It is not just about shifting things around in a supermarket – putting the healthy food at the first rank of the aisles rather than at the bottom, but rather thinking through how we can use these kinds of innovations to really shift the dial with socially wicked problems. I think that this is something that we've really learned over the years through doing this type of work.”

Mr. Nabil Saleh, Vice President, Nudge Lebanon

“We have four stages going from the general population to being fully active and violent extremist. We've seen that behavioural Insights is more effective in the first and the second stages of radicalisation. Because once people get their thoughts influenced about something in particular, it becomes much harder to persuade them otherwise. Instead of trying to persuade them, we work on getting them to avoid the traps and techniques that are typically used to get them into this kind of rabbit hole.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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