

**SESSION 3: UN Counter-Terrorism Compact's coordination with regional organizations, civil society, and the private sector in preventing and countering terrorism in Africa.**

*Remarks by Florence Nakazibwe, Senior Legal Advisor-Africa, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)*

*Thank you chair.*

*Your Excellencies distinguished members of the UN Counter Terrorism Global Compact Coordination Committee, fellow Panelist, and all Delegates.*

I am delighted and grateful for the opportunity to address you today.

As many speakers have echoed, the need to coordinate counter terrorism efforts with regional mechanisms, the private sector and civil society in Africa is critical in ensuring a more holistic and comprehensive response to the rising, complex and multifaceted threat of terrorism and violent extremism on the continent. We are encouraged by this positive commitment by the Global Compact on this issue, recognizing that civil society actors play a critical and strategic role in the collective effort to prevent and combat terrorism in Africa.

Our challenge is how to ensure that this coordination happens in practice.

In reality, we continue to observe persistent gaps in civil society engagement in counterterrorism measures across all levels, and this continues to undermine the goal towards inclusivity of all stakeholders in global counterterrorism efforts.

The whole-of-society approach demands a deliberate and dedicated focus by the UN and member states to provide meaningful, active, and accessible avenues for community engagement to complement state-led security measures, in addition to creating robust systems to constantly evaluate these efforts for sustainable impact. Civil society serves as a key intermediary between local communities and state actors, and has the necessary expertise, knowledge, and resources to assist in developing effective and actionable strategies to address emerging security threats.

In Africa, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have advanced the global fight against terrorism in various ways including conducting training for law enforcement agencies, supporting countries to conduct Terrorism Financing risk assessments and secure favorable ratings, collaborating with governments to implement P/CVE programs, providing humanitarian supplies in conflict-ravaged settings as well as supporting victims of Gender based Violence, among others. In recognition of this critical role of CSOs, member states need to support and expand opportunities for civil society participation in the implementation of counterterrorism initiatives in Africa.

Unfortunately, states are doing the opposite. The growing misuse of counterterrorism measures by governments in various countries has presented barriers for civil society's meaningful engagement in counterterrorism policy making and programming. Legal frameworks designed to counter terrorists have been invoked arbitrarily to limit civil society and democratic freedoms. This raises questions on the commitment by member states to prioritize human rights and rule of

law principles in their counterterrorism measures. The UN should engage governments to conduct human rights due diligence on these measures in consultation with civil society.

Similarly, CT policy spaces are disproportionately security-focused and lack transparency. This leaves civil society uninformed about the evolving security landscape and unable to contribute constructively to national counterterrorism efforts. Similar concerns have been noted at the multilateral level with the exclusion of civil society in country assessments when information is shared with member states.

For the regionalization of counterterrorism efforts to be effective, the African Union and Regional Economic Communities should commit to promote inclusive and cohesive counterterrorism approaches in partnership with civil society. Civic space and human rights must lie at the center of growing counterterrorism initiatives in Africa. This will require a shift from prioritizing security measures to developing comprehensive strategies that integrate human rights, development, and partnership with communities and civil society organizations. The UN can advance this vision by helping states build an enabling environment for civil society and foster trust between state actors and citizens by creating safe spaces for dialogue.

The proposed technical assistance project in Benin provides an opportunity to build a model for Africa. This model can only be a success if the core elements of human rights, participation, transparency, and inclusivity are built in from the beginning by the UN co-leads, and the government.

In summary, as the global community looks to strengthen coordination on counter terrorism efforts in Africa, we call on the UN, regional mechanisms, and other stakeholders to:

1. Foster a conducive environment for civil society voices to be heard and proactively engage in counter terrorism decision making processes. The UN should address the misuse of counterterrorism measures by states that unduly target civil society and ensure accountability to human rights obligations. Barriers embedded in laws including terrorism financing laws should be reformed and informed by a risk-based approach in line with the new Financial Action Task Force Recommendation 8 and Best Practices Paper.
2. Establish safe, inclusive, and participatory spaces for civil society, including women and youth, to engage in the design, implementation, and monitoring of counterterrorism national strategies and action plans taking into account the needs, expectations and experiences from the whole of society. These should be complemented by robust avenues for information sharing to foster transparency in the counterterrorism measures at the national level.
3. Inclusion of civil society in national capacity building efforts under pillar 3 of the Global Counterterrorism Strategy must be ensured. Civil society should be empowered with the skills and resources to implement effective counterterrorism programs at the grassroots level to respond to the needs of affected communities.

Your excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen, I thank you again for the opportunity to address you.