



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

**Opening Statement by
Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism,
Third High-Level Strategic Dialogue Between the State of Qatar and the
United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)
9 December 2020, 09:00am-11:00am**

Excellency Major General Al-Ansari,
Your Excellency, Ambassador Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani,
Distinguished representatives from the Government of the State of Qatar,
Dear colleagues from the Global Counter-Terrorism Compact entities,

It is a pleasure to meet again for our Third High-Level Strategic Dialogue, which follows the successful launch of the International Hub on Behavioural Insights two days ago.

The establishment of the Doha Hub is an important, and first-of-its-kind development in the behavioural insights field. Its work will make meaningful contributions to global efforts to prevent and counter terrorism through better informed programming design and delivery.

The signing of the agreement with the Shura Council two weeks ago to establish the UNOCT Programme Office on Parliamentary Engagement in Doha also marks an important milestone in our strategic partnership.

Around this time last year, we held our second bilateral Strategic Dialogue. The global terrorism landscape has evolved since the outbreak of an unprecedented pandemic.

Terrorist groups continue to exploit socioeconomic and political grievances, distrust in public institutions, human rights violations, and the 'infodemic' arising from the pandemic, to incite violence.

The impact of COVID-19 has reinforced the need to strategically invest in prevention and prepare against new and emerging terrorism threats and trends, including by strengthening cybersecurity and biosecurity.

Meanwhile, ISIL still commands thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria, as well as in Afghanistan, and exploits instability to strengthen its presence around the world.

ISIL's Central Africa Province has stepped up attacks in the Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique, posing a growing threat to regional security, already under pressure from Al-Shabaab further up north in Somalia.

Despite significant leadership losses and operational setbacks, Al-Qaida affiliates in East and North Africa, the Sahel, and Yemen remain highly capable and, in some cases, even stronger than rival groups.

The threat of attacks by lone actors inspired by terrorist content online remains an acute challenge for security services.

There is also a growing transnational threat from far-right violent extremists, including Neo-Nazis and white supremacists.

Almost one hundred Member States rightly referred to terrorism as an issue of concern in their statements during the opening session of this year's General Assembly. The threat is real and persistent, and reminds us every day of the continued relevance of our mandate and the importance of our work.

I therefore welcome the opportunity to continue our strategic dialogue with Qatar, a key counter-terrorism partner of my Office and the United Nations.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Qatar for its strong political support and generous financial contributions, without which it would not be possible for my Office to carry out its core policy, coordination and capacity-building functions.

Let me say a few words on what we have achieved over the course of this year—and thanks to the support of Qatar:

First, we have been able to enhance our leadership on the counter-terrorism mandates entrusted by the General Assembly to the Secretary-General.

Throughout the year, I engaged closely with Member States, regional partners and civil society organizations, and provided advice to the Secretary-General in various fora, to keep the momentum for international counter-terrorism cooperation and to strengthen the focus on key priorities.

In July, my Office organized a Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week to sustain this policy dialogue following the decision of the General Assembly to postpone the seventh biennial review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy to its 75th session, together with the entire second Counter-Terrorism Week.

This unique Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week, the first of its kind, allowed for a global conversation on the evolving terrorism threat and Member States' counter-terrorism priorities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am thankful to Her Excellency Ambassador Al-Thani for her participation and contribution to the Virtual CT Week.

Earlier in the year, we also organized a two-day conference in Vienna in partnership with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Switzerland on the evolving foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon.

The pandemic prevented us from holding other planned high-level regional conferences. However, we have continued our preparations to be able to deliver them next year—hopefully physically but, if not possible, virtually or through a hybrid modality.

In the meantime, we organized other high-level virtual events, including the third commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism in August, and a side-event on the margins of the General Debate on the Central Asian experience on repatriations and the UN support to Member States that have repatriated or are committed to repatriating their nationals from camps in north-eastern Syria and Iraq.

Similarly, we prepared the report of the Secretary-General for the seventh review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which was issued in February, and worked closely with the then co-facilitators until the process was postponed.

We are now preparing an update to that first review report, and look forward to actively supporting the Permanent Representatives of Oman and Spain as co-facilitators.

Second, the financial support of Qatar has been vital to deliver on our coordination mandate. I serve as chair of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, and UNOCT serves as secretariat to the

Compact Coordination Committee and its eight interagency working groups, bringing together 43 entities.

I am very pleased to be joined today by my colleagues from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)- and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), our key Counter-Terrorism Compact partners. Ghada, Miguel, Michele, Asako: welcome and thank you for joining us today.

This coordination has continued uninterrupted throughout the pandemic. If anything, it has even increased with more interagency collaboration pursued virtually.

In March, I launched the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Platform. In just a few months it has become the digital gateway to the United Nations' counter-terrorism work, connecting us already with focal points from 127 Member States and regional organisations, including the European Union. I am keen to further invest in and leverage the full potential of this online tool.

Mr. Rafi Shah, the Chief of UNOCT's Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch, will provide additional information on our policy and coordination efforts in the next session.

Third, my Office, in partnership with relevant Counter-Terrorism Compact entities, has made significant progress in the implementation of our global capacity-building programmes in the fields of countering terrorist travel, promotion of sports for PVE, protection of vulnerable targets, parliamentary engagement, and inter-agency fusion cells.

I am pleased to share that our flagship Countering Terrorist Travel Programme has now expanded to 38 beneficiary countries, with, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Maldives, Morocco and Namibia joining the programme this year.

In September, we launched the workstream of our global sports programme on the 'Promotion of Sport and its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism', in partnership with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), UNAOC, and the International Centre for Sport Security.

Together with CTED, UNAOC, UNICRI and INTERPOL, we are now launching a global programme to support Member States in the protection of vulnerable targets through public-private partnerships.

Our fusion cells programme, launched in January, is supporting Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mozambique and Uganda in developing their national interagency counter-terrorism coordination mechanisms through information sharing, trainings and technical advice.

And our global Victims of Terrorism Support Programme has expanded its activities to uphold the rights and meet the needs of victims around the world.

My Office has also developed an integrated Global PCVE Programme that seeks to build resilience to violent extremism through capacity-building across a range of mutually reinforcing portfolios, including strategic communications, video games, education, youth engagement, mental health, climate security, gender and human rights.

The Chief of the Special Projects and Innovation Branch of UNOCT, Mr. Mauro Miedico, will further detail the progress we have made in the implementation of these innovative programmes.

Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,

Next year marks a turning point for the United Nations' counter-terrorism efforts, as we mark the 15th anniversary of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the 20th anniversaries of the 9/11 attacks and UN Security Council resolution 1373 establishing the Counter-Terrorism Committee, and the 10th anniversary of our United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre.

As we continue preparations for the 2021 Counter-Terrorism Week, I count on the support of Qatar to help the General Assembly achieve a consensus review resolution, providing a clear and strong counter-terrorism mandate for the next two years, as well as language for an increase in the allocation of Regular Budget to UNOCT to cover our senior staff—allowing your extra-budgetary financial contributions to go further.

I also hope that Qatar will be represented at a senior level during the Counter-Terrorism Week, which will also include the Second High-Level Conference of

Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States and the first United Nations Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism.

In the coming year, UNOCT will step up the implementation of its multi-year programmes on sports, national fusion cells, and preventing and countering violent extremism, launched in 2020, while continuing the delivery of its global programmes on countering terrorist travel and support to victims of terrorism.

We will launch a global programme on countering terrorist threats against vulnerable targets in January through an event that will include an online panel on the protection of religious sites. We would welcome the participation of Ambassador Al-Thani in this event.

We will also launch a global campaign on sports values to prevent violent extremism, which will build momentum in the run-up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

We look forward to expanding our capacity-building cooperation to our other flagship programmes on countering the financing of terrorism, cybersecurity, WMD/CBRN prevention and response, and the “all-of-UN” Global Framework that supports concerned States in the repatriation, prosecution, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of their nationals returning from Syria and Iraq.

We are planning high-level regional conferences in Riyadh, Málaga and Trinidad and Tobago on thematic counter-terrorism priorities.

We will also convene the first Annual Forum of Beneficiaries of Technical Assistance jointly with the State of Qatar. My Chief of Office, Ms. Oguljeren Niyazberdiyeva, will further elaborate on this shortly.

You will hear more about our key strategic priorities for the coming year from my Deputy, Mr. Raffi Gregorian, in the closing session.

And as we continue to deliver on our counter-terrorism mandate, we remain committed to continuing our strategic dialogue and close cooperation with Qatar.

I look very much forward to our discussions today.

Thank you.