

17th session of the Human Rights Council

Concept note

Panel on human rights of victims of terrorism

Date and Venue:

1 June 2011, 15:00 to 18:00, Room XX , Palais des Nations, Geneva

Focus and objectives:

Mandate

As decided by the Human Rights Council at its 16th session in Decision 16/116, the panel discussion will focus on the issue of human rights of victims of terrorism, taking into account, inter alia, the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Symposium on Supporting Victims of Terrorism, held on 9 September 2008, in New York.

Opening statement: Ms. Navanethem Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights (to be confirmed)

Moderator: H.E. Mr. Sihasak Phuanketkeow, President of the Human Rights Council

Panelists:

- Mr. Martin Scheinin, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism
- Ms. Rianne M. Letschert, Professor of International Law and Victimology and Deputy Director of the International Victimology Institute Tilburg (INTERVICT), University of Tilburg, The Netherlands
- Ms. Anne Wu, Political Affairs Officer, Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Office (CTITF), Department of Political Affairs
- Mr. Mauro Miedico, Coordinator, Specialized Terrorism Prevention Unit, Terrorism Prevention Branch, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- Ms. Yakin Erturk, former Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Member of the Committee on the Prevention of Torture of the Council of Europe
- Ms. Maite Pagazaurtundua, Victims of Terrorism Foundation/Fundación Víctimas del Terrorismo, Spain

Format:

- Presentations by the panelists will be followed by an interactive discussion to be divided into two slots of 60 minutes each (45 minutes for comments and questions from the floor, followed by 15 minutes for comments and replies by panelists).

- The interactive discussion will be followed by concluding remarks from the moderator.

- The modalities for interventions are 3 minutes for the Member States and 2 minutes for Observers. Member States, national human rights institutions, international organizations and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to participate and contribute to the debate, subject to the modalities and the practice of the Council. In particular, NGO coordination is strongly encouraged to maximize the use of time.

Outcome:

The debate will increase awareness and understanding on the issue of human rights of victims of terrorism. As requested in Decision 16/116, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will prepare a report on the outcome of the panel discussion in the form of a summary of the debate.

Background:

While in the immediate years following the 9/11 events, the issue of terrorism has been addressed with an almost exclusive focus on the suspected perpetrators, the issue of victims' rights has gradually moved to the center of the debate over the past half decade.

In the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the international community has emphasized "the importance of assisting victims of terrorism and of providing them and their families with support to cope with their loss and their grief."¹ One year later, Member States adopted unanimously the United Nations Global Counter-terrorism Strategy that stresses "the need to promote and protect the rights of victims of terrorism"² and points to the dehumanization of victims of terrorism as one of the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. The Global Counter-terrorism Strategy also includes a pledge of all Member States to "consider putting in place, on a voluntary basis, national systems of assistance that would promote the needs of victims of terrorism and their families and facilitate the normalization of their lives."³ This Strategy was reaffirmed twice by the General Assembly, in 2008⁴ and 2010.⁵

¹ A/RES/60/1, para. 89.

² A/RES/60/288, Annex, Plan of action, section IV. entitled "Measures to ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism".

³ A/RES/60/288, Annex, Plan of action, section I. entitled "Measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism", para. 8.

⁴ A/RES/62/272.

⁵ A/RES/64/297.

In 2008, the Secretary-General of the United Nations hosted a symposium on supporting victims that brought together victims of terrorist attacks from all over the world.⁶ This event was followed in December 2010 by a workshop co-organized by the UN Counter-terrorism Implementation Taskforce (CTITF) and the International Institute of Higher Studied in Criminal Science on “Best practices on supporting victims of acts of terrorism”.

Furthermore, in a resolution adopted on 26 March 2010, the Human Rights Council “deeply deplore[d] the suffering caused by terrorism to the victims and their families and expresse[d] its profound solidarity with them, and stresse[d] the importance of providing them with proper assistance.”⁷

The panel discussion will offer a forum to enhance the understanding on the issue of human rights of victims of terrorism, exchange information on relevant efforts undertaken at international, regional and national levels, and share good practices with a view to increasing the capacity of States to respond to the needs for protection of the rights of victims of terrorism and their families, while taking into account their international human rights obligations.

⁶ The brochure “Supporting victims of terrorism” is available at:
http://www.coe.int/t/dlapil/codexter/3_CODEXTER/Working_Documents/UN_Report_on_Supporting_Victims_of_Terrorism.pdf.

⁷ A/HRC/RES/13/26, para. 3.