



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

Statement of Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism

Security Council meeting on "Threats to international peace and security from terrorist acts: Foreign Terrorist Fighters" 28 November 2017, 3.00 p.m.

Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on this very complex and evolving issue.

It is great to have the possibility to take part in the discussion together with my colleague and friend CTED Executive Director Madame Coninx.

Allow me to start by remembering the tens of thousands of victims of terrorism around the world, and particularly express my solidarity with the Governments and peoples of Egypt, Mali and Nigeria, who have most recently suffered atrocious terrorist attacks.

My thoughts and prayers are also with our MINUSMA colleagues, who are bravely defending the United Nations principles and values at the cost of their lives.

Mr. President,

The threat stemming from foreign terrorist fighters affects all Member States, even those far away from conflict zones.

Recent reports suggest that at one stage over 40,000 foreign terrorist fighters from more than 110 countries may have travelled to join terrorist groups in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq.

They have prolonged and complicated the conflicts in both countries; they have increased the brutality of the fighting and the frequency of human rights violations, including against women and girls.

As the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has suffered a series of major military defeats and Member States have implemented better measures to prevent travel, the flow of fighters to the region has significantly decreased.

A serious number of terrorists try to relocate to countries such as Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan, which has fuelled existing conflicts and further destabilized fragile regions. These and other affected countries need significant assistance and support from the international community to tackle this threat.

There are at least 5,600 fighters from 33 countries who have returned home.

Many returnees are very well trained and equipped to carry out attacks in their own countries; others hope to radicalize and recruit new followers to their cause; there is a number of those who have rejected terrorist ideologies and pose no threat to society.

This is a truly global challenge that demands an urgent and concerted multilateral response.

Member States need to enhance their cooperation and exchange information, develop effective border controls and strengthen their criminal justice systems, in accordance with the rule of law and human rights standards.

Mr. President,

Following Security Council resolution 2178 in September 2014, the Security Council issued Presidential Statement 2015/11 in May 2015, which mandated the United Nations Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force Office, replaced by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, to develop a capacity building implementation plan for countering the flow of foreign terrorist fighters.

The Security Council strongly recommended that we set out a list of priorities of capacity building and technical assistance projects as part of this plan.

Taking an “All-of-UN” approach, we developed a comprehensive Foreign Terrorist Fighters Capacity Building Implementation Plan by mobilising and coordinating the efforts of 38 United Nations entities, including the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the ISIL and Al-Qaida Monitoring Team.

As the threat from foreign terrorist fighters has evolved, the implementation plan has also evolved.

Now the plan addresses the full life-cycle of foreign terrorist fighters, including a number of projects related to prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration to support Member States in their efforts to address returnees.

New projects have also been added which specifically address women and children.

The latest version based on an “All-of-UN” approach includes 50 capacity building projects submitted by 13 United Nations entities with a total budget of 107 million dollars over 5 years.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism is collaborating with INTERPOL to enhance Member State information sharing on foreign terrorist fighters, and build capacity to use their social media engagements to gather vital information.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism has worked closely with a range of United Nations entities to deliver a project on Advance Passenger Information for 43 Member States that are most affected by the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon.

Many of these Member States are now implementing national Advance Passenger Information Systems that are fully compatible with their border management infrastructures as well as international standards and obligations.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism is working with the United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights to assist Member States in complying with international human rights standards in their border security and management.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism has engaged with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to support Member States in the management of violent extremist prisoners and the prevention of radicalization in prisons.

The Office of Counter-Terrorism will also shortly begin a project to assist Member States to develop comprehensive policies to support child returnees through a human rights based and gender-sensitive approach.

I want to thank those Member States that have supported projects and urge others to follow this lead.

In order to get several projects under the plan started, the Office of Counter-Terrorism provided a total of 9 per cent of the funding for the Implementation Plan through catalytic seed funding.

However, together with contributions from Member States, and this is very important, the Implementation Plan is still only 41 per cent funded. Though the list of projects is very long and includes 50 projects.

This means that many critical and urgent projects have not yet been implemented.

There is much more that the United Nations can and wants to do to build the capacities of Member States to counter the threats from foreign terrorist fighters.

Mr. President,

Returning foreign terrorist fighters pose an enormous challenge with no easy solution.

A tempting response, and certainly the easiest one, would be to throw all returnees into prison, or even to do what can be done to stop them coming home at all.

But full compliance with international law is vital to combat the threat of foreign terrorist fighters.

As the Secretary-General said in his speech in London earlier this month “Terrorism is fundamentally the denial and destruction of human rights, and the fight against terrorism will never succeed by perpetuating the same denial and destruction.”

There are also obvious benefits to developing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, alongside prosecution efforts, for returning foreign terrorist fighters.

Such programmes can be integrated at various stages of the criminal justice process, helping to reduce prison-based recruitment and complement comprehensive strategies to counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

Ultimately, addressing the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters requires addressing the underlying conditions that are conducive to young men and women being lured by violent extremism.

So I welcome the growing emphasis by Member States on addressing the drivers of violent extremism at the global, regional, national and local levels to prevent radicalization.

We also need to ensure that our counter-terrorism efforts are based on solid evidence and lessons learned from around the world.

That is why my office published a report in July on “Enhancing the Understanding of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon in Syria” which was based on interviews with 43 individuals in detention between August 2015 and November 2016, representing 12 nationalities.

It provides Member States with a strong knowledge base from which to understand the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters, assess the risks they pose, and develop effective responses.

The report confirmed that there is no single foreign terrorist fighter profile. Those interviewed left their countries of residence for different reasons.

Unresolved conflicts that include inter-communal violence was one of the strongest factors. A sense of shared identity - and a desire to help - those from the same religion who were perceived as victimised was also common.

The foreign terrorist fighters interviewed were motivated to leave the Syrian Arab Republic either by their genuine disappointment in the terrorist organization they joined or were disillusioned by their host’s lack of welcome, be it the Syrian people or the terrorist group itself.

While social networks played a key role in motivating individuals to go to the Syrian Arab Republic, their influence on the decision to return was less evident. Instead, it was the family network, particularly mothers, that exerted the most influential pressure on foreign terrorist fighters to return home.

Mr. President,

With the support of United Nations entities, Member States are increasingly strengthening their legal frameworks and criminal justice systems, and enhancing their collaboration, to prevent and respond to the threat from foreign terrorist fighters.

During his recent speech in London, the Secretary-General listed stronger international cooperation on counter-terrorism as one of his key priorities.

There is an urgent need for governments and security agencies to collaborate more effectively in fighting terrorism, while respecting human rights.

That is why the Secretary-General will convene the first-ever United Nations Summit of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies in June next year.

This will be an excellent opportunity to enhance cooperation, exchange information and to develop new and innovative ways to tackle terrorism and address the threat of foreign terrorist fighters.

The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism stands ready to further support Member States to protect its citizens against this threat.

Thank you, Mr. President.