



UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

“Countering Terrorism and other acts of Violence based on Religion or Belief: Fostering Tolerance and Inclusivity”

24 June 2019

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi and Ambassador Feridun Hadi Sinirlioğlu for organizing this important event and inviting UNOCT to partner. I also welcome Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

In recent months, we have witnessed horrific attacks against places of worship that have claimed many innocent lives, spread fear, and contributed to growing polarization and intolerance around the world.

Many of these attacks have sought to exploit existing religious tensions and grievances.

There has also been an alarming rise in hate speech, xenophobia and other forms of bigotry, which can incite violence. For instance, we have seen a resurgence of anti-Semitism and Neo-Nazi organizations, while attacks on Muslims in several societies are on the rise.

These worrying developments raise much broader questions for the international community related to our efforts to maintain peace and security.

How can we promote tolerance and peaceful co-existence in an era of globalization when there are unprecedented human interactions taking place, both online and offline, across boundaries of faith and culture?

Are our societies ready to cope with a hyper-connected world?

And most importantly, how can we work together to promote tolerant and inclusive societies in unstable and fragile environments?

These are critical questions, for which, unfortunately, we do not seem to have a definite answer.

I look forward to hearing your views this afternoon on how can we collectively address the challenges posed by religion and/or beliefs-based violence.

Let me offer four key ideas in this regard.

First, the international community must focus on what unites us, rather than what divides us, if we are to stamp out all hate-filled ideologies.

We need to demonstrate our commitment to tolerance, diversity and inclusion, as well as protecting and respecting religious freedom, in line with the values of the United Nations Charter. Our efforts must also fully respect the rule of law and universal human rights.

I recall General Assembly recent resolution 73/285 condemning terrorism and other acts of violence based on religion or belief, which was adopted in April under the leadership of some of the distinguished Ambassadors here today.

The resolution reaffirms our collective determination to protect and promote freedom of religion and belief and to foster an environment of religious tolerance, peace and respect.

Moreover, the General Assembly coming together on this important issue demonstrates the fundamental value of multilateralism, at a time when the value of international cooperation is being questioned.

Second, we should promote positive narratives which promote a culture of peace, as persuasive alternatives to the dangerous propaganda spread by terrorist and violent extremist groups.

Violence driven by ideology can only be effectively countered by more powerful ideological arguments.

This is a critical area where the United Nations can support Member States. My Office is exploring the organization of a leadership-level event during this year's General Assembly to strengthen our collective efforts to counter terrorist narratives, both online and offline.

The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in my Office is also providing training for Member States to enhance their strategic communication capacities to prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

Third, we need to strengthen the resilience and cohesion of our societies to withstand the narratives of religious hate and violence.

This means governments adopting a comprehensive and inclusive approach, involving all parts of society.

It means starting at the grassroots, where local communities, families and civil society organizations are at the frontline of efforts to protect vulnerable people from terrorist ideologies.

Religious leaders and faith-based organizations have vital roles to play in promoting understanding and acting as advocates for peace, harmony and our shared human dignity.

We must also ensure that women and young people are fully involved as drivers and agents of peace.

Last but certainly not least, we need to lift up the voices of victims and survivors of terrorism.

Victims are extremely powerful and credible messengers. Their experiences put a human face to the impact of terrorism and help to counter the warped narratives of terrorists and violent extremists.

That is why my Office plans to convene the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism in New York in June next year.

This will be held alongside the second High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, during the “United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week”, which will take place in the framework of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Our discussions this afternoon will help bring the United Nations and Member States closer together, in working to build a world free of fear, discrimination and persecution, where people of different faiths, identities and cultures can live in harmony and peace.

Thank you for your attention.