UNITED NATIONS ACTION TO COUNTER TERRORISM

Background Note

The United Nations effort to counter terrorism has been guided by a global strategy adopted by Member States in September 2006. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy – in the form of a Resolution and an annexed Plan of Action (A/RES/60/288) – is a unique instrument to enhance national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism. Its adoption marks the first time that all Member States of the United Nations have agreed to a common strategic and operational framework to fight terrorism. With General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/62/272) in September 2008, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the Strategy and pledged to strengthen their efforts to implement it. The Strategy rests on four pillars of action: measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; measures to prevent and combat terrorism; measures to build state capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; and measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.

Highlights of the strategy

- The Strategy is the first ever comprehensive, collective and internationally approved framework for tackling the problem of terrorism. It builds on Member States' consistent, unequivocal and strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes.
- The Strategy sets forth over fifty concrete measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and to strengthen individual and collective capacity of States and the United Nations to prevent and combat terrorism, all while ensuring the protection of human rights and upholding the rule of law.
- The Strategy brings together a range of new proposals and enhancements of ongoing activities to be undertaken by Member States, the United Nations system and other international actors, and regional and sub-regional organizations, all under a common strategic framework.
- The principal responsibility for implementing the Strategy falls on Member States but some provisions call for the United Nations to provide support. This commitment has been reinforced by Member States during the 2008 review of the Strategy.
- The Strategy contains a number of innovative initiatives, including:
  - Improving the coherence and efficiency of counter-terrorism technical assistance delivery so that all States can play their part effectively.
  - Putting in place systems of assistance that would address the needs of victims of terrorism and their families, and promoting international solidarity in support of victims.
  - Addressing the threat of bioterrorism by establishing a single comprehensive data-base on biological incidents, focusing on improving States' public health systems and acknowledging the need to bring together major stakeholders to ensure that biotechnology's advances are not used for terrorist or other criminal purposes but for the public good.
  - Involving civil society, regional and sub-regional organizations in the fight against terrorism and developing partnerships with the private sector to prevent terrorist attacks on particularly vulnerable targets.
  - Exploring innovative means to address the growing threat of terrorist use of the internet.

- Modernizing border and customs controls systems and improving the security of travel documents to prevent terrorist travel and the movement of illicit materials.
- Enhancing cooperation to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

- The Strategy clearly affirms that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group.
- The Strategy reaffirms the responsibility of States to deny financial and operational safe havens to terrorists and to prevent terrorists from abusing the system of political asylum, bringing them to justice on the principle of extradite or prosecute.
- The Strategy calls for Member States to ratify and implement the existing 16 legal instruments (13 instruments and three amendments) to create and solidify the legal basis for the international fight against terrorism.
- The Strategy, through its four pillars, anchors the United Nations' counter-terrorism work firmly into the broad agenda of the Organization, which focuses on maintaining international peace and security, promoting sustainable development and protecting human rights. The four pillar approach also encourages and enables Member States to take a similarly integrated approach to countering terrorism on the national level and creates a common framework for regional and global coordination of their national efforts.
- The Strategy creates a common platform for bringing together the efforts of the 30 international entities that make up the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), established by the Secretary-General in 2005.
- The Strategy has a strong focus on defending human rights and upholding the rule of law, not just by having one of the four pillars dedicated to this issue but also by consistently reiterating the need to uphold human rights in conjunction with the efforts to be undertaken under the other pillars.
- The importance of promoting and protecting human rights while countering terrorism was further underscored in Resolution A/RES/62/272 in September 2008 when Member States reviewed the implementation of the Strategy.
- The Strategy envisions periodic reviews by Member States. The first such review was in September 2008 by the General Assembly where the stress was on strengthening implementation. The next review of the Strategy is planned for 2010.
- By reaffirming their commitment to the Strategy in September 2008, the 192 Member States of the United Nations have not only renewed their support and ownership of the Strategy, but also reiterated their common resolve to its implementation in an integrated manner and in all its aspects.

For more information please visit: www.un.org/terrorism/strategy

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