

**Virtual Dialogue with human rights and civil society partners on the theme of
“*Building a Better Paradigm to Prevent and Counter Terrorism*”**

Opening Session, 25 May 2021

H.E. Ms. Arancha González Laya, Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain

UNOCT is an excellent example of how valuable multilateral institutions can be. We were present at the beginning, during the initial years, and we will be even more present in the future, we are very much looking forward to the opening of the UNOCT Regional Office in Madrid, in the coming months, to develop several of the programs that the UNOCT has in its agenda, from the Protection of Places of Worship, developed jointly with the Alliance of Civilizations, to the United Nations Global Sports Program, focused on preventing terrorism working with the youth; or the programs dedicated to the victims of terrorism.

In early 2022 we will host the Regional Conference on Human Rights and Civil Society in the fight against terrorism in the city of Málaga. It will be a pioneer in a series of lectures that the UN wants to devote to the field of human rights in multiple contexts.

As you all know, our Permanent Representative to the UN, together with his Omani counterpart, is co-facilitating the Seventh Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. This is the cornerstone of the UN efforts and activities in this field. For us in Spain it will be important that we use this opportunity to build consensus around a number of issues, such as the consolidation and sustainability of UNOCT. To focus in new threats that we are facing, technological or cyber-threats, to look at new scenarios such as the Sahel or to look at progressing human rights, such as we are addressing here today.

For Spain, one of the new elements to be included in this Strategy is precisely the importance of preserving and respecting human rights in the fight against terrorism. Let me on this, move to the second point, which is precisely human rights.

The need to respect human rights in the development of the fight against terrorism is one of the very lessons that we have learned from our experience.

First, from our legal obligation. We must comply with international human rights rules which are an essential part of our legal architecture and for which States are the ultimate guarantors.

Second, because we also have a moral obligation. To the extent of the principles and values that define us as a society do not allow us to resort to methods that are incompatible with them. The moral pre-eminence of the State over terrorists requires all its servants to scrupulously respect these guarantees.

And finally, also as a matter of operational effectiveness. A good number of examples show that when human rights are respected, the fight against terrorism is more effective.

So this is where we do think that we need to focus in order to ensure that human rights go beyond simple programmatic references and are fully entered into the practical sphere of action.

There is a one particular human rights angle that I would like to stress and that is gender. We have to pay specific attention to the gender perspective in the fight against terrorism. Unfortunately, the experiences of recent years attest to the fact that there are terrorist groups using violence particularly targeted against women and girls as part of their strategy to impose their agendas through terror.

Women and girls should not only be considered as victims of terrorism, but also as essential agents in preventing, fighting and reconstructing the civic spaces that terrorists want to destroy.

We do think that this gender perspective has to be very present in our strategies.

Third and final, the participation of civil society. Our experience shows that the fight against terrorism has to include the whole of society. It's clear that the State has an essential role, in particular through Security Forces, through the military, but for this fight to be more effective the whole of Society, Society with capital S, must be involved and participate in this common effort.

Civil society organizations can participate in different ways:

- o In monitoring the way the fight against terrorism is being carried out by the public Authorities;
- o In analyzing scenarios that can be used for the planning of counter-terrorism activities;
- o In mitigating the consequences of terrorism;
- o and even combating terrorism at the counter-narrative level.

Related to the latter two, mitigating consequences and counter-narrative, I would like also to focus on the victims of terrorism.

This is a priority for Spain. We have to put victims at the center of the fight against terrorism to guarantee the recognition of their dignity and their memory, fighting against oblivion and ensuring their protection.

We have to support the testimony of the victims of terrorism as an authoritative and fundamental voice in order to present counter-narratives that delegitimize past and present terrorism and prevent radicalization of the new generations.

Spain holds as a priority of our anti-terrorism policy the recognition of the dignity and rights of the victims of terrorism, which inspires our Act of 2011 on the Recognition and Integral Protection of Victims of Terrorism.

And we have tried to transfer this national priority also to the international sphere. That is why Spain together with Afghanistan chairs the UN Group of Friends of Victims of Terrorism. Together with the resolutions on this subject that we have passed in recent years, the Group of Friends has managed to introduce and maintain this issue on the organization's agenda.

And it will be very important for us the First Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism, scheduled to take place in the autumn of this year.

We do think that we also could do more and this is where we support the initiative presented by UNOCT to promote a Global Network of Associations of Victims of Terrorism. It's not just symbolic, it can help us also in better pursuing together what it's best.

Thank you again Mr. Voronkov, dear participants, for this opportunity and again let me reiterate Spain's commitment to this fight and to support the UN efforts to fight against terrorism.

Thank you very much.