



VIRTUAL COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK

6-10 JULY 2020

Remarks by Alison August Treppel, Executive Secretary, Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) of the Organization of American States during the panel session:

“Strategic and Practical Challenges of Countering Terrorism in a Global Pandemic Environment” – Virtual Counter Terrorism Week 2020, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism

Delivered on July 10, 2020

His Excellency, Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations
Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism
Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Organization of American States, let me begin by extending our congratulations to the United Nations on the commemoration of its 75th Anniversary. We reiterate our full support for the UN’s long-standing efforts to maintain international peace and security, in accordance with the principles set forth in its Charter, particularly during these extremely challenging times.

As UN Secretary General Guterres indicated earlier this week at the opening of this Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week: “Terrorism, like the virus, does not respect national borders. It affects all nations and can only be defeated collectively. So we must harness the power of multilateralism to find practical solutions”.

The Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) is the Western Hemisphere’s **principal multilateral forum for preventing and countering terrorism**, and we are committed to responding to our member states’ evolving and multidimensional security concerns from a strategic and practical approach, both during and after this pandemic.



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The COVID-19 outbreak is having a particularly devastating impact in this Hemisphere. Over 5 million COVID cases have been registered and more than a quarter of a million people have died since the pandemic began. Furthermore, our region's economies are expected to contract this year by more than 7%, with the Caribbean economy potentially seeing a decline of 20 to 30%.

And on top of this, in cities across the globe we are seeing significant public unrest in the name of social injustice. Any of these issues alone would pose significant challenges to maintaining peace and security. But together they create the conditions ripe for terrorist exploitation.

So we believe there are 4 key areas that our region, and perhaps others, must focus on in the coming months:

First, effective biosafety and biosecurity measures are key. The disproportionate death toll in the Americas from the 2009 global outbreak of H1N1, and the current Covid-19 pandemic underscores the urgent need for greater awareness, engagement and investment in biosafety and biosecurity -- whether threats be of natural or man-made origin. Over the next 3 years CICTE will be working with both policy makers and scientists to improve biosafety and biosecurity protocols and strategies throughout Latin America.

Second, COVID poses new challenges for cybersecurity. Increases in telework and online learning have generated a 50% increase in data traffic, for which some sources attribute a 350% increase in "phishing" attacks. To better support our governments, businesses, and citizens, we need to redouble our efforts to prevent and mitigate the impact of cyber incidents and attacks on our critical infrastructure.

We also need to prevent terrorists from exploiting Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) during the pandemic, and develop greater capacity to counter online radicalization and violent extremist propaganda.



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Developing effective national cybersecurity strategies, increasing national capacities through cyber incident response teams (CSIRTs), establishing cybersecurity confidence building measures, and fostering greater public-private sector collaboration, will be crucial for preparing our region against future cyber threats.

Thirdly, in anticipation of our eventual return to public life, we must begin to implement measures that ensure the safety and security of our crowded spaces. Whether they be tourism destinations, sporting or other major public events, we need to develop and/or modernize protocols and practices that will help build confidence in the security of mass gatherings.

And fourth, real-time sharing of operational information among counter terrorism authorities is ever more critical. Through the Inter-American Network against Terrorism, a new network created specifically for this purpose, CICTE will continue to help facilitate **cooperation and coordination among its member states** to counter terrorist threats. Because as a region we are committed to working together towards this goal.

On June 3, the OAS commemorated the first Inter-American Day against Terrorism. On this day our member states not only reflected on the devastating impact that terrorism has had in our region, and on the thousands of lives lost, but also on the many important efforts being carried out to ensure that as a region we are better prepared to prevent and respond to future terrorist attacks.

Through these reflections, we know that we need to promote greater awareness of the risks of terrorism and violent extremism in our region, particularly with all of the societal changes the pandemic is expected to bring about.

We know, too, that we must continue to **move away from being a reactive society and focus greater attention on prevention efforts**, namely by strengthening capacities to protect our region's critical infrastructure, by increasing the exchange of operational



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information with our neighbors and partners, and by fostering greater preparedness and resiliency among our communities.

But we also know that our challenges are not unique and that other regions are facing very similar tests and trials. Which is why our participation here today, and our valuable partnership with the United Nations, its specialized agencies, and other regional organizations, is so important for our success.

Because we believe that cooperation and collaboration among all stakeholders continues to be the most practical and strategic response to countering terrorism across the globe, during and after this pandemic.

And regardless of the challenges that may come our way, the Organization of American States, and its Inter-American Committee against Terrorism stands ready to actively support global and other regional efforts to prevent and counter terrorism, and to working together with all of you to achieve our collective goal of international peace and security.