

**UN Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism  
NY, UN HQs, 8 – 9 September 2022**

**Statement by Ms. Laura Dolci**

Closing Plenary Day 1 – Victims of Terrorism spotlight

Exactly 21 years ago I was taking refuge with my husband and hundreds of UN colleagues in this very corridor, while the city of New York was under terrorist attack. On 11 September 2001, within these walls we felt for the first time that the United Nations could be a target of terrorism. Luckily, on that day, it wasn't.

It took less than two years after that horrific day for a UN HQs to be targeted by terrorists. On 19 August 2003, 22 people died in the rubble of the Canal Hotel in Baghdad in a monstrous explosion caused by a truck loaded with two tons of TNT. My husband Jean-Sélim Kanaan, a 33 year-old UN staff like myself, was amongst them. The UN flag, that was flying on that UN building is displayed here, in pieces, at the visitors' entrance.

On that tragic Tuesday, I lost the man I had planned to share my life with, the father of our one month-old son and, ultimately, a piece of myself. Also, my journey as a victim of terrorism started, initially as raw pain and diagnosed complicated grief. Later, as an increasing self-awareness that brought me to work for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, where I managed UN Trust Funds that provide direct assistance to victims of other human rights violations (torture and slavery).

I came back to this corridor on 9 September 2008 to participate in the Symposium on Victims of Terrorism convened by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. Unlike today, victims had to come through the backdoor, with additional security put in place due to our very presence.

I am glad to have made it thus far, with other courageous victims, to see the progress achieved in placing the recognition of victims of terrorism on the UN agenda. We have managed to have the General Assembly establish the World Humanitarian Day, marked every 19 August to remember the sacrifice of UN humanitarian staff, as well as the International Day for Victims of Terrorism.

A long journey, indeed, but progress in the field of human rights is never linear. No later than 2016, the General Assembly adopted the reviewed UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which contains only one paragraph - out of 72- on victims of terrorism. To this day, still, several UN texts merely express solidarity to victims of terrorism.

Out there, there are thousands of victims struggling with the devastating consequences of terrorism in countries where there is little or no assistance in place. Over the years, I interviewed numerous victims, including UN staff,

that succumbed to the dehumanization inflicted by terrorism, or – worse – to the subsequent indifference of national and international institutions.

In my years of victim-focused work, I also came to realize that the literature on terrorism victimization is quite limited. And this is why in 2017 I undertook a research project, sponsored by the UN Sabbatical Programme, to unpack the specific victimological features of terrorism and, through an [open source book](#)<sup>1</sup>, bring evidence on how the experience of victims of terrorism differs in degree from that of victims of other crimes.

Terrorism is not an ordinary crime. Its intent transcends the direct victims, who are often caught in cross-border mass attacks, suffer from severe multiple sequelae and often have no access to justice and information.

Today's landmark UN Global Congress should give us all much-needed impetus to ensure that victims of terrorism are no longer just an afterthought - but included systematically in counter-terrorism strategies and programs, at the national and international levels. **The advocacy and mobilization of victims alone is no longer sufficient. It is time for the UN and its Member States to keep the spotlight on victims of terrorism.**

As I articulated in my advocacy and research, during the General Assembly's yearly counter-terrorism week, a space should be ensured for States, practitioners and victims to share practices, mobilize and map epidemiological research and develop consistent rights-based language on victims in UN texts. A Voluntary Trust Fund should be established to support terrorism victims, in particular from the Global South. Also, the UN should consider increasing efforts towards an international codification of the crime of terrorism, building on the normative corpus developed thus far. Lastly, a comprehensive response should be put in place to support affected UN staff. [718 words]

I thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Dolci, *A victimless crime?: a narrative on terrorism victimization to build a case for support*, Wolf Legal Publishers, 2018,