



**SERIES ON PROTECTING DIGITAL SPACES**

**Opening Remarks for  
Deputy to Under Secretary-General Raffi Gregorian  
for Expert Panel Event on Safeguarding the Metaverse from Terrorism and Violent Extremism**

**28 November 2022  
9:00 to 11:00am EST, New York time**

**via Webex**

Excellencies,  
Colleagues,  
Distinguished Guests,

Good morning, good day, or good evening to you, from wherever you are joining us today. My name is Raffi Gregorian, Director of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to this Expert Panel Event on “Safeguarding the Metaverse: Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism in Digital Space”.

Today’s event is part of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism’s efforts to raise awareness on terrorist and violent extremist misuse of emerging technologies through the “Series on Protecting Digital Spaces” organized by the External Partnerships Section of the Special Projects and Innovation Branch in UNOCT.

Previous panels on Extremism in Virtual Reality and Video Games have highlighted that further research and stakeholder exchanges will be needed to fully understand the dimensions of new technologies and develop comprehensive and timely responses to potential threats. Today, we seek to build on the important lessons learned during these events, while exploring the next frontier in immersive technology: the metaverse.

As our distinguished guests know, it was the novelist Neal Stephenson who coined the term metaverse in 1992. Now, however, thanks to the vast resources of interoperability of data, extended reality (XR) environments, Artificial Intelligence, and blockchain technology, some elements of Stephenson's universe in which people could escape their dystopian reality are now not just within the realm of possibility, but to some extent is already here. Today, users can already be immersed in, and manipulate digital environments such as video games.

Tomorrow, they may be able to conduct most everyday life activities on these platforms. In fact so-called metaverse-enabling technologies are already being used to strengthen capacity-building activities in the counter-terrorism sector. The United-Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, for example, already uses augmented and virtual reality to provide Iraqi law enforcement, first responders and intelligence personnel with a platform to conduct training exercises securely and safely.

The UNOCT Global PCVE Programme is also exploring the role of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning and its potential application in prevention.

As is often the case with new technologies, the sorts of regulatory safeguards needed to address security risks and other threats emanating from their use often lag far behind the frontiers of how they area used—or misused. This includes the how terrorists and violent extremists can use such technologies to spread their hateful narratives, recruit, raise funds, communicate, plan—and even train for—real world operations.

At the same time, efforts to reduce the spread of terrorist and violent extremist content have at times adversely impacted human rights, by excessively limiting freedom of expression and by infringing upon freedom of association and the rights to privacy and non-discrimination, among others.

Given that the foundations of the metaverse are still being laid, now is the time to act in a human rights-compliant way to prevent it from becoming a safe haven for terrorists and violent extremists.

It is important, as counter-terrorism practitioners and stakeholders, that we consider emerging technologies as new opportunities to tackle the threat of terrorism and the conditions conducive to terrorism and violent extremism.

Excellencies,  
Colleagues,  
Distinguished Guests,

Today's meeting offers us the opportunity to improve our understanding of the key risks and features of the metaverse and to explore appropriate governance responses needed to avoid their exploitation.

Accordingly, we have assembled this impressive panel of diverse counter-terrorism stakeholders, including private sector representatives from leading companies in the metaverse space, who will assist in explaining the role the private sector can play to counter and prevent terrorism and violent extremism, alongside practitioners and policymakers from international organizations and civil society.

I hope that our discussion today will contribute to building safer digital spaces, free from terrorism and violent extremism, for a safer world for us all.

Thank you for your attention. Welcome again.

It is now my distinct pleasure to turn the screen over to my dear friend and colleague, to Mr. David Scharia, Chief of Branch in the United Nations Security Council's Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to deliver the opening statement.