



**Remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General
United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**

Web-dialogue on Preventing and Countering Bioterrorism in the Wake of COVID-19

10 December 2021

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank His Excellency, Ambassador Magzhan Ilyassov, and the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, for co-organizing this web-dialogue on preventing and countering bioterrorism in the wake of COVID-19.

The Government of Kazakhstan has made several important contributions to the global fight against terrorism, including repatriation of its nationals from Syria and Iraq, and initiating the Code of Conduct for Achieving a World Free of Terrorism.

We are also grateful to the Republic of Kazakhstan for its financial and in-kind support of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

In its seventh review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the General Assembly invited Member States to anticipate, monitor and address the short-, medium- and long-term impacts of the pandemic on the evolution of the global terrorist threat. It also recalled Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) and called upon all Member States to prevent the acquisition by terrorists of nuclear, chemical and biological materials and to support international efforts under the auspices of the United Nations.

In the recent report by Secretary-General entitled “Our Common Agenda”, he identified terrorism as a strategic risk and emphasized the need for preparedness, including in the event of “a high-consequence biological attack.”

The Secretary-General has continued to call for networked multilateralism as the foundation for the global responses to the multifaceted challenges our next generation face, such as terrorism.

This requires multilateral initiatives, such as the Code of Conduct, which are essential to the global fight against terrorism, and in particular the fight against the threat of bioterrorism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

This web-dialogue is timely, as we brace for what seems to be a new wave and a new variant of the COVID-19 virus.

The pandemic highlights the potential risks of bioterrorist attacks and has already shown some of the ways in which preparedness might fall short if a disease were to be deliberately manipulated to be more virulent, or intentionally released in multiple places at once.

One can imagine the potential destruction and loss of life if terrorists are able to weaponize a virus of equal or worse proportions.

Unfortunately, this is not just imagination – it could be a devastating reality. Such scenarios are getting closer by the day, and bioterrorism is a very real risk.

Recently, there have been a number of concerning incidents, for instance: an individual in Germany prepared an attack in the name of Da'esh and manufactured an improvised explosive device containing ricin; and several attempts of deliberate COVID-19 contamination through direct human-to-human contact have been recorded.

The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh is investigating allegations of bioterrorism in Iraq, and I am happy that the Chairperson for the Iraqi National Monitoring Authority for Non-Proliferation, as well as a colleague from UNITAD have joined us today.

New scientific developments and transformative technologies, including advancements in biotechnology, are transforming our everyday life and global economy in remarkable ways.

However, it is the same developments and technologies that in parallel open up new threat vectors for terrorists. For instance, there is a risk they could develop or modify pathogens by using readily available materials and equipment. This requires, unfortunately, limited technological knowledge to carry out.

United Nations entities collaborate with INTERPOL in the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact to address this terrorist threat and support Member States' efforts to prevent and counter bioterrorism.

I am particularly proud of the Global Programme on preventing and responding to chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological terrorism, led by the UN Counter-Terrorism-Centre of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, which provided capacity building to over 1200 officials this year.

Our activities enhanced the capacity in preventing and responding to bioterrorism, including training for the first responders on outbreak containment, biological countermeasures and countering clandestine laboratories.

I would also like to recall that during last year's Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week organized by my Office, the risk of bioterrorism was widely acknowledged by Member States. There was a broad agreement on the urgent need to prevent and establish the necessary response mechanisms against weaponization of biological materials by non- state actors.

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Bioterrorism is a global issue. One of the most important lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic is that global issues need global solutions.

Let's make sure that we learn that lesson by taking action together, in partnership and in the spirit of the United Nations Charter.

I look forward to today's dialogue with Member States and senior experts in this field, to identify and discuss experiences, good practices, challenges and opportunities to address this threat, in a manner fully consistent with human rights and the rule of law.

This will set the stage for multilateral action against bioterrorism. You can count on the support of the United Nations, and my Office in particular.

And I thank you.