



# UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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**Twenty-third Regular Session of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) of the  
Organization of American States (OAS)**

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Mexico City, Mexico**

## **INAUGURAL CEREMONY**

Excellencies,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism of the Organization of American States for inviting me to its twenty-third regular session to discuss trends, challenges, and practices in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism.

Let me begin with a brief overview of the terrorist threat.

Although overall terrorism-related deaths declined somewhat last year and Da'esh and Al-Qaida continue to suffer leadership losses, terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to international peace and security, set back sustainable development, and undermine human rights and civil liberties. Both groups continue to harbor aspirations to resume external operations.

The threat is particularly grave in sub-Saharan Africa, which the Global Terrorism Index now considers to be the epicenter of terrorism.

Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaida's affiliate in the Horn of Africa, remains a serious danger, although the efforts of the African Union and Somali security forces now have the group on the backfoot in some parts of the country.

The expansion of Da'esh and its affiliates in Central and Southeastern Africa, but especially in West Africa and the Sahel, is particularly worrying, with terrorists now controlling as much or more than 40 percent of the territory of Burkina Faso, and the Al-Qaida associated Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam Wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and other groups probing southward into countries along the Gulf of Guinea littoral.

The interaction between transnational organized crime and terrorist groups in West Africa is another source of concern. Given that the region has long been a major trafficking route for cocaine from South America and the Caribbean, what is happening on the other side of the Atlantic is not something this hemisphere can afford to ignore.

Meanwhile, Taliban-controlled Afghanistan is once again a safe haven for Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups, including Da'esh's so-called Khorasan Province, which the de facto authorities seem unable to suppress and which only worsens that country's serious humanitarian crisis.

The humanitarian situation in camps and detention facilities in Iraq and northeast Syria, where more than 50,000 persons with suspected links to Da'esh and other designated terrorist groups are held, presents an acute security, human rights and humanitarian challenge that requires urgent, decisive action – particularly for the tens of thousands of children who are stranded there through no fault of their own.

As if all this wasn't bad enough, we have also seen an increase in the frequency and lethality of terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance or in the name of religion or belief, including here in the Western Hemisphere.

Individuals and groups with these motivations often have transnational connections, and a few Member States consider terrorism on such basis as the fastest growing, or even the most prominent domestic security threat that they face.

Terrorist have proven to be highly adaptive and nimble, expanding their use of the Internet, social media, online video games and adjacent platforms to spread their propaganda and recruit new supporters – particularly young people.

They are adept at exploiting new and emerging technologies, including unmanned aerial systems and virtual assets. No doubt they are also seeking ways to exploit artificial intelligence and related applications.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We know that tackling the terrorist threat requires strong partnerships between the United Nations, governments, intergovernmental institutions, civil society, academia, and the private sector.

The General Assembly's exhaustive seventh biennial review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy two years ago, and the resulting consensus resolution, marked significant advances on key priorities, which still need to be fully implemented.

The ongoing eighth biennial review represents an important moment for Member States both to renew the international consensus on counter-terrorism and to identify and explore areas for further attention.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism is providing secretariat support during the ongoing review of the Strategy, and we hope that the General Assembly will adopt another consensus resolution when it meets on 22 June at the end of the Third United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week, that UNOCT will convene in New York.

The Week will also include the Third High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States from 19 to 20 June. We look forward to your participation in this important event.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly pleased with the strengthened collaboration we have with the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism of the Organization of American States in the area of cybersecurity and new technologies.

Yesterday, CICTE, the Government of Mexico, the Latin American Jewish Congress, and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism delivered a joint side event on “Offline effects of online activity.”

Participants discussed trends and challenges in preventing and combating the use of information and communication technologies for terrorist and violent extremist purposes and participated in a cybersecurity table-top exercise, delivered by our Global Cyber and New Technologies Programme.

The exercise explored national and regional response mechanisms to notional cyber-attacks against a national electric utility with cascading effects to other critical infrastructure, perpetrated by a terrorist group using AI-powered ransomware and demanding ransom payment in cryptocurrencies.

Cyberspace provides new mechanisms for the delivery of cyber-attacks, with increased speed, diffusion, impact, anonymity and undetectability.

As noted by the Group of Government Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, “the use of Information and Communication Technologies for terrorist purposes, beyond recruitment, financing, training and incitement, including for terrorist attacks against ICTs or ICT-dependent infrastructure, is an increasing possibility that, if left unaddressed, may threaten international peace and security.”

I trust that the exercise raised awareness of cyber threats stemming from terrorist actors and will inform future priorities for capacity building and regional collaboration in protecting critical infrastructures against such attacks.

The UN Office of Counter-Terrorism is looking forward to future work with CICTE in strengthening regional capacities to prevent and respond to the use of new technologies and cyberspace for terrorist purposes, as well as on matters pertaining to aviation and maritime security.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UN General Assembly has made clear that more comprehensive, human-rights compliant and gender-sensitive approaches that prioritize prevention and tackle the underlying drivers of terrorism and violent extremism are needed.

Put differently, we need to stop keeping counter-terrorism in a silo and instead embrace the sort of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches that are most effective for defeating what in many parts of the world are insurgencies that use terror to undermine state authority in order to conquer, rather than old-style, small, fringe groups that use terrorism to attract attention.

Concerted action is also required to address terrorist use of new and emerging technologies, as well as the growing transnational threat of terrorist attacks based on “xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion and belief.”

In his report on *Our Common Agenda*, the UN Secretary-General called for a revitalized, comprehensive, and overarching prevention agenda.

The ongoing development of the New Agenda for Peace, for which my Office is one of the co-leads, provides an opportunity to articulate a new, unifying global response to prevention and peacebuilding, and reforge commitment to the UN Charter and multilateral solutions to peace and security.

We are working to ensure that the New Agenda for Peace adequately reflects the complexities around terrorism in the global peace and security landscape, as well as steps that could be undertaken to ensure that the UN counter-terrorism system is more efficient, collaborative, and impact-oriented.

The UN Office of Counter-Terrorism looks forward to continuing its cooperation with the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism and all members of the Organization of American States for greater coordination, coherence, accountability, transparency, and effectiveness of global counter-terrorism efforts to build resilience.

Thank you.