Statement by Mr I. Rogachev,
Director of the Department for New Challenges and Threats
of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Head of the Russian Delegation
at the ministerial segment of the International Conference
on Preventing Violent Extremism
(Geneva, 8 April 2016)

Mr. President,

Russia welcomes the increased focus by the international community focused on preventive aspects of combating terrorism and particularly on a truly relevant challenge of countering violent forms of extremism. In our view, it means there is a growing understanding of the need to not only suppress terrorist threats by force and law enforcement measures but also to counter it by winning people’s hearts and minds, countering recruitment mechanisms employed by terrorists and engaging people of all countries and the international community as a whole in these efforts in a comprehensive manner.

At the same time, we continue to insist that it is extremely important to ensure that the joint struggle against violent extremism is built on a firm basis of international law, primarily the UN Charter, including the principles of sovereignty and equality of States and non-interference in their internal affairs. This is first.

Second, it should be mentioned that the concepts of "extremism" and "violent extremism" have not been defined yet in international law or universally adopted in national and international practices. Therefore, we are convinced that all forms of international cooperation in this still new area must be strictly and fully consistent with the implementation of the basic UN instruments against terrorism, in particular the UN Security Council resolutions and the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy.
Third, and probably the most important thing, which I am authorized to say on behalf of the Russian Federation and which is definitely drawn on Russia’s long experience of countering and preventing extremism. It is only States and their competent authorities that can and must be given a primary role in combating violent extremism and, therefore, in any international efforts undertaken in this field.

Mr. President,

Russia has already had an opportunity to explain its position on the Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism, an ambitious document presented to a global audience by the UN Secretary-General on January 15, 2016.

Russia fully shares the philosophy behind this document and the idea to draft it.

However, we do not understand why a document purporting to generalize best practices of the international community in the fight against extremism and to formulate joint fundamental tasks of the UN in this area overlooked the principal elements of the Russian experience in this field, which have just been outlined.

The Plan does not adequately reflect the primary role of States in the fight against extremism, does not require commitment to international law, including the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, and does not link the task of countering extremism with the ongoing efforts in the framework of international anti-terrorism cooperation, as it should have done.

We have repeatedly elaborated on our approaches and it was even before the announcement of the development of the UN Secretary-General's Plan. It was when the first events were just being held under the “Washington initiative” on countering violent extremism, which later laid the foundation for the Plan.
Mr. President,

I will try to clarify our concerns once again.

The spread of violent extremism cannot be countered effectively without an objective view of the root causes of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, the willingness of a number of States to use radical groups for political purposes, as a tool to interfere in the other States' internal affairs, incite extremist sentiments and indiscriminately poor resources in all kinds of opposition groups in other countries with a view to destabilizing and undermining the activities of State institutions, is the cause that stands out among the others. It is the erroneous and dangerous policy of appeasing terrorists and extremists, applying double standards in assessing their actions that largely causes the current escalation of the terrorist and extremist threat in the Middle East and North Africa and sufferings of hundreds of thousands, millions of people.

Beside that, we call not to ideologize the issue: we particularly refer to the message which received a wide presentation in the Plan, that radicalization of the public sentiments all the way to extremist and terrorist acts is primarily generated by "authoritarian regimes". We consider it wrong to see the "lack" of democratic governance as the main cause of this phenomenon. Radicalization spreads around the globe and not a single society is prone to it and immune to the threats it generates.

Besides the document attempts to deliberately overstate the role of certain civil society elements over others in countering violent extremism and this appears to be completely unfounded. In particular, it concerns the role of NGOs which are doubtfully the only ones suited for the role of some "universal agents" in countering extremism. We insist on the need of equal involvement of all elements of civil society concerned. It is crucial to take account of both peculiarities and traditions of States and peculiarities, powers and interests of civil society structures, respect the principle of voluntary participation in all such public-private partnerships.

We regret that these important aspects were not reflected in the Plan.
Mr. President,

No stereotypes or ready-made solutions must be used, let alone imposed in a generally very sensitive area of countering violent extremism. The relevant international efforts and initiatives should not be shaped as an intrusive mechanism.

We believe that the call for formulating national plans to counter violent extremism is one of the key components of the document. In practice, it is useful for the States to actively improve and develop their national strategies for addressing new terrorist and extremist threats and heed recommendations and achievements of each other. Nevertheless, even international best practices should be always adapted to local realities and take national peculiarities into account.

This is the track that Russia follows. We take progressive and active steps to effectively protect our citizens, society and the State from extremist and terrorist threats.

We are willing to share our practical experience in this area with the States and international organizations concerned. It is unique in many aspects, particularly taking into account new political and organizational best practices developed by our State, including the current Russian anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation.

Mr. President,

The experience of the countries confronted with terrorism, the most dangerous form of violent extremism, shows that an integrated approach combining the use of force and activities for the prevention (control) of terrorism is the only way to counter this threat effectively.

In the Russian Federation this approach was codified in Federal Law No. 35-FZ of March 6, 2006, on counteracting terrorism and the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 116 of February 15, 2006, on measures to counter terrorism. The Russian broad legal framework on countering extremism is based on Federal Law No. 114-FZ of July 25, 2002, on counteracting extremist activities.
In November 2014, the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin approved a comprehensive Strategy for countering extremism in the Russian Federation through 2025, which outlines the conceptual framework for implementing the state policy in this area.

These regulations established the basic principles for countering terrorism and extremism, the legal and organizational framework for preventing and combating terrorism, minimizing and eliminating the consequences of its manifestations.

Also, as part of the large-scale reform of the counter-terrorism system of the mid-2000s a special coordinating body, the National Anti-Terrorism Committee (NAC), was established. It is composed of the heads of all specialized ministries and agencies of both chambers of the Russian Parliament, the Presidential Administration and the Government of Russia.

To ensure prompt response and the prevention of terrorism and violent extremism, a complementary structure was created at the regional level, which allowed to complete the formation of a clear hierarchy in the anti-terrorism system from the federal to the local level. At the same time, the main effort is focused on the prevention of terrorism, including countering its ideology.

It should be noted that the International counter-terrorism database created by NAC is an effective form of information support for international anti-terrorism cooperation.

Russia has noted that international extremist and terrorist organizations have geared up their recruitment activities. In order to address these threats, the Russian Federation is carrying out a set of legislative and institutional measures aimed at disclosing and preventing illegal actions by persons who participate in military operations in the ranks of international terrorist organizations abroad and have returned to Russia with a view to engage in terrorist activities.

Therefore, the relevant Russian legislation was amended back in 2013 in order to provide for the prosecution of persons participating in international terrorist activities, undergoing training for terrorist purposes (Article 205.3 of the Russian Criminal Code), belonging to an armed group in the territory of a foreign
State, which does not have a legally acknowledged status there (Article 201, para 2 of the Russian Criminal Code).

The annual Meeting of the Heads of specialized services, security and law enforcement agencies, which has become a tradition since 2002, plays an important role in fighting terrorism. The Meeting is held under the auspices of the Russian Federal Security Service and represents an established dialogue platform for experts in these matters. Since the first Meeting, this format has helped to increase confidence between special services and law enforcement agencies from different countries, as well as to promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation in counteracting terrorism. For instance, the Meeting was the first international platform to acknowledge the threats coming from foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs).

For the purposes of countering and preventing the spread of extremist ideology and the recruitment of terrorists, Russia engages the academia, non-governmental organizations and most notably spiritual administrations of Muslims, prominent ecclesiastics, leaders of ethnic group and local authorities, especially for carrying out information and awareness-raising campaigns targeting the youth. This aims at promoting traditional religious principles and forming a sustainable and anti-terrorist worldview among young people. The leading role in counteracting terrorist ideology belongs to the bodies responsible for the implementation of state policy in education, culture, sports and upbringing of youth.

It is the need for such greater involvement of the civil society we were talking about earlier. And, as we have already highlighted, the primary contribution of all its structures should be to support the efforts of State, first and foremost, at the local level in the work with socially vulnerable groups of the population, and, of course, in the information field in order to create and maintain the atmosphere of intolerance and rejection of any terrorist and extremist ideas and manifestations in the society, whatever pretext they are presented under.

In our understanding, to counter extremism it would be helpful to pay particular attention to making the counter-terrorism and counter-extremism activities carried out by law enforcement agencies at both the international and
national levels more effective and better coordinated. Urgent and decisive law enforcement response is what would allow to deal efficiently with a dangerous increase in violent extremism and terrorism in the world.

Meanwhile, we fully agree that at the same time the mandatory and most important task of competent public authorities in the modern context is to actively harness the capacities of the whole of civil society, various public institutions, businesses, religious communities and media, invite the listed NGOs to cooperate and ensure conditions for such cooperation, while the law enforcement component of the fight against terrorist and extremist manifestations is preserved and reinforced.

As the Plan of the Secretary-General rightly states, it is necessary to work with young people, engage local religious communities and leaders that would explain the difference between radicalism and true religion, provide relevant information through media in an adequate manner, and fight the misuse of the Internet and social media for dissemination of extremist materials. All these measures would contribute to creating an atmosphere of complete intolerance with regard to violence or extremism in our societies.

Thank you.