



## UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

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

**Repatriation and Reintegration in Central Asia**

**Hybrid, 11 November 2021, 8:30 EST**

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you, the Slovenian Presidency, for inviting me to speak at today's geographic spotlight meeting on "Repatriation and Reintegration in Central Asia", jointly with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union Special Representative and civil society represented here by "Regional Dialogue."

Let me reiterate my appreciation for the continuing strategic partnership between the European Union and the United Nations in the area of counter-terrorism. The European Union, as a reliable partner, has been providing political as well as financial support for UNOCT counter-terrorism efforts around the world.

It is almost two and a half years since Dae'sh's territorial enclave was dismantled. Yet, many foreign terrorist fighters and their families remain stranded in Syria and Iraq – a situation that implies impunity for perpetrators and denies protection and justice to the victims of those heinous acts.

Additionally, those who have been left behind in camps in northeastern Syria and Iraq, many of whom are women and children, are exposed to harmful terrorist propaganda and face dire living conditions.

The recent escalation of violence in these camps and the continued threat of COVID-19 highlight the urgent need for Member States' action.

The status quo presents serious protection, human rights, and counter-terrorism concerns, as was highlighted by United Nations Member States during the seventh review of

the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and also raised by Member States during the General Debate in New York in September.

As Member States around the world, including in Central Asia, are facing pressing issues related to foreign terrorist fighters, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre of UNOCT has offered guidance, coordination and capacity building through the Global Programme on Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (PRR).

PRR strategies aim to reconcile security considerations with a dignified and human rights-based approach that restores lives and helps with the healing processes of individuals and communities with a view to rehabilitate them back into society.

Without comprehensive PRR responses, there are significant risks of shattered lives, broken communities, and recurring cycles of violence.

With that in mind, it is of utmost importance that PRR approaches help to avoid the marginalization and stigmatization of returnees and their families in an effort to thwart future radicalization.

Excellencies,

During the 76<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly, we formally launched the Global Framework for UN Support on Syria / Iraq Third Country National Returnees and its dedicated Multi-Partner Trust Fund. The Global Framework supports the efforts of Member States and other actors to protect and address the needs of returnees while also building the capacity needed to respond to security concerns and to ensure accountability.

My Office coordinates the Global Framework together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to facilitate development and recovery and PRR support to requesting Member States.

Before the launch of the Global Framework, thanks to the generous support of the European Union and other donors, UNICEF has already started implementing activities in Iraq, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

My office is also working with CTED and UNODC to develop policy recommendations to enable Member States to develop comprehensive and tailored PRR strategies for suspected terrorists including but not limited to returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members. To that end, a Compendium will be available to Member States in early 2022.

Central Asia practices will feed into the compendium and will be of particular value given the Central Asia experience with implementing PRR both with nationals returned from Syria and Iraq as well as with domestic caseloads.

The financial contribution of the European Union will increasingly support Central Asia Member States to ensure that these practices are human rights based and in line with the best interest of the child.

During my meetings with the representatives of the Central Asia States on the margins of the General Debate of the 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly, they assured me of their readiness to continue the repatriation process. They also requested UNOCT assistance for subsequent prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration.

This is particularly important for Kyrgyzstan which started repatriation of its citizens after other countries in the region and is eager to continue this process with the support provided by the United Nations.

UNOCT has previously partnered with Kazakhstan to share its experience of executing two special operations to repatriate Kazakh citizens from Syria and Iraq. Despite the risks and seriousness of reintegrating such citizens, the country considered it a humanitarian imperative to take timely action and not to abandon stranded victims.

The Kazakh example is worth highlighting also because Kazakhstan has repatriated a significant number [43] of male foreign terrorist fighters. It's a kind of unique experience.

This Kazakh repatriation plan was implemented following thorough work on gathering battlefield evidence, which was possible thanks to significant criminal justice and penal reform implemented in this country with assistance from the European Union.

These are examples that we can learn from, and which UNOCT stands ready to disseminate. This also demonstrates that when there is a will, there is a way.

I am also encouraged by the increasing numbers of European children being repatriated from Al-Hol camp, who can now benefit from advanced reintegration services in their home countries.

However, for a long-term sustainable solution, we need to move from a "retail" repatriation approach to a "wholesale" approach with a view to repatriate larger number of inhabitants of those camps to their home countries.

I was encouraged by the outcome of recent negotiations of the 7th biennial review resolution of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy which showed a lot of progress on the repatriation question. However, the review outcome also reflected the difficulties Member States are facing to find a common ground.

I urge Member States to continue their common efforts to make progress on some critical aspects of this issue – especially keeping children out of harm's way.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The situation in Afghanistan has made the foreign terrorist fighter issue more complex but even more urgent. There are many Member States who need international assistance to repatriate, prosecute and rehabilitate their nationals from the conflict situations.

I therefore take this opportunity to call on you as European Union Member States to contribute funds to the Pooled Fund created to support the UNOCT Global Framework. Your assistance is crucial to sustain the continuation and efficiency of repatriations efforts.

Let me also highlight that UNOCT and UNRCCA jointly with the OSCE and Uzbekistan will convene a high-level conference in Tashkent on 17-18 February 2022. This conference will provide an opportunity to engage with Central Asian Member States on their CT/PCVE efforts and capacity needs, especially in view of the latest developments in Afghanistan.

In the second half of next year UNOCT and Tajikistan are planning to convene a regional conference in Dushanbe which will serve as a valuable platform to review the border control challenges and needs in the region.

Excellencies,

I look forward to continuing to strengthen UNOCT's partnership with the European Union, and to move forward our joint efforts to mobilize support for countries and regions most affected by terrorism.

I thank the Slovenian Presidency for its excellent cooperation and will be looking forward to working closely with France when they will take over the Presidency from Slovenia in January. I also thank all European Union Member States for their continued partnership and support for UNOCT counter-terrorism policy, advocacy and capacity building efforts around the world.

Thank you for your attention.