Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me kindly welcome you to the plenary session on “The role of victims of terrorism in countering the terrorist narrative”.

Let me express my delight at participating in this panel as victims of terrorism now occupy a central position in the UN’s efforts to combat terrorism; one which has been entrenched in the UN Global Strategy as it cuts across many of its four pillars. The Global Strategy also cites the “dehumanisation” of victims of terrorism as one of the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

Excellencies,

It is our common responsibility to ensure that the rights of victim remain central to all counter-terrorism activities. Our mandate on victims of terrorism has been further strengthened through the third review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy of June 2012, which - for the first time - placed a specific emphasis on victims of terrorism and the key roles that they can play in countering terrorism.

Victims have a valuable role to play in countering terrorism, and we must ensure that their actions and activities are elevated to give them greater exposure. Through
their participation in combating the spread of terrorism, victims have an important role in dispelling the myths that violent extremists often create around themselves and their actions.

By giving victims a voice, we learn from them about the effects that a terrorist attack has on the lives of ordinary people: what this means for them in going about their daily lives, for those seeking justice, and what can be done to further support victims and survivors. Listening to victims and giving them a voice can only further encourage and feed into efforts on combating terrorism.

Yet, victims are not commodities to be used in our fight against terrorism. They must be treated with dignity and respect. By highlighting the victim as a person who has been affected by an attack also goes in some way to dispelling the image of a victim as a passive entity, and further “humanizes” the victim. By showing the world the effects that terrorist attacks have on the lives of innocent people brings a more personal dimension to the debate than any government, organisation or entity can do. This courage to speak out can change not only perceptions but can successfully engage the wider public on the ramifications of terrorist acts and clearly shows the human consequences of such violent actions.

Excellencies,

Although the primary responsibility to promote and protect the rights of victims rests with Governments, the involvement of civil society remains fundamental to any actions taken on victims, as they bring a unique and often personal perspective to this issue. The discussion during the previous session on the role of civil society has informed us greatly on how victims can be supported through active civil society action.

The CTITF Office has a portfolio dedicated to ensuring that victim’s rights are not lost or forgotten and we will keep building on existing activities and creating new ones to assist victims and their families. We need to ensure that our responses reflect their needs.

The CTITF Office and the CTITF Working Group on Highlighting and Supporting Victims of Terrorism fosters the work on victims of terrorism. The Working Group recently endorsed a comprehensive work plan for the period from 2012 to 2013.

From this work plan, three major activities have been prioritised: 1) creating a web portal for victims of terrorism; 2) launching a media campaign for victims of terrorism; and 3) strengthening the UN’s internal response to staff affected by terrorism. These activities will be conducted within the context of the ongoing work on victims of terrorism by the CTITF and its partner entities. It will take into account the activities of other fora such as the GCTF and its working groups as well as the Madrid
Memorandum and Plan of Action for victims of terrorism and the work of Hedayah on victims.

Let me explain the three major activities in more detail:

1) The web portal's main objective is to ensure that victims’ voices are heard, that those working for and on behalf of victims will be provided with the space and opportunity to come together and use a common platform to share ideas, information and resources. Building on this greater desire for a more vocal and visible platform, the web portal, as a multi-faceted dynamic tool, would enable all users to access information and work on victims of terrorism.

The web portal, thus, could be seen a pivotal mechanism in three clear ways.

One: in ensuring an easily accessible multimedia platform and resource hub on all information to do with victims of terrorism.

Two: as a tool to counter the narrative of extremists that often lead to violence. By showing how victims are affected by terrorist attacks, through the different links, information and visual media, the message by violent extremists becomes diluted.

The third clear objective of the web portal is as an active mechanism that could contribute to the rehabilitation of victims of terrorism. This ensures that victims, their families and various interlocutors working on behalf of victims of terrorism can access a medium that would allow them to seek information from a variety of bodies and entities that would further enhance the rehabilitation of victims of terrorism.

2) The overall objective of the second activity – the Media Campaign for Victims of Terrorism - is to equip victims of terrorism with the appropriate tools and skills to enhance their knowledge, understanding and use of the media in all its forms – through conventional interviews to the use of social networking to better communicate their messages and so play a more prominent role in better countering the messages that are put forward by violent extremists.

Mainstreaming victims’ voices into the context of the counter narrative can be an effective way to offset the narratives used by violent extremists through a number of communication channels. For victims to undertake a more central role within this environment requires their knowledge and skills to be further enhanced and an understanding from those supporting them to treat them with dignity and an awareness of the effort this requires. An
effective communications strategy can elevate victims of terrorism to play an integral part of any action to countering terrorism, and can crucially also reach out and influence a wider segment of the population that could be supporting terrorism.

3) The last activity aims at strengthening the UN response to staff affected by terrorism. The UN, unfortunately, has been a target, and remains a target of terrorist attacks. In the course of duty, the UN as been hit by suicide and other terrorist attacks in Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo to name a few places. Staff who were working on the frontline to support and assist countries in conflict have either lost their lives or survived, but often deeply scarred, by terrorist attacks. By ensuring that the UN has an appropriate and sensitive response to staff members who are victims and survivors of terrorist attacks we can ensure that our moral voice in helping other victims and survivors is legitimate. To this end, CTITF has become involved in the various processes being undertaken by the UN in ensuring that the rights, needs and dignity of survivors and victims families are being considered.

Excellencies,

In conclusion, let me quote the Secretary-General on the important role of victims of terrorism in countering the terrorist narrative: In the context of the Secretary-General’s Symposium on Supporting Victims of Terrorism in 2008 he emphasized that

“The [Global Strategy] called for ending the dehumanization of victims of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We have embarked on the journey to give practical meaning to these commitments. Let us go forward in mutual respect, determination and solidarity.”

Thank you.