



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

Timbuktu, Mali

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**Statement of Mr. Vladimir Voronkov
Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism**

Mr. Governor,
Members of civil society,
MINUSMA and UN colleagues,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and an honor to address you from the ancient city of Timbuktu. A city that has been at a crossroads in the fight against terrorism and in efforts to prevent violent extremism. A city that has suffered immense human, physical and cultural loss and is today still struggling to recover peace and stability.

Your country and your region that have seen destruction, violent conflict and extremism decimate communities and turn prospects of development and peace. Mali has made big sacrifices with very little resources and means. You continue to suffer from brutal terrorist attacks, which the Secretary-General has strongly condemned. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the efforts undertaken by the Government of Mali and the people and security forces of Mali to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism. I would like to offer my condolences to the people and government of Mali for all these losses. Mali deserves the support of the international community, and we are determined to do so, both at the national and at the regional level.

I come here as the head of the new UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, one of the first reforms of Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in the field of peace and security. And I have chosen to come to Mali and to the Sahel as my first official field visit, to demonstrate the priority that we give to efforts undertaken in this

region. It is also a tribute to the work being done with a variety of actors, government, civil society, UN and MINUSMA colleagues, under threatening circumstances and periodical violent, unacceptable terrorist attacks.

Today, terrorists, particularly in armed conflict situations, are not only destroying lives but also historical sites and objects. The looting and illicit trafficking of cultural objects deprives people of their cultural heritage and finances terrorism and criminal networks. It prevents humanity from transmitting its values and knowledge to future generations. The protection of heritage, then, is not only a cultural issue; it is also a security and humanitarian imperative. I come here today accompanied by the UNESCO Representative in Mali to pay tribute to the work that the Government of Mali, with the support of the UN, has been doing to rehabilitate its valuable cultural heritage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have five messages for you today.

The first message is that combating the global threat of terrorism cannot be associated to any religion, ethnicity or race. It is a global threat that affects all regions. And there is no excuse for terrorism. Terrorist acts can never be considered legitimate or defensible. Yet often terrorist groups exploit conflict zones, zones with weak state institutions or zones marked by extreme poverty. Lack of development, inequalities and poor governance are fertile grounds for terrorism. Terrorists instrumentalize the feelings of resentment and humiliation and the lack of education associated with poverty to stir violent extremism.

My second message is that the best remedy to counter terrorism is the prevention of violent extremism. Countering the appeal of terrorism, preventing conflict, promoting inclusive, sustainable development and the protection of human rights are the first line of defense against terrorism. Decent jobs, education, training and opportunities for youth and fostering dialogue and understanding are essential to counter radicalization in fragile regions.

We also need to pay particular attention to the general inequalities that drive terrorist groups. While terrorist groups differ among them in ideology and methods, all of them tend to thrive on the subjugation of women and girls. Often, sexual violence is part of the tactics of terror. To devise effective strategies to prevent violent extremism, we need to ensure that we consider not only the needs

of women and girls as victims of terrorism, but also that they play a role as actors in finding solutions within communities, institutions and societies.

My third message relates to the need for effective policy instruments. States are currently scrambling to enhance efficiency of their counter-terrorism legislation.

I would like to commend the Government of Mali for its efforts towards the conclusion and imminent adoption of a National Strategy on Counter Terrorism and on the Prevention of Violent Extremism. This strategy, with a sound foundation on good governance, the rule of law, human rights and gender equality, will allow Mali to move towards an integrated policy to counter terror and prevent violent extremism. The United Nations has supported the development of this strategy and is now ready to spearhead support to its prompt implementation and operationalization, with the full ownership of Malian stakeholders, so that Mali becomes a pioneer in efforts to prevent violent extremism.

We are also working closely with the region and in support of the Secretariat of the G5 Sahel to implement a regional initiative as part of our Integrated Assistance for Countering Terrorism (I-ACT), a package of projects designed to promote the role of education, support the role of women, promote criminal justice, and support border security, among others.

My fourth message is that we must do more to ensure accountability for terrorist acts. Accountability for terrorist acts has been a priority for the international community in its effort to combat terrorism and prevent violent extremism. The UN Security Council has called upon all Member States to use applicable international instruments as a basis for mutual legal assistance and, as appropriate, for extradition in terrorism cases.

Yet despite this repeatedly reaffirmed commitment, bringing of perpetrators of terrorist acts to justice has been a serious challenge. The nature and *modus operandi* of many of terrorist groups in recent years across borders and in cyber space also make the pursue of justice difficult.

Against this background, Timbuktu serves as a historical symbol in securing accountability for the suffering that people have endured under the groups Ansar Dine and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. In 2012, the world witnessed the tragic destruction of the mausoleums in the city. Terrorist groups methodically levelled

legendary Sufi mausoleums and the ancient door of the Sidi Yahia mosque. Two ancient mosques were also severely damaged.

Five years later, in September 2016, the International Criminal Court convicted Mr. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi who was the spiritual adviser of the Ansar Dine group of the war crime of intentionally directing attacks against religious and historic buildings in Timbuktu and ordered him to pay reparations.

Healing of the suffering endured by the people of Timbuktu is likely to take a generation. Nevertheless, this case raises a hope that accountability for terrorist acts, including those that amount to international crimes, is possible. Timbuktu has set an important example for the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Protecting our cultural heritage demands a global criminal justice response that can prevent trafficking in cultural property by disrupting organized criminal and terrorist networks, including through anti-corruption and anti-money-laundering action, and effective accountability mechanisms. With the support of United Nations entities, Member States are strengthening their legal frameworks and criminal justice systems, and enhancing their collaboration to prevent and respond to terrorists' attacks against their cultural heritage.

Fifth, and finally, I would like to end my remarks with a moment of reflection on the victims of terrorism. Any balanced and comprehensive strategy for countering terrorism must recognize that victims of terrorism are entitled to our support. Far too often, victims are left to suffer in silence. Their needs are not addressed and their voices are unheard. This only exacerbates their trauma. We must do more to protect the rights of victims of terrorism and provide the services they need. I would like to pay tribute to the hundreds of victims of terrorism here in Mali.

The United Nations Victims of Terrorism Support Portal, developed by the Office of Counter Terrorism, is a resource for thousands of victims, their families and communities, Governments and civil society organizations. It aims to promote understanding of the diverse needs of victims, and to offer guidance for addressing those needs effectively and comprehensively.

I would also like to show my solidarity and pay a special tribute to the work being done by MINUSMA, side by side with Malians. MINUSMA and its forces are being systematically targeted by terrorist groups. The courage of MINUSMA's

women and men who have suffered such immense loss will remain a source of inspiration for all UN staff throughout the world, and our thoughts are with our fallen colleagues and their loved ones.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

We must collectively do more to ensure that our voices of compassion and tolerance are louder and have more impact. For that, we will need you to persist in leading efforts at the local level to rebuild communities, promote clear thinking, education, social cohesion and the rights of all Malians, women and men, young and old. We need a clear partnership that brings together all stakeholders to prevent our communities from sinking into violent extremism and terrorism. We all have a role to play. The United Nations remains committed to responding to this challenge and to move with Mali to build a country where hope, peace and inclusion can prevail.

Thank you. Merci.
