

**Keynote address of ASG Brands Kehris at the Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism: Advancing the rights and needs of victims of terrorism**  
**9 September 2022, 10.00 am**

Distinguished participants,

I thank the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism for the opportunity to address this first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism.

It is truly a milestone that provides victims with the opportunity to express their needs, concerns and hopes.

And that provides all of us with the inspiration to put into immediate effect our commitments to uphold their rights and dignity.

We cannot lose this momentum.

Despite some progress, we still see much more focus on alleged perpetrators and the fight against terrorism than on victims and their families.

In court proceedings, for instance, victims of terrorism often only serve as witnesses.

As **rights holders** and **agents of change**, victims of terrorism must be both the central subject and active partners of any process or measure involving or affecting them.

That means being provided with the space and opportunities to advance their human rights, and the adoption of measures that are respectful of their needs and concerns. This benefits not only victims, but societies at large.

We have number of guiding principles to facilitate this goal.

The **first** is recognizing victims' **legal status and the full range of their human rights**, including the right to be treated with dignity, to the right to truth, justice, and reparations.

In the context of the criminal justice system, this means that victims acquire an independent status as participants in court proceedings, providing them with certain participatory rights that are unavailable to witnesses or members of the public.

**Second**, it entails ensuring an effective response that **brings perpetrators of terrorist acts to justice**.

States have a duty to investigate and prosecute those responsible for such heinous crimes. An effective accountability mechanism also serves as a deterrent against future violations.

**Lastly**, and closely related, is victims' **right to effectively participate in the justice system**, and to access services and assistance.

Victims must be able to do so while also being protected from intimidation, retaliation and unlawful interference into their privacy.

Distinguished participants,

We cannot talk about a focus on victims without also stressing that measures should be put in place to ensure **adequate, prompt, and effective reparations**.

And let us be clear that reparations encompass restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation, including medical and psychosocial support.

To ensure these, the effective and meaningful participation of victims and their families is once again essential.

This entails, for example, their access to systematic, high-quality and long-term care and medical and psycho-social support.

At the international level, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances provides a good model.

The Committee reserves a space for hearing the testimonies of victims of enforced disappearances, and those are used to identify ways to support both victims and their families.

We should also find ways for victims to play a greater part in **developing and implementing measures to prevent and counter terrorism**.

We know that terrorism, by its very nature, de-personalizes and reduces victims to mere numbers. To terrorists, victims are an instrument to their main intention of provoking a state of terror in the general public.

Elevating victims' voices and their role will not only shift the focus of counter-terrorism from perpetrators to victims. It will address one of the conditions conducive to terrorism—the dehumanization of victims in all its forms and manifestations.

I am pleased that States have committed to such a shift in various resolutions of the General Assembly, including the seventh review resolution of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Respecting the human rights of victims of terrorism will be critical to fulfilling this commitment.

Colleagues,

It is worth mentioning that the principles I have evoked also apply to victims of abusive counter-terrorism measures.

As both the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights and Our Common Agenda recognize, respect for human rights is as an essential crisis prevention mechanism.

Upholding the rights of victims of terrorism and of violations from counter-terrorism measures, can help address underlying tensions, structural discrimination, and marginalization in society, and can thus play a key role in reducing support for terrorism itself.

Achieving this goal requires active engagement and participation of all:

First and foremost, victims of terrorism and their families, but also Governments, the judicial system, Parliaments, civil society organizations, including associations of victims of terrorism, and indeed, society as a whole. And, of course, the United Nations.

In that spirit, I look forward to the deliberations and conclusions of this First Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism.

Thank you.