



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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

EDIN Project End Event

“Leveraging Interfaith Dialogue for the Prevention of Hate Speech and Violent Extremism”

18 February 2022, 10 a.m., Westin Hotel, New York

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to welcome you here today to the EDIN Project’s End Event on “Leveraging Interfaith Dialogue for the Prevention of Hate Speech and Violent Extremism”.

I am grateful to be joined by our partners in this project and to speak to you alongside my dear friend and colleague Miguel Moratinos, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who funded this project.

Today marks a very special occasion, where many of our EDIN participants are able to meet in person for the first time, and where we can reflect together on the lessons and successes of harnessing interfaith dialogue and strategic communications to help address some of the drivers of violent extremism and hate in our communities.

First, I would like to commend EDIN participants and facilitators for committing to this project over the last 12 months and creating such inspiring and successful campaigns. Thank you for your time and efforts to be here today, whether you are able to join in person, or are here virtually, we value your dedication to the project.

I would also like to thank the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations project team for their incredible efforts in co-organizing this special event. It has been a pleasure partnering on this exciting project and we look forward to continued partnerships in the future.

The impact of the EDIN project has been significant, and the evidence is clear: investing in building the capacities and skills of young leaders, especially those who are already leaders in their online or faith communities, helps counter terrorist narratives of hate and division.

Dear Colleagues,

The last two years have been challenging for all of us, individually and collectively. As the world tries to reset and find our way in this 'new normal', we continue to struggle with the impact and ongoing threats to international peace and security, which the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated.

The surge in hate speech conducive to violent extremism and violence against ethnic, religious and other minorities across the world over the past three years, accelerated by the COVID-19 'infodemic', is alarming. Lockdowns and social distancing measures have increased social isolation and fueled anti-government sentiments.

Terrorists and violent extremists across the ideological spectrum have exploited the fall-out from the pandemic to foment division and polarization, to incite hatred and violence.

They have preyed upon vulnerable audiences, especially young people out of school and out of jobs. Many of these young people have spent significantly more time online, across multiple social media and gaming platforms. We are seeing violent extremists understand these new vulnerabilities.

Alarmingly, we are also seeing increased violent extremist activity on online gaming platforms. Given that there are more than 3 billion gamers globally, this development is a significant cause for concern.

Dear Colleagues, dear friends

Curbing the online spread of hate speech conducive to violent extremism and terrorist content, while upholding freedom of expression, was a key focus during the Seventh Review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy that the General Assembly concluded in June 2021 with the adoption of a comprehensive and forward-looking consensus resolution.

The resolution calls for appropriate measures to counter incitement to hostility, hatred and violence by terrorist groups and in this regard highlights the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech launched by the Secretary-General in June 2019.

It stresses the importance of counter-narratives, among other measures, to address the rise in terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief, that we have witnessed in recent years.

The General Assembly also underscored the importance of multi-stakeholder and cooperative approaches, as well as the positive use of technology.

Dear Colleagues,

Young people, particularly young leaders, have a critical role to play in the whole-of-society responses needed to confront this evolving threat.

Strategic communication has become an essential part of our toolbox to effectively and ethically engage with affected communities, in a world drowning in conspiracy theories, disinformation, hate speech and violent extremist propaganda. My Office has been leading efforts in this regard to harness innovative and evidence-based practices and partnerships, including with our key partner United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, through our Global Programme on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism.

The EDIN project brought together young religious leaders and media makers from 11 countries across the Middle East and Europe, providing capacity building on strategic communications to enable them to foster interreligious understanding, counter terrorist narratives and build social cohesion on social media. Throughout the project, participants were supported by interfaith facilitators to develop communication plans and social media campaigns which were shared widely across different platforms. Each participant crafted and implemented their own social media campaigns to engage their communities on local issues related to religion, interfaith tensions, violent extremism and social cohesion.

Last June the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism launched the EDIN website during the UN's Second Counter Terrorism Week. It showcases the projects and the talented people behind the campaigns, who join us here today.

We look forward to hearing about the experiences of the EDIN participants as part of the project, and how EDIN has helped you to make positive impacts on your local communities and globally through social media.

Moving forward, we need to reshape responses to all forms of hate and violence and boost partnerships that the United Nations Secretary-General called for last year in his report on “Our Common Agenda” for people, the planet, prosperity and peace.

You can count on the engagement and support of my Office.

I now pass the floor to my dear colleague and friend, distinguished High Representative Mr. Miguel Moratinos.

Thank You