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HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE

International and Regional Border Security and
Management Cooperation to Counter Terrorism
and Prevent the Movement of Terrorists

DUSHANBE, TAJIKISTAN • 18-19 OCTOBER 2022

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

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this High-Level Conference on “International and Regional Border Security and Management Cooperation to Counter Terrorism and Prevent the Movement of Terrorists.”

I would like to thank the President of Tajikistan, His Excellency Emomali Rahmon, for opening this Conference, together with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres.

My words of deep gratitude go to the Government of Tajikistan for hosting and organizing this important event together with United Nations Office for Countering Terrorism, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

I am grateful to the State of Qatar for its continuous support to United Nations Office for Countering Terrorism, including the series of High-Level Conferences that we have organized since 2019. These Conferences help to sustain multilateral momentum on counter-terrorism.

I am thankful to the representatives of Member States, United Nations entities, international and regional organizations, civil society and academia, who have travelled from all parts of the world to join us here today.

The broad representation from the international community in this Conference is impressive. Gathered here today are over 723 participants, including from 59 Member States, 12 Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Entities, 18 international and regional organizations, and 30 non-governmental organizations.

The active engagement by all stakeholders is a demonstration of the importance of our Conference focusing on the theme of “Border Security and Management Cooperation to Counter Terrorism and Prevent the Movement of Terrorists.”

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This Conference is taking place not just amidst the continuing turmoil in Afghanistan, but also growing geopolitical challenges and divides. The very fact of this conference is a testimony to the necessity of sustained multilateral cooperation in our collective fight against terrorism.

I commend the governments of Central Asia for their leadership and determination to work with the United Nations, as well as with regional and international partners, on countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism.

In May 2018, the Government of Tajikistan, together with the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union, launched the “Dushanbe Process” during the first High-Level International Conference on “Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism”.

A year later, in 2019, a Regional Conference, focused on international and regional cooperation on countering terrorism and its financing through illicit drug trafficking and organized crime, was organized in Dushanbe.

And in March of this year, we met in Tashkent where the foreign ministers of Central Asian States renewed their collective commitment to the updated Joint Plan of Action for the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Today's Conference, which is our first joint event on border security issues, is a significant milestone in the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action in Central Asia, and a manifestation of the importance of regional cooperation.

It is also fitting that it is being held in Tajikistan, the country that pioneered and developed a National Border Management Strategy and accompanying Action Plan as early as 2010.

Border security and cooperation is an essential part of the international counter-terrorism legal framework. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and related Security Council resolutions call upon Member States to step up national efforts, as well as bilateral, sub-regional, regional, and international cooperation, to improve border and customs controls to prevent and detect the movement of terrorists.

The General Assembly and Security Council have also requested Member States to strengthen their efforts to curtail the threat posed by terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters, through the adoption of measures on border security and management, criminal justice, and information sharing, in compliance with domestic and international law.

My Office has two flagship programmes to support Member States in these efforts, one on Border Security Management and one on Countering Terrorist Travel. Both programmes will be featured during this Conference, along with other complementary and prominent initiatives implemented by our partners and co-organizers.

You will have a chance to hear more about these innovative initiatives and our counter-terrorism efforts during the three conference side events. Today at lunchtime we will have a side event on "Border Management Strategies". And tomorrow morning two side events on the "United Nations Multi-Year Appeal for Counter-Terrorism" and "Behavioural Techniques for Securing Borders".

But the aim of this Conference is not only to present what we already know and have learned, but to look beyond the current challenges, to widen the horizon of our joint planning, and facilitate new avenues for collaboration.

Looking at the latest statistics from the International Civil Aviation Organization, world passenger traffic is expected to recover to 86% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of this year. If

the global volume of air passengers continues to grow between 5 to 7% every year, it could reach 7.2 billion passengers by 2036. Once we add those traveling by sea, rail and road, we will witness a dramatic growth in global passenger numbers overall.

Not all these individuals will be *bona fide* travellers. We can therefore expect an increase in the movement of terrorists and transnational criminals.

Given these trends, we have no other choice but to strengthen our joint efforts to prevent and counter terrorism, including by sharing information on foreign terrorist fighters, and finding innovative solutions for enhanced border management to detect their travel.

It is for this reason that during its seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in June last year, the General Assembly urged Member States to enhance international cooperation between law enforcement organizations, specifically through the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), and to develop relevant response measures, in accordance with their domestic and international law obligations.

The seventh review resolution also welcomed the cooperation between the United Nations system and INTERPOL through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, which is led by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, in preventing and countering terrorism.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

To be effective, counter-terrorism measures must be in full compliance with the rule of law and international law, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international refugee law.

During the first United Nations High-Level Conference on Human Rights, Civil Society and Counter-Terrorism organized by my Office and the Government of Spain in Málaga this past May, participants emphasized the devastating impact of the misuse of counter-terrorism measures.

They underlined how violations of human rights play into the hands of terrorists as they seek to provoke heavy-handed and indiscriminate responses from security forces. Terrorists do this with the aim of undermining public confidence in the ability of governments to protect their own citizens.

Dear colleagues,

We also need to strengthen our prevention efforts by addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

I want to use this opportunity to highlight the plight of the thousands of children and women associated with Da'esh who remain stranded in camps in North-East Syria and Iraq who need to be repatriated by their countries of nationality.

In addition to the legal, human rights and humanitarian concerns, the detention of individuals under such circumstances exacerbates serious short-, medium- and long-term security threats.

I urge Member States present here today to continue and strengthen their repatriation efforts, and to ensure accountability for terrorist offenses, while providing child protection as well as rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees. President of Tajikistan, His Excellency Emomali Rahmon told us today about positive experience of Tajikistan in this regard.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Countering and preventing terrorism is a complex task, but we can succeed if we work together.

This Conference will help us to reflect on existing challenges, identify solutions, and chart a way forward to strengthen our cooperation to counter terrorism and prevent the cross-border movement of terrorists.

I look forward to a candid discussion on the challenges we are facing, and I wish you all fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.