



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

**At the Civil Society Workshop in advance of the Vienna Regional
Conference on “Foreign Terrorist Fighters – Addressing Current
Challenges.”**

10 February – Vienna

Good afternoon dear colleagues,

Thank you for inviting me. I am delighted to close this civil society workshop held in advance of the Regional Conference that we will open tomorrow with our partners from the Swiss Government and the OSCE on addressing the current challenges posed by Foreign Terrorist Fighters.

This will be the second regional conference organized by my Office preceded by a dedicated civil society-led workshop.

The first one was last December in Abu Dhabi on the eve of the regional conference we held together with the United Arab Emirates on Empowering Youth and Promoting Tolerance.

These workshops reflect our efforts and determination to strengthen the meaningful engagement of civil society in all of our work to promote the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, as called for by the General Assembly.

I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Global Centre on Cooperative Security for organizing this workshop in partnership with my Office, and to the

Government of Switzerland and the OSCE for helping make it a reality, including through their generous financial support.

Dear friends,

First and foremost, your discussions today demonstrated once again that civil society, in all its diversity, is a vital partner in addressing the drivers of violent extremism and the conditions conducive to terrorism.

In the area of prevention, we heard about civil society-led efforts to build resilience, including by raising awareness of the threat of terrorism, promoting religious education and interfaith and intra-faith dialogues, supporting vulnerable youth, developing and disseminating counter narrative campaigns, and building community trust in government institutions.

In the intervention space, we heard about the critical role that civil society actors – including psychologists, risk assessment experts, mentors, religious representatives, victims, and former terrorism offenders – are playing in designing, delivering, and evaluating risk assessment and management tools, as well as intervention approaches around the world.

And in the rehabilitation and reintegration space, we heard about the experiences of civil society organizations in Central Asia and elsewhere working hand-in-hand with governments to facilitate the repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration of violent extremists and those associated with violent extremist groups.

It is clear from these discussions that civil society actors often enjoy credibility in their communities and bring to bear specific expertise and skills across a wide range of psychosocial, vocational, financial, educational, legal, religious, familial, and communication needs, which no other actor can provide.

Importantly, civil society can greatly contribute to community ownership in rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives, especially with regard to reducing stigma, and helping to channel concerns.

Dear friends,

The importance of civil society engagement in our long-term fight against terrorism is well recognized both by the General Assembly and the Security Council - and we are taking decisive steps to translate this into tangible actions.

The General Assembly in its resolution for the 6th review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy encouraged civil society to engage, as appropriate, in efforts to strengthen the implementation of the Strategy, and encouraged Member States and United Nations entities to enhance engagement with civil society and to support its role in the implementation of the Strategy.

Accordingly, my Office is working to ensure more systematic and meaningful engagement of civil society in our policy, coordination and capacity-building work at all levels and across all four pillars of the Strategy.

I have, for example, established an external partnership section in my Office, with a dedicated staff for civil society engagement.

We are also working in this regard with partners, such as the Global Center for Cooperative Security, but also Hedayah and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, with which we have concluded memoranda of understanding.

In anticipation of the 7th biennial review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy this year, for the first-time we invited feedback from civil society organizations on their efforts to support the implementation of the Strategy and their recommendations to the UN system. Fifty-five civil society organizations responded to this call.

Furthermore, in addition to ensuring the strong participation of civil society in the Regional High-Level Conferences, civil society will also play a significant role in the second United Nations Counter Terrorism Week, from 29 June to 2 July in New York, especially in the first-ever Global Congress for Victims of Terrorism.

Civil society will also be invited to participate and speak during the 2nd United Nations High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, where the Global Center for Cooperative Security will report on civil society participation and views from the regional conferences.

Dear friends,

I am very concerned over the situation in the camps in Syria and Iraq where children and women with alleged links to foreign terrorist fighters are stranded.

We need every effort to encourage and support Member States to provide protection, repatriate their nationals, ensure accountability, and establish gender and age-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration programme.

We need leadership and vision so that this situation is not left to fester and exacerbate into an even bigger threat in the mid-term, if foreign terrorist fighters escape justice, and children are exposed to further radicalization.

I believe that civil society organizations can work very closely with governments to find a solution of this difficult problem in accordance with their international legal obligations.

Together with UNODC and CTED, my Office has developed a programme to provide tailored support to requesting Member States on the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals suspected or convicted of committing terrorist acts, their families and associates. Your contribution to these efforts will be definitely welcomed.

Dear friends,

We all know that terrorism cannot be defeated through military and law enforcement means alone.

But a lot more needs to be done to bring about a holistic, inclusive and thoughtful approach to counter-terrorism, which addresses the challenge in all its complexity. And much more needs to be done to shift the focus from short-term responses to a long-term perspective, investing in building resilience for sustainable prevention.

The experiences you have shared today, your good practices and lessons learned, are invaluable to help concretize such an approach. Your contributions, your feedback and your support are making our efforts more relevant, meaningful and impactful. Most immediately, they will inform our deliberations in the coming days and shape the recommendations that will be presented during the Counter-Terrorism week.

I thank you again for your strong commitment and look forward to continue working closely with you.