



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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

Ninth “Report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat”

27 August 2019

Mr. President,

Excellencies and Distinguished Representatives,

I would like to express my sincere condolences to Member States where recent terrorist attacks have claimed hundreds of innocent lives – Afghanistan, Egypt, Kenya, New Zealand, Somalia, Sri Lanka, the United States of America, and elsewhere. My heartfelt words of deepest sorrow to the families who lost their relatives.

Last week we commemorated the second International Day of Remembrance of, and Tribute to the Victims of terrorism, reaffirming that their needs, rights and resilience must be at the center of our efforts. This topic will be an integral part of the Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations in the summer of 2020, with the organization of the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism.

Mr. President,

I thank you for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the ninth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security, and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering this threat, as mandated by Security Council resolution 2368 (2017).

The report was prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate – CTED – and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the ISIL and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, in close collaboration with my Office, with contributions from other United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities.

I am grateful to Mr. Fitton-Brown and Ms. Coninx for their valuable contribution to this report. It is a comprehensive analytical document on the threat that ISIL continues to pose today at the global and regional levels.

This report outlines how, despite its territorial defeat in the Syrian Arab Republic in March 2019, ISIL continues to aspire to global relevance. It capitalizes on its affiliates and inspired attacks and has an estimated residual wealth of up to three hundred million dollars at its disposal.

Acute concerns also remain about the challenges posed by foreign terrorist fighters, returnees and relocators. Between twenty-four thousand and thirty thousand of which have survived from the initial estimate of forty thousand. Member States also have to contend with the threat posed by “frustrated travelers”, the number of which is hard to estimate.

The report highlights relevant activities of United Nations entities over the past six months to support Member States.

These efforts are in line with the requirements under Security Council resolution 2396 (2017), but also the newly adopted resolutions 2462 (2019) on countering the financing of terrorism, 2467 (2019) on sexual violence in armed conflict, and 2482 (2019) on the links between international terrorism and organized crime.

Mr. President,

I would like to give you an overview of the global and regional situation on the threat of ISIL.

In the Middle East, the group's military defeat in the Syrian Arab Republic was a watershed, bringing to an end the dystopia of the so-called "caliphate", which cost so much to the people of Syria and Iraq.

Yet, the fall of Baghuz was not a fatal blow. ISIL continues to evolve into a covert network, with attacks increasing in areas controlled by the Government of Syrian Arab Republic.

This follows the same pattern we have seen in Iraq since 2017, where ISIL insurgency activity reportedly designed to prevent normalization and reconstruction efforts continues.

Looking at Africa, there has been a striking increase in ISIL and Al-Qaida-linked recruitment and violence in the West of the continent. The Islamic State's West Africa Province is now one of the strongest ISIL affiliates, with around four thousand fighters. The evolving threat posed by ISIL in Central Africa also calls for vigilance.

In Europe, radicalization in prisons and the risk posed by returnees upon release from prison remain major concerns, which compound the risk of homegrown terrorism and inspired attacks, at a time when ISIL finds it difficult to send fighters to Europe.

In Asia, the threat posed by ISIL continue, despite military pressure. The group is estimated to have between two thousand five hundred and four thousand fighters, including FTFs, in Afghanistan.

In South-East Asia, ISIL affiliates remain capable of launching attacks, with two worrying developments. First, the role of women in planning and executing attacks, and second, the explicit targeting of places of worship, as we saw on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka, which may indicate a new trend.

Mr. President,

Over the past six months, thousands of suspected ISIL fighters, together with their families, have been detained in Iraq and Syrian Arab Republic. Many are stranded in overcrowded camps, in dire conditions, generating acute security and humanitarian concerns.

There are as many as seventy thousand people in Al-Hawl camp in Syria alone, including women and children with potential links to United Nations listed terrorist groups.

The Secretary-General recognizes in his report that Member States face significant, multifaceted challenges related to the repatriation of their nationals, including women and children, from territories previously controlled by ISIL.

At the same time, the report recalls that Member States have the primary responsibility for their own nationals, and that policies and actions that lead to statelessness should be avoided.

In this regard, I would like to highlight that several Member States, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, have repatriated women and children, including orphans, from Iraq and Syria.

At the direction of the Secretary-General, my Office together with other United Nations entities developed in April a set of key principles for the UN system, for the protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children with links to United Nations-listed terrorist groups.

We have shared these principles with Member States as we believe they can assist them in designing their own policies and action, in compliance with international law and human rights standards.

We are now following up with the practical implementation of the key principles. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in my Office is developing a global programme in partnership with other UN entities, and regional and field presences, to provide tailored support to requesting Member States on the screening, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration, of individuals suspected or convicted of committing terrorist acts, their families and associates.

On September 30, we will launch a handbook on ensuring a child rights-based approach in addressing the situation of children affected by the foreign fighter phenomenon, which will support the implementation of the key principles.

Mr. President,

Let me just highlight key new initiatives of my Office which are mentioned in the report.

First, on law enforcement and border security we launched in May our Countering Terrorist Travel Programme – a multi-year, multi-million, multi-agency programme with CTED, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of Information and Communications Technology, and the International Civil Aviation Organization. Today, Interpol has joined the Programme, and I think it is a very promising development.

The programme seeks to enhance the capacity of Member States to prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute terrorist offences, human trafficking and other forms of serious organized crime, by using travel information such as advance passenger information and passenger name record data in accordance with Security Council resolutions 2178 (2014) and 2396 (2017).

I would like to thank the Kingdom of the Netherlands for their continuous technological and financial contributions that enabled this programme, as well as the State of Qatar and other countries and the European Union for their support, including financial.

Second, on protection of vulnerable targets my Office will soon be launching a four-year, global comprehensive programme, especially on safeguarding religious sites from terrorism-related threats, which is a worrying trend.

The programme will be implemented in close coordination with CTED and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in line with Security Council resolution 2341 (2017). I am grateful to Ms. Coninx and to Mr. Moratinos for the excellent cooperation in this regard.

Third, on countering the financing of terrorism, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in my Office is expanding a global capacity-building programme to include technical assistance on terrorist-asset freezing, protecting the non-profit sector, sharing financial intelligence, and promoting public-private partnerships, among other areas, in response to Security Council resolution 2462 (2019). I am grateful to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its generous financial contribution to this programme.

Last, I would like to thank all Member States which have been partnering with my Office to organize high-level regional conferences sustaining the momentum for international cooperation and laying the ground for the Second UN High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States to be held next year.

We have already completed three such conferences in partnership with Member States: In April with the Government of Tajikistan; in June with the Government of Mongolia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; and in July with the Government of the Republic of Kenya, which was our biggest regional conference yet. With close to one thousand five hundred participants, the Kenya Conference galvanized the international community's support for the counter-terrorism efforts in Africa. It's very important that all three conferences were organized with active engagement of civil society organizations.

Next week we will organize our fourth conference in Minsk with the Government of Belarus, focusing on the risk and opportunities posed by new technologies in the fight against terrorism.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General stressed in his report that the current lull in international attacks directed by ISIL may only be temporary.

We need to remain vigilant to mitigate the risk posed by the evolution of ISIL and its affiliates, deny it new recruits, and prevent its resurgence.

It is essential that Member States keep a comprehensive and long-term perspective in this fight. This requires urgent political leadership and a principled approach, based on international law and human rights standards.

The United Nations system remains fully committed to supporting Member States in countering terrorism.

Thank you, Mr. President.