



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

**High Level International Conference
“Preventing and Countering Terrorism in the Digital Age”**

Minsk, 9 October 2018

Dear Colleagues and friends,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the OSCE for organizing this important Conference and for inviting me to address it.

Over the past two decades, we have witnessed exponential technological development.

Rapidly evolving fields such as artificial intelligence, blockchain and biotechnology have the potential to deliver great benefits for the world.

Innovations in information and communication technologies have driven economic growth, revolutionized entrepreneurship and broken down barriers between states and societies.

In the space of a few years, the Internet, mobile devices and social media have transformed how we communicate and get information about the world.

We live in an ever more interconnected world, but the pace of technological and digital change has led both to positive results and emerging of new dangers and threats.

Unfortunately, there are many who have exploited these innovations for their own nefarious and despicable objectives.

Terrorists continue to exploit social media, encrypted communications and the dark web to spread propaganda, radicalize new followers and coordinate attacks.

They communicate skilfully and strategically, with a clear understanding of their target audiences.

The most poisonous ideas now flow across borders at the touch of a button or the tap of a tweet, often aimed at young and vulnerable people.

Although terrorists have not yet acquired the expertise and tools to launch large-scale cyber-attacks on critical national infrastructure, they may develop this capability in the future, with potentially devastating consequences.

The risks we face leave us only one viable way forward.

There is an urgent need for innovative and coordinated action to prevent terrorist abuse of information and communication technologies.

There needs to be a strategic coalition involving governments, civil society, the private sector, multilateral organisations and all those who can make a difference.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In June, the General Assembly reviewed the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy for the sixth time since 2006.

It adopted a consensus resolution, which sets a clear direction for the counter-terrorism efforts of the United Nations and Member States over the next two years.

The resolution expressed concern at the increasing use of information and communications technologies by terrorists and their supporters to fund, plan and commit acts of violence.

For the first time, Member States acknowledged the challenges posed by rapid developments in closed communications technologies, such as encryption and the dark web.

The resolution also encourages Member States to work together to ensure that terrorists do not find a safe haven online, while also promoting an open, interoperable, reliable and secure Internet.

Immediately following the adoption of the resolution, the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, convened the first ever High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States in New York.

Over 1,000 participants from 150 Member States, 51 civil society organizations, 31 international and regional organizations and 25 United Nations entities came together to discuss practical and operational counter-terrorism issues.

Many of representatives of the countries present here, made valuable contributions to the Conference and 25 side events on its margins.

One of the four thematic sessions of the Conference was dedicated to strengthening global action to prevent violent extremism, including by engaging youth and preventing misuse of new technologies and the Internet by terrorists.

During this session, Member States underlined the importance of preventing the misuse of information and communications technologies by terrorists.

They expressed serious concern at the widespread exploitation of the Internet by terrorists to spread their evil ideologies and coordinate their heinous activities.

In his concluding remarks, the United Nations Secretary-General welcomed the establishment of the 'Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism' and other similar partnerships to prevent the spread of extremist content online.

But he urged the international community to do more to identify and remove terrorist content before it is accessible to all.

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

The United Nations remains fully committed to playing our part to support Member States prevent and counter online terrorism.

We need to build on the existing international framework, such as General Assembly resolutions, the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, and Security Council resolutions 2341 on the protection of critical infrastructure and 2354 on countering terrorist narratives.

Under the framework of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact that was agreed earlier this year, we are enhancing our collaboration within the United Nations through inter-agency working groups on preventing violent extremism, the protection of critical infrastructure, gender, human rights and communications to ensure a coherent response to the threats posed by terrorist abuse of ICTs.

For example, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, as a part of UNOCT, is implementing a joint project with INTERPOL to use social media to counter and prevent the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon.

We also implement API/PNR project mentioned by Mr. Greminger in his statement.

CTED, which is represented here today, has successfully engaged with private sector companies, including Facebook, Twitter, Google and Microsoft, to deliver impressive results.

CTED launched an online knowledge-sharing platform under their "Tech-against-Terrorism" initiative, that allows larger tech companies to share knowledge on responding to terrorist exploitation of the Internet with smaller companies.

In collaboration with UNESCO and the League of Arab States, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre has developed a project to promote dialogue, tolerance and openness through the media to counter narratives associated with terrorism in the Arab Region.

The project promotes digital literacy, critical thinking, intercultural dialogue and an understanding of rights and ethical principles to empower users and consumers of media.

My Office will also launch a project to enhance international cooperation on cyber security and to support the efforts of Member States in Africa and South and South East Asia to enhance their prevention, legislation, investigation, and prosecution capabilities.

Taking an “All-of-UN” approach, we will be implementing this project with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Office of Information and Communications Technology.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, the frontline against terrorism is increasingly in cyberspace – on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, VKontakte and many other alternatives.

To win this war, we must join forces and act together to prevent and curb the risks of terrorist abuse of digital technologies, while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression.

It is important to have enhanced coordination and collaboration between countries. In this regard we welcome the intention of the Republic of Belarus to keep its leader position in countering the threat of terrorism in cyberspace. This is an obvious contribution to the realization of agreements reached at the above-mentioned High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States.

Of utmost importance is to strengthen coordination between states, private sector, civil society and religious organizations.

We also need to empower the victims and survivors of terrorism, who 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.

Dear Colleagues,

We have a very important task in hand. We will have to enhance common work in order to eradicate the threat of terrorism in cyberspace.

I wish you all the luck in the work of the Conference.

Thank you for your attention.