



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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

**Joint United Nations – UAE Regional Conference for the Arab League
Countries on
Empowering Youth and Promoting Tolerance: Practical Approaches to
Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism**

18 December 2019
Abu Dhabi, UAE

Your Excellency, Zaki Anwar Nusseibeh, Minister of State on Cultural Affairs

Your Excellency, Mr. Péter Sztáray, State Secretary for Security Policy of Hungary

Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Ms. Fatima Ezzahrae Benoughazi, from the Young Leaders Council of Tangiers,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I propose a minute of silence to honour the victims of terrorism around the world. I request you all to please rise.

Thank you

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the Government of the United Arab Emirates for co-organizing this important regional conference.

Declaring 2019 as the Year of Tolerance shows your commitment towards creating peaceful and tolerant communities. As you are aware, tolerance for diversity and intercultural understanding are at the heart of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal on building peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Let me also thank Hedayah for its significant role and contribution in the preparation of this Conference. I would also like to applaud the tremendous work that Hedayah has been doing since its inception in countering violent extremism around the world.

I would also like to commend the efforts of the United Arab Emirates and other Member States of the League of Arab States in developing an Arab Security Vision based on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

I am proud that the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism is able to support this important endeavour at the request of the Arab Interior Ministers Council.

But we still have a long struggle ahead of us.

Terrorism seeks to rip apart the social fabric that binds our shared humanity. It causes lasting damage to individuals, families, communities, and entire countries and regions.

ISIL/Da'esh remains a global threat to international peace and security.

Despite its territorial defeat and loss of its leader this year, the group still aspires to global relevance and continues to pose a threat, in particular through its affiliates and inspired attacks. According to some experts, ISIL is even aiming to gain territorial control of some spaces in the Middle-East and North Africa region, taking advantage of local conflicts.

Al-Qaeda also remains resilient and its affiliates are in fact stronger than ISIL's counterparts in Syria's Idlib province, Yemen, Somalia and much of the Sahel Region.

As we saw in Christchurch in March, in El Paso in August and elsewhere, the growing threat from far- right and supremacist terrorist groups and individuals also pose severe risks to many countries.

The multifaceted and global nature of terrorism reaffirms the core assertion of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, namely, that "terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group."

Attacks around the world also highlight the transnational nature of terrorism which requires continuous and strengthened multilateral cooperation.

We need to remain vigilant to mitigate the risk posed by terrorist groups and their affiliates, which have proven a remarkable capacity to adapt.

We need to thwart their push to regain or expand control of weakly governed territories.

We need to counter their propaganda and distort their arming, financing and recruitment efforts, particularly amongst vulnerable individuals and groups.

That is why this conference, with its emphasis on empowering youth and promoting tolerance, is so important.

Through the Regional Conferences, we are bringing together Member States, regional and sub-regional organizations, civil society and non-government organizations, to help strengthen our global, regional and national efforts to prevent and counter terrorism.

Supporting Member States in building resilient societies and delivering meaningful and sustainable results on the ground is one of our top priorities.

This is the sixth regional conference that the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism has organized with Member States to build on the momentum created by the first High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, which was convened by the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, in June 2018.

Let me outline here what I think we can jointly achieve through this Conference.

First, I hope this Conference promotes the sharing of good practices and innovative solutions to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism.

There are many good examples of Arab countries working together to fight terrorism by promoting a renewed focus on trust and partnership building, this Conference seeks to further strengthen the values of tolerance and resilience which are critical to counter terrorist narratives and attacks.

Second, I hope this Conference provides a platform to identify ways and opportunities to strengthen cooperation among Arab League Member States and explore how we, at the United Nations, can further support you in empowering youth and promoting tolerance as a part of your prevention efforts.

This year, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Center (UNCCT) within my Office initiated a Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme to ensure the meaningful participation of youth in our efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism.

This global programme is one of my Office's key priorities for 2020, and will include a series of national and regional Youth Fora, where young people can make their voices heard, co-create prevention tools, programmes and policies, and contribute to the fight against terrorism as positive agents of change.

In fact, many young people are already leading local, national, regional and global efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism across the globe. There are countless youth groups that are waging peace, and we must support them.

Third, I hope this Conference encourages the development and implementation of youth and tolerance-centric national and regional plans of action based on full national ownership.

Such plans can provide a renewed and sustained focus on prevention, including by addressing the underlying conditions that cause young men and women to be lured by terrorism.

Young people should be included in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of relevant strategies and programmes, as set out in the 2015 Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security and Security Council resolution 2250.

My Office, in close partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, spearheads a Global PCVE Policy Programme to facilitate coordinated UN assistance and expertise to requesting Member States and regional organizations in developing and implementing their own National and Regional Plans of Action. And we are committed to making sure youth are at the center of all our efforts.

Fourth, I hope that this conference highlights the vital role of civil society organizations, including community, religious and non-traditional actors in promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, tolerance and peaceful co-existence—particularly at the grass-roots level.

Civil society organizations have a unique insight and understanding of their communities and local circumstances. They have a critical role to play in building social cohesion and understanding, and laying the groundwork to prevent terrorist recruitment and to unite their societies after a terrorist attack.

Yesterday, at the Civil-Society Workshop, we heard many excellent examples of partnerships to prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism. Civil society representatives reflected on their experiences on how to empower youth and promote tolerance.

They presented valuable recommendations and I think we could build on their experiences, innovative ideas and work.

This is the essence of resilience: coming together to promote tolerance to prevent the rise of violent extremism conducive to terrorism; and coming together to react with dignity, strength and hope in the face of adversity.

And let me be clear, there are no better builders of resilience than young people.

In this context, I would like to highlight that my Office is working with the UN Alliance of Civilizations on an initiative to build the capacity of young leaders in Arab States.

This initiative will train them in the effective use of strategic communication methods to promote a culture of peace, social cohesion and respect for diversity.

It is a pleasure to have Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, High-Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, as well as Mr. Adama Dieng, UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, together with us today

Lastly, as in every regional conference of this kind, I am keen to hear from you how the United Nations can enhance its counter-terrorism support to Member States in close cooperation with civil society organizations.

The establishment of my Office and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact provides a clear framework and a solid platform for our joint work with Member States.

My Office is implementing capacity-building projects in 71 countries on a wide range of issues such as mitigating the threat of foreign terrorist fighters, empowering and engaging youth, countering terrorist financing and travel, and supporting victims of terrorism and their families.

I would also like to emphasize that we cannot counter terrorism and build resilient societies without promoting full respect for human rights and the rule of law. The struggle to protect human rights is often our last line of defense against the collapse of a society into violent conflict and chaos.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

This brings me to my final point, which is to update you on our plans for the Second United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week, which will take place in New York from 29 June to 2 July 2020, and will focus on “Building Institutional and Social Resilience to Terrorism”.

The 2020 Counter-Terrorism Week will consist of three main elements:

First, the seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy under the leadership of the President of the General Assembly, with the concluding debate to take place on 29 June.

Second, the first-ever Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism which will take place on 30 June. This event will be a historic global gathering of Member States, civil society organizations and other key stakeholders to lift up the voices of victims and strengthen our collective commitment to address their needs and uphold their rights.

Third, the Second United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States will also take place during the UN Counter-Terrorism week, on 1 and 2 July. We are keen to make the Conference more interactive and we will work again with all Member States to ensure that civil society organizations are able to meaningfully participate and contribute to this initiative.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To empower young people and promote tolerance at global, regional and national levels, our efforts must be holistic, predictable, well-funded, and backed by strong political will.

The United Arab Emirates has created a good example on how to empower its youth to build a tolerant and resilient society. I would like to recall that today nearly half of the world's population (46 percent) is younger than 25 years-old. The Middle East and North Africa have the highest proportion of young people.

As the Secretary-General has pointed out "Youth need to be seen more and more, not as a threat, but as an enormous potential for our world, especially in our search for peace, development, justice and respect for human rights."

This conference provides us with an important opportunity to think outside the box, identify practical approaches to support young people and promote tolerance, develop new partnerships and strengthen multilateral counter-terrorism cooperation at all levels.

I thank you all for your attention and wish you fruitful discussions during the next two days.