



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

Opening remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)

High-Level Event of Heads of Counter-Terrorism and Security Agencies on Enhancing Capacity-Building and Training for West African Member States

Marrakesh, 23 June 2022

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this event dedicated to enhancing capacity building and training for West African countries.

Allow me to start by expressing my sincere gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco for its strong support to the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

I am honoured to be joined on the podium by His Excellency, Mr. Mohamed Yassin Mansouri, Director General of the General Directorate for Studies and Documentation of the Kingdom of Morocco.

I am also very pleased to be joined in this meeting by Mr. Annadif Saleh, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel; by General Mohamed Ely Znagui, Head of Defence and Security Department in G5 Sahel; and by His Excellency Mr. Paulo Rocha, Minister of Interior of Cape Verde.

Today's meeting is taking place at a time when terrorism and violent extremism are assuming unprecedented scales of expansion and intensity within and beyond the African continent.

I would like to express my solidarity with those countries that have suffered the scourge of terrorism. My thoughts are with the victims and their families. To honor them, I would ask all of us to observe a minute of silence.

Excellencies,

Terrorism knows no borders and has consequences for all countries and regions across the globe. Across West Africa and the Sahel region, it is evident that terrorist groups including Da'esh and Al-Qaida affiliates remain a dominant threat for peace, stability and development.

The latest report of the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team highlights that, I quote “In West Africa, in particular in the Sahel, those groups have successfully exploited local grievances and weak governance to command growing numbers of followers and resources, notwithstanding internal divisions and rivalries”. [End of quote.]

According to the 2022 Global Terrorism Index report, four of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism are in West Africa. It also highlights that the Sahel has become increasingly more violent over the past 15 years, with deaths rising by over one thousand per cent between 2007 and 2021.

We share serious concerns over the intricate relationships between terrorists, armed groups and criminal networks, in addition to the reports of an increased influx of foreign terrorist fighters in some of the countries of the region.

Against this background, we welcome this opportunity to have an open discussion about the strategies and approaches to reinforce regional cooperation on counter-terrorism issues. We see this as an outstanding moment to gather international, regional, and national stakeholders’ perspectives and expertise. This will result in better coordinated and inclusive responses to actively anticipate, deter and counter terrorism.

Excellencies,

During the recent African Union Summit on ‘Terrorism and Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa’ held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea - in which I represented the Secretary-General - there was growing concern over the expanding threat of violent extremism and terrorism across the continent.

The Summit declaration highlighted several action points, including developing a comprehensive Continental Strategic Plan of Action on countering terrorism in Africa, premised on existing national and regional strategies; and establishing an AU Ministerial Committee on Counter Terrorism to serve as a high level coordination, monitoring, evaluation and follow up mechanism.

My Office stands ready to work with the African Union to implement these commitments.

Excellencies,

The work of the agencies you lead is vital in the fight against terrorism. I encourage you to engage in today’s discussions by sharing your terrorist threat assessments, the challenges and proposals to strengthen regional cooperation on counter-terrorism matters, as well as your needs regarding more impactful capacity-building.

In June last year, we opened with a strong political and financial support of the Government of Morocco our Rabat Programme Office and Training Center for Counter-Terrorism in Africa, which

is established to serve as a much-needed training hub to advance our counter-terrorism capacity-building efforts in Africa, particularly in West Africa and the Sahel.

I am very proud to say that less than a year since its opening, the Rabat Office has already conducted several important capacity-building activities on its premises. Most recently, the Office delivered a three-week-long foundational module, as the first part of a more than 10-week Specialized Counter-Terrorism Investigations training programme. This training benefited twenty-four participants coming from Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal.

The Office will train the same group of participants on Intermediate and Advanced Modules by the end of the year and will develop mentorship programmes at country level, to ensure sustainability and standardization. This will support national law enforcement academies to own and deliver the curriculum on a permanent basis.

Moreover, UNOCT recently launched the EU-UN Global Terrorism Threats Facility that will operate out of Rabat with global reach to provide demand-driven, rapid support to Member States that need assistance in facing evolving or urgent terrorist threats.

I would also like to take this opportunity to share that Nigeria and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism are planning to organize an African High-Level International Conference on Counter-Terrorism, in Abuja, in October 2023. I look forward to working closely with you all in generating lots of innovative ideas and practical actions to be implemented at the international, national and local levels.

All these activities would not be possible without support of UNOCT main donors – the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the European Union. We are grateful for that.

Excellencies,

The threat picture in Africa is changing, and terrorist groups continue to adapt their techniques and operations. We are seeing a fast-evolving situation on the continent with violent extremism spreading outside of terrorism-affected countries to coastal countries.

It is only through enhanced multilateral cooperation that we will be able to launch sustainable and effective responses as well as resilience against terrorism.

The Secretary-General's report on our Common Agenda offers a fresh opportunity, in the words of the report (and I quote) "to re-think and re-position our approach to peace in Africa, and ensure that our peace architecture is fit-for-purpose to address the rapid shifts and changes we see across the continent and around the world."

My Office remains committed to supporting you in responding to the terrorist threat in the region and will move with you to strengthen hope, peace and inclusion. I look forward to hearing your views today on how best to work together to achieve this goal.

Thank you.