



*“Countering and Preventing Terrorism in the Age of Transformative Technologies: Addressing the Challenges of the New Decade,”* virtual conference, 28 June 2021

Opening Session: ‘Addressing the Challenges of the New Decade’ 9:00-10:15 ET

Talking Points Judith Lichtenberg, Executive Director, Global Network Initiative

I would like to start by offering my thanks to the UN Office of Counterterrorism and Member States for inviting me to participate in this important event.

A decade ago, the potential for Internet and mobile technologies to significantly enhance human rights became clear. However, early controversies showed that this potential rested, in part, on the ability of those providing these innovative products and services to retain the trust of users when faced with government demands to censor or hand over sensitive information.

Governments seeking to address the terrorist misuse of transformative technologies today face a similar challenge: how to build trust in order to enlist diverse stakeholders in a shared mission.

The Global Network Initiative or GNI was designed to foster collaboration among a diverse cross-section of stakeholders by building trust upon a foundation of shared values. Along these lines, I would like to humbly suggest that this same approach should continue to guide efforts to counter and prevent terrorism in the age of transformative technologies.

GNI brings together leading information and communications technology companies, digital rights and press freedom groups, academic institutions and experts, and investors from every region of the world. Together they work to support and advance freedom of expression and privacy in the ICT sector.

The foundation of our members’ participation is a shared commitment to the GNI Principles on Freedom of Expression and Privacy. These are rooted in international human rights standards and provide a framework for responsible company decision making in response to government pressures and restrictions that could impact users’ rights.

Our independent accountability mechanism, the only one of its kind in the ICT sector, allows for deep insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by ICT companies. It fosters the trust and insight that enable us to provide a unique platform for shared learning and problem solving, as well as collaborative engagement on difficult challenges regarding freedom of expression and privacy.

In the course of this work, we have examined many instances of the misuse of legal powers for countering terrorism and violent extremism. These include silencing individuals documenting and speaking out on human rights abuses, disproportionate impacts on underrepresented populations, and restricting legitimate political debates.

In all of these instances, overly broad counter-terrorism efforts often dampen the very trust needed to empower collaborative efforts to address the root causes of extremism in a sustainable, rights-respecting manner. They also have harmful impacts on democracy, the rule of law, and economic development.

Thankfully, there is a well-established, alternative approach based on recognition of shared values, diverse expertise, and mutual support. GNI is proud to have been engaged in such efforts with various UN agencies and offices and Member States over the last few years.

In 2015, GNI launched a global stakeholder dialogue on this topic, building bridges between our multistakeholder membership and government officials, law enforcement, and international organizations.

This work resulted in a policy brief, offering a roadmap for companies and governments in responding to potential online extremism while respecting human rights. This brief continues to serve as a lodestar for our engagement in important international discussions like this one.

GNI has been grateful for the many opportunities to share lessons from our multistakeholder membership with the UN Office of Counterterrorism and Member States in the years since concluding this dialogue.

In this spirit, we are delighted to see the commitments, throughout this week's program, to human rights and gender equality in the context of implementing the global counter-terrorism strategy. We hope that GNI's own experience in multistakeholder engagement and collaboration can help serve as a model for the work of UNOCT, Member States, and the important partners joining this week's event to address legitimate concerns in creative, collaborative, and rights-respecting ways.

Thank you.