



## UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL SOCIETY AND COUNTER-TERRORISM

### For a Future Free From Terrorism: The Role of Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Civil Society Engagement in Effective Counter-Terrorism Efforts

#### Remarks by

**Katerina Hadzi-Miceva Evans,**  
Executive Director, European Center for Not-for-Profit Law

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

A part of the title of this event is “A future free from terrorism”. Unfortunately, historically there has never been and it is hard to imagine in a foreseeable future – a zero risk of terrorism. But - - we can build a future where our responses to terrorism threats are based on rule of law, strengthen our democracies, protect our societies and guard our fundamental rights.

So let me highlight three key pathways about how we can build a future that counters terrorism AND preserves democracies and rights.

**First, let us focus on the actual terrorism threat.** We don’t do that by cracking down on civil society and human rights. There is no evidence to date that limiting civic freedoms, imprisoning activists, restricting funding flows, whether through law or practice, reduce the threat of terrorism. Global and national reports show that the risk of terrorist abuse in the civil society sector is low. In fact, studies find that countries may pre-empt terrorist attacks more effectively if they create the trust of populations and collaborate with civil society. So, the UN and Global Compact Entities cannot tolerate misuse of the counter-terrorism agenda any more. They need to prevent such misuse. Member states need to stop it. Otherwise, we give terrorists a competitive advantage.

**Second, let us review the global architecture.** The counter-terrorism agenda does not belong to the Global Compact entities only. It belongs to the UN as such. Therefore, it cannot trump other key UN goals. And this should be a human rights agenda, not an authoritarian states’





one. The counter-terrorism agenda needs to be linked and held to the same rigor as our development, human rights, and other security initiatives. Frankly, a rigorous and continuous assessment of such kind has not been fully integrated yet. So, let's create an oversight and accountability mechanisms which assess how the counter-terrorism bodies, programming and actions impact the UN Goals and our rights. Let's then work together to agree on what needs to change in order to preserve peace, security, development and rights. We can do this through a new and inclusive process as the Secretary General produces his next annual report and looks into the necessity of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism and an independent oversight.

**And third, let us elevate leadership and participation.** We have seen in practice and heard today that when civil society is given the opportunity to present its findings and bring solutions, the counter-terrorism actions are more effective; they are agreed and followed by most.

And I want you to remember this: **civil society does not just take part – it leads.** Today, at the conference and at home - we have a wealth of expertise - representatives of national and global civil society coalitions researching, documenting, creating solutions and holding to account. So, let's create systems that guarantee civil society contribution in Secretary General reports, CTED assessments, national actions. We already have seen how this can be done through the leadership of the Kingdom of Spain and the Sultanate of Oman in the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy review. Let us take this example forward. We can do much more to bring civil society in conferences such as this and into other efforts.

So, the future is created now and by us. We know what we need to do. Under the leadership of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, civil society from 43 countries developed recommendations that are being discussed and presented at this conference. We are grateful to the Kingdom of Spain and UNOCT for committing to integrating this document as an official independent conference document and process.

In sum, to build a future that is based on the core values and, as the Secretary General said, where human rights are front and center, we need to:

**First, stop attacking civil society and our rights, and hold accountable those who do it. As civil society stated yesterday – complicity must end now.**





**Second, integrate human rights assessments in the UN counter-terrorism through oversight mechanism.**

**Third, directly fund civil society and facilitate civil society participation – at the UN and at home. Counter-terrorism goals will benefit from the leadership role of civil society.**

Please take these forward. For the sake of our democracies, our rights, counter-terrorism efforts and legitimacy of the UN mandate. We know it needs to be fixed, we have suggestions how to fix it. Let's do it. Together.

Thank you.

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