



## Press release

### **Regional Conference on addressing challenges posed by foreign terrorist fighters begins in Vienna**

VIENNA, 11 February 2020 – More than 400 participants from over 70 countries attended the opening of a two-day, high-level regional conference on challenges posed by foreign terrorist fighters. The conference, which is being held today and tomorrow in Vienna, is jointly organized by the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), the OSCE, and Switzerland, in co-operation with Albania's OSCE Chairmanship.

The expected return of foreign terrorist fighters from Iraq and Syria is an area of increasing concern for the international community. Some of these returnees may move to commit violent acts, incite others to engage in terrorist activities, or take part in recruitment and fundraising efforts for terrorist organizations. The repatriation, in accordance with Member States international obligations, of women and children associated with those fighters presents additional challenges.

In his opening address, Ambassador Johannes Matyassy welcomed the participants of the conference on behalf of the Swiss Foreign Minister and highlighted the many challenges the issue of foreign terrorist fighters pose. He emphasized the need to find common and convincing solutions on the basis of the rules-based international order. "In order to solve what concerns all of us, we have only one choice: we must come together and jointly tackle the issues at hand," he said.

Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, expressed his hope that “this Conference will provide an opportunity to discuss practical ways to assess and mitigate the risks posed by returning or relocating foreign terrorist fighters, and will address the particularly complex situation of women and children associated with foreign terrorist fighters.” He also added that “the international community must reaffirm and be guided by the principles of individual criminal responsibility, presumption of innocence, right to appeal, and the internationally recognized standards of justice.”

The conference will include panels on key challenges such as: (i) Responses to incitement, recruitment for and facilitation of foreign terrorist fighter activities; (ii) Preventing the travel of foreign terrorist fighters; (iii) Gathering and sharing of evidence; (iv) Prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters; and (v) Repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration.

“The humanitarian and security situation in formerly terrorist-controlled territories has captured the attention of the international community and requires action. Repatriation has come to the forefront of discussions, and in particular, how to address repatriation in compliance with international standards and obligations,” said OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger. “Apart from discussing how, when and which individuals should return – which are politically charged issues in some OSCE participating States – we will look at how to link prison-based rehabilitation programmes with post-prison reintegration efforts. The importance of including non-government actors in order to achieve sustainability will also be highlighted.”

Igli Hasani, Permanent Representative of Albania and Chair of the OSCE Permanent Council, said: “Because the related challenges are by nature international, we believe that all States must enhance their international co-operation for an effective human rights-compliant response to this challenge. Combatting threats through a purely domestic approach will not work. Inspired by the 30th Anniversary of the Charter of Paris, Albania’s Chairmanship will prioritize the revitalization of dialogue within the Organization, including with partners. In this regard the OSCE-wide Annual Counter-Terrorism Conference, to be held on 4 and 5 May in Tirana and organized by Albania’s Chairmanship. The Annual Conference will focus on effective partnerships to implement a whole of society approach to violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism.

Ghada Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said: “Foreign terrorist fighters pose urgent and expanding challenges to governments everywhere – in the theatre of operations and transit countries, to places of home and return. Strengthening co-ordinated, integrated responses to foreign terrorist fighters remains a critical priority of the UNODC in our comprehensive support to countries and regions to address drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism.”

This event brings together high-level officials and senior experts from OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, the United Nations, international and regional organizations, academia and civil society. The conclusions of a civil society event, organized by UNOCT and the Global Center on Cooperative Security, held on the day preceding the conference, will be presented at the conference.

The conference is one in a series of regional conferences announced by the UN Secretary-General at the UN's 2018 High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies in New York. It is also part of a broader initiative to give new impetus to multilateral co-operation in addressing the evolving threat of terrorism and violent extremism in accordance with international law and human rights. The outcomes of these regional conferences will feed into the Second UN High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, to be held in New York in July 2020.

For more information, visit: [www.un.org/counterterrorism/vienna](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/vienna)

#### **Contacts**

- Communication and Media Relations Section, OSCE Secretariat, Phone: + 43 676 71 74 592, [press@osce.org](mailto:press@osce.org)
- UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, Laurence Gerard, [Gerardl@un.org](mailto:Gerardl@un.org)