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2022 Building Integrity Conference
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Session III: Good governance as a tool of societal resilience

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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to speak to you here today on how upholding human rights is crucial to good governance as a tool of societal resilience.

I would like to address this topic from the perspective of counter-terrorism and focus on an aspect that is often insufficiently considered: the role of human rights and gender equality as indispensable elements in fostering good governance.

In addition to inflicting often indescribable human suffering, terrorism poses a serious challenge to the very tenets of democracy and the rule of law, human rights, and their effective implementation. It sets back development and is intended to undermine trust between citizens and their governments, a job made easier by the long-lasting impacts of the 2007 financial crisis and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

As my colleague from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Tom Parker, has noted "terrorist doctrine is sophisticated and well established, and groups all over the world adhere to the same basic strategic approach, key pillars of which are provoking states into overreaction, polarizing society to drown out moderate voices, and actively contesting the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its stakeholders."

Under international law, States are primarily responsible for promoting and protecting human rights. Unfortunately, today we are witnessing a shrinking space for human rights across the globe, and particularly women's rights, as is the case in Afghanistan.

Decades of international counter-terrorism efforts have led to significant milestones, including serious leadership losses by Al-Qaida and Da'esh. We have a rigorous multilateral architecture in place to address the threat of terrorism to international peace and security. We have also gained important lessons to improve our response across the board: from legislation, policy, and programming, to prevention, capacity-building, monitoring and evaluation.

Although a key pillar of the 2006 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy involves measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism, we still have a long way to go in effectively incorporating these issues to our responses to terrorism.

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, human rights violations committed under the guise of counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism have resulted both in inefficient responses and resource misallocation, creating significant setbacks to security. Indeed, violations of human rights perpetrated in a counter-terrorism context can exacerbate the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism in the first place.

In other words, states are doing exactly what Tom Parker warned against in his 2019 book appropriately titled *Avoiding the Terrorist Trap: Why Human Rights is the Key to Defeating Terrorism*.

It has often also been the case that such violations undermine civil society, depriving States of a crucial partner in building societal resilience through inclusive and representative decision-making that facilitates ownership of relevant public policies by diverse segments of the public.

Overly broad or improperly applied counter-terrorism measures contribute to shrinking civic space, as repeatedly noted by the Secretary-General in his reports to the Human Rights Council on reprisals for cooperation with the United Nations. Moreover, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism has also noted that approximately two-thirds of the communications sent by her mandate to Member States relate to allegations of misapplication of counter-terrorism measures against civil society actors and human rights defenders.

We also know that poor governance, democracy deficits, gender inequality, marginalization, discrimination, injustice, corruption, and a culture of impunity for unlawful behaviour by the State or its agents, are exploited by terrorists and violent extremist actors in their recruitment efforts. This fundamentally contributes to fuelling conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

A 2017 study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) entitled the "Journey to Extremism in Africa" found that a "striking 71 percent [of those surveyed] pointed to 'government action', including 'killing of a family member or friend' or 'arrest of a family member or friend', as the incident that prompted them to join" a violent extremist organization. UNDP believed that "[t]hese findings throw into stark relief the question of how counter-terrorism and wider security functions of governments in at-risk environments conduct themselves with regard to human rights and due process." In other words, "state security-actor conduct is revealed as a prominent accelerator of recruitment, rather than the reverse."

So, how do we develop responses to this threat that are firmly anchored on human rights and gender?

First, such responses must strive to support systems of governance that are participatory and accountable, grounded in the supremacy of laws that are accessible and foreseeable, and adopted and enforced through transparent procedures.

Second, these responses must uphold equality before the law and fairness in their application, including through an independent and competent judiciary where timely access to justice is guaranteed.

Third, responses to terrorism should be designed based on inclusive engagement with a broad range of civil society actors, including women-, youth-, and locally-focused entities. This improves transparency, accountability, and legitimacy of decision-making; facilitates informed and inclusive processes; and bolsters the effectiveness and sustainability of laws and policies, including their implementation and enforcement.

Fourth, counter-terrorism responses must promote gender equality. This is not only an obligation of states under the UN Charter, but it also helps to address structural factors conducive to violence and radicalization, including violent masculinities, repressive gender norms, and gender-based discrimination. Understanding these aspects contributes to more effective measures for countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism, anchored in the specific conditions and grievances of different gender and age groups, among other intersectional factors.

To meaningfully integrate gender perspectives, the collection and analysis of gender- and age-disaggregated data is required, to enable decision-making informed by context-specific gender analysis. This will allow us to better understand and mitigate gender-differentiated impacts and harms. Systematic and meaningful consultations with women-led civil society, women's rights

activists, and human rights defenders are also crucial to understand these harms and address them effectively.

For our part, UNOCT provisionally established in January this year a new Human Rights and Gender Section as a means of mainstreaming human rights and gender perspectives into all our policy, coordination, and capacity-building work as well as providing an in-house capability to implement the UN's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. We have even developed counter-terrorism focused human rights training for law enforcement and intelligence services which we have piloted in several African and Middle Eastern countries.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome the focus of this conference as it ultimately seeks to understand how security, human rights and development could be mutually reinforcing aims, and how actors in each category can contribute to these objectives.

In a context marked by increasing polarization, with heightened divisions stemming from the war in Ukraine, an increase in governance fragilities and inequality arising from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting loss of public confidence and trust in institutions, we must recommit to the principles of the United Nations Charter.

The New Agenda for Peace under preparation by the UN Secretary-General is a direct response to the convergence of these threats. It will represent a call to revitalize our system of collective security and our multilateral action for peace.

To address the complex challenges that the world faces today, we need more of such collaborations.

Thank you.