

Open briefing of the Counter-Terrorism Committee

“Countering Incitement to Commit Terrorist Acts Motivated by Extremism and Intolerance: the Kingdom of Morocco’s Approach and Experiences of other African States”

ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 30 September 2014

Summary of discussions

Opening remarks

H.E. Ms. Raimonda Murmokaitė, Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, recalled that, during its 2013 visit to the Kingdom of Morocco, the Committee had identified Morocco’s national strategy to promote dialogue among civilizations as a good practice to be shared among other States. Whether in developing or developed States, religious leaders could play a pivotal role in creating an environment of peaceful coexistence. By promoting intrareligious and interreligious reflection and dialogue, Governments could help build trust within societies and within public institutions. The role of religious institutions fell within the scope of Security Council resolution 1624 (2005), which targeted in particular the threat of terrorism incitement, calling upon States to counter incitement and prevent the subversion of religious institutions by terrorist and their supporters. In its resolution 2178 (2014), the Council stressed that countering violent extremism was essential to addressing the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters and encouraged States to empower religious leaders in developing strategies to counter the violent extremist narrative. Working together with their partners, the Committee and its Executive Directorate (CTED) would continue to assess States’ implementation of resolutions 1624 (2005) and 2178 (2014) in relation to countering violent extremism and incitement to terrorism, and would continue to compile good practices and make recommendations to States to strengthen their counter-terrorism programmes.

Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, speaking on behalf of the Secretary-general, said that the evolution of the terrorist threat in new and unpredictable directions was among the most serious challenges faced by the international community. In particular, groups driven by violent extremism had caused destruction in West Africa, South Asia, Iraq and Syria. The actions of the international community must address the immediate security challenges, the political context, and underlying long-term grievances. They must also be undertaken in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law, as well as with the mandates conveyed by the Security Council in its resolution 1624 (2005) and by the General Assembly in Pillar I of its Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The United Nations would do its utmost to assist States to implement the recently adopted resolution 2178 (2014), on foreign terrorist fighters, including through the actions of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT), the Counter-Terrorism Implementation task Force (CTITF) and its member entities, and CTED, and in accordance with the fourth review of the Global Strategy. Events such as the open briefing enabled Member States to learn from one another’s experiences and to replicate successful programmes elsewhere in order to counter the rising threat posed by violent extremism.

H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations noted that the Security Council, in its recently adopted resolution 2178 (2014), had for the first time underscored the importance of countering

violent extremism as a key element in effective responses to the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. The resolution also built upon previous Council resolutions, including resolution 1624 (2005), which focused on prevention and called for increased attention to social contexts that might be conducive to the spread of terrorism. Both resolutions stressed that the actions of Member States and the international community must respect fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief, expression, opinion and association. Although law enforcement measures were critical to counter-terrorism, long-term success required strategic approaches to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, especially ideologies that helped justify and build support for terrorist causes. In many societies around the world, and especially in Muslim-majority societies, young people constituted a majority of the population, but had very little influence on the policies that affected their lives. The international community must therefore provide viable and meaningful alternatives to the falsification of religion propagated by terrorists. The Alliance looked forward to strengthening its cooperation with its partners, including the Security Council, CTED, Member States, international organizations and civil society, in countering the appeal of extremist organizations.

Session I: “Countering Terrorist Incitement through Partnerships with Religious Leaders: the Experience of the Kingdom of Morocco”

H.E. Mr. Nasser Bourita, Secretary-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Morocco, underscored Morocco’s commitment to counter-terrorism and its firm belief that the fight against terrorism was a collective endeavour of all members of the international community. The briefing was both important and timely in view of current developments on the ground. The Security Council’s adoption of resolution 2178 (2014) testified to the urgency with which radicalization and violent extremism must be addressed. Morocco’s approach to counter-terrorism was (i) pragmatic, in so far as it was adaptable to the evolving situation on the ground; (ii) coherent, in that initiatives at the national level were compatible with regional and international efforts; and (iii) global, in the sense that it represented a comprehensive approach that included security measures, socio-economic development, and the religious dimension. Political stability and good security governance were indispensable, but there was also a need to strengthen efforts to fight poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Morocco had launched several development initiatives with its partners in Africa and was committed to sharing best practices and contributing to counter-terrorism at the national, regional and international levels.

H.E. Mr. Ahmed Toufik, Minister of Habous and Islamic Affairs, Kingdom of Morocco, said that Morocco’s approach to managing religious affairs in the context of combatting terrorism had not originally been designed specifically to address terrorism, but had proven effective in preventing radicalization and the abuse of religion for terrorist purposes. Morocco’s policy rested on three pillars. The first was political legitimacy, which was derived from the King’s position as the Commander of the Faithful and the oath of allegiance pledged to him. The second was religious leadership, provided by the High Council for Religious Affairs, which issued fatwas pertaining to political life and social activity and was widely recognized within Moroccan society as the sole authority on such matters. The third was the provision of religious services, which included an emphasis on religious education. Religious scholars therefore guided people towards a moderate understanding of religion and devised fatwas through an institutionalized authority, thereby protecting them from the influence of extremists.

Mr. Yassine Mansouri, Directeur Général de la Direction Générale d'Etudes et de Documentation, said that, through its involvement in the international fight against terrorism in the wake of the attacks of 11 September 2001, Morocco itself had become a target for terrorism. Its security forces had, however, been successful in foiling a significant number of planned attacks and had dismantled various terrorist cells operating on its territory. The terrorist threat in the Sahara and Sahel regions was aggravated by the formation of new alliances between Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro, and other groups, such as the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and Ansar Al-Sharia. The threat emanating from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was unprecedented in view of the significant financial and military resources available to the group, as well as the large number of foreign terrorist fighters travelling to the region. More than 1,200 Moroccan fighters were believed to be in the conflict zone. There was a significant risk that some of those fighters might attempt to return to Morocco to perpetrate terrorist acts. Morocco continued to cooperate with its African partners on training and intelligence-sharing and would remain fully engaged in bilateral and multilateral counter-terrorism efforts, which should include measures to address radical ideologies and extremist discourse that led to violence.

Session II: “Cooperation with the Kingdom of Morocco and National Initiatives to Counter Terrorist Incitement, Including by Preventing the Abuse of Religion”

H.E. Mr. Thierno Amadou Omar Hass Diallo, Minister of Religious Affairs and Worship, Republic of Mali, said that Mali’s strategy in preventing violent extremism and combating terrorism was based on actions to promote development and combat poverty, as well as strong legislation. Mali’s longstanding cooperation with Morocco had been marked in particular by numerous programmes and activities that sought to disseminate a moderate and tolerant Islam. Cooperation in the religious sphere notably included the training of young Malian citizens in Moroccan Islamic schools and efforts to promote the dissemination of tolerance among women and children. There was a need to continue the training of Imams, preachers and other religious leaders to promote a moderate Islam that was compatible with the values of tolerance and peace. Islamic education should seek to promote a spirit of tolerance and the rejection of all forms of violence. Mali would require substantial financial support in its efforts to promote freedom of religious expression and preserve the true Islam. Morocco alone bore the costs of implementing its programmes to address the role of religion in the fight against violent extremism, and should be supported in its endeavours

H.E. Mr. Abdellah Jassi, Secretary-General, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Guinea, said that his country condemned all violence perpetrated in the name of Islam, which was a religion of peace, love, peaceful coexistence, and the acceptance of differences. As with the training of Guinean engineers and other professionals in Morocco during the 1970s, the training of Guinean Imams in Moroccan schools was part of an ancient tradition of cooperation between Guinea and Morocco. The atrocities currently being perpetrated by those who claimed to act in the name of Islam had nothing to do with Islam. Guinea was determined to prevent violence from entering its territory and to promote an Islam of tolerance. It was essential to cooperate in addressing the root causes of terrorism.

Mr. Cisse Djiguiba, Director-General of *La Radio Nationale Islamique Al-Bayane*, Côte d'Ivoire, said that countering incitement to terrorism was a matter of global concern. It was very important to understand all the underlying factors, which included disenchantment, frustration, poverty, unemployment, and interreligious and inter-ethnic mistrust. The international community must do everything necessary to overcome the scourge of terrorism, which threatened the very existence of mankind. It was essential to incorporate young people into all counter-terrorism efforts. Côte d'Ivoire's emergence from civil war had been due in part to the efforts of its religious leaders, who had been empowered to combat mistrust and exclusion. Radio messages continued to play an important role in national efforts to build a culture of peace. The programme to educate Ivorian Imams was part of a historic relationship of cooperation between Morocco and Côte d'Ivoire, in many fields, aimed at promoting openness and tolerance. The abuses current being perpetrated by those who claimed to act in the name of Islam brought shame to all Islam.

H.E. Mr. Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah, Founder and President of the Abu Dhabi-based Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, said that terrorism was a complex issue, which was associated with many grievances, including poverty and the complexities of modern life. The achievement of lasting peace required efforts to address historic grievances. Responses should include not just security measures, but also religious and cultural measures aimed at countering the exploitation of religion for terrorist purposes. It was of fundamental importance to define the response of religious leaders, and Morocco continued to play a pioneering role in that regard. The phenomenon of terrorism could be addressed within the Islamic world through sharia law, by demonstrating the error of terrorist concepts, developing counter-narratives, and adapting sharia law to the contemporary world. Extremism should be attacked at its source and disassociated from religion. The efforts of Morocco to educate religious teachers could have a powerful impact on young people with limited understanding of the issues involved. Erroneous and partial interpretations had corrupted Islamic thought and attracted young people to the wrong causes. Religious leaders must work with political leaders and with the media, since terrorism was not an isolated phenomenon. There was also a need for Government to protect religious leaders. It was important to focus on youth and to support the efforts of civil society.

Open discussion

The representative of the United States of America welcomed the open briefing as an opportunity to learn more about the efforts of Morocco and other States to counter the spread of violent extremism. Security Council resolution 1624 (2005) was an important tool in countering the global terrorist threat, which had become more dispersed and more diverse. The United States would continue to support the efforts of CTED to identify gaps in States' implementation of the resolution and to make recommendations on ways to address them. Measures to counter violent extremism were vital in building States' resilience to the messages of terrorist groups such as ISIL and the acute global threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters. It was for that reason that the United States had chaired the recent Security Council summit meeting on foreign terrorist fighters. The summit had brought the adoption of resolution 2178 (2014), which gave the international community the tools to combat terrorism while respecting international human rights and humanitarian law. It was important that women and young people be included in efforts to repudiate the rhetoric used to recruit terrorists, which should be based on public and private funding. The United States would continue to support the efforts of the United Nations, including through the Global

Counterterrorism Forum, the Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience, and the Hedayah Centre for Excellence in Countering Terrorism. The United States planned to increase the emphasis placed on counter-messaging. The Internet and social media should be kept as open as possible, since the inability to voice concerns and seek solutions could itself lead to radicalization and terrorist recruitment. Any restrictions placed on free speech must comply with international human rights law, and counter-terrorism strategies must be inclusive and respect freedom of expression.

The representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia said that Islam was a religion of peace, which had nothing to do with terrorism. Counter-terrorism actions should include both a security-based aspect and an intellectual aspect. All four Schools of Islam called for tolerance and peace, and could not be used to justify terrorism. Saudi Arabia worked to spread tolerance around the world, including through youth education about the true Islam, cooperation with other States, and its recent funding of the UNCCT.

The representative of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria said that terrorism could not be defeated through security measures alone. Counter-terrorism efforts should also include preventive measures aimed at understanding the reasons for terrorism's appeal. Algeria had developed religious guidance programmes that aimed to promote tolerance and peace and respect for human rights. Its counter-terrorism approach was based on countering the ideologies that exploited disenchantment within society and addressing root causes. It included measures to, inter alia, ensure that mosques conveyed the true message of Islam, strengthen the religious role of women, teach tolerance in schools, counter extremist messages in the media, and train Imams to spread the message of a peaceful Islam.

The representative of the People's Republic of China, noting that many speakers had employed the term *abuse*, said that the international community should reflect upon the many abuses that had contributed to the resurgence of terrorism. Those abuses included the taking of military action without a Security Council mandate, abusive funds transfers by non-profit organizations, selective reporting by the media, misinterpretation of the concepts of human rights and freedom of expression, and abuse of the Internet and social media.

The representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan said that counter-terrorism required a global approach that included efforts to address the conditions conducive to violent extremism and radicalization. Jordan had adopted a balanced approach, based on the true interpretation of Islam, the promotion of a culture of peace and tolerance, and the principle of peaceful coexistence. Jordan's approach sought to strengthen relationships among Muslim States and strengthen interreligious equality. Religious leaders bore a special responsibility to counter extremist messages and to use balanced messages to raise awareness of the danger of extremism. The key to success was to educate young people to reject terrorist messages.

The representative of the United Kingdom said that the United Kingdom was committed to countering violent extremism within the international human rights framework and notably worked to do so within the framework of the CTITF, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and the provisions of resolutions 1373 (2001), 1624 (2005) and 2178 (2014). The United Kingdom welcomed the leadership, energy and commitment demonstrated by Morocco in countering incitement to commit terrorist acts motivated by extremism and intolerance.

The representative of the Republic of Turkey said that countering violent extremism was an issue of great concern for the international community and that the response must address

root causes. It was wrong to associate any religion, especially Islam, with terrorism. Because radicalization occurred both in majority-Muslim and minority-Muslim States, responses must be tailored appropriately. Long-term success would require broad strategies that addressed root social causes such as unemployment, poverty, and basic living conditions. Cooperation was crucial, and the Global Counterterrorism Forum, in particular, provided an important arena for the sharing of experiences and the development of civilian-led initiatives.

Closing remarks

Mr. Jean-Paul Laborde, CTED Executive Director, said that Morocco had developed a comprehensive, coherent and effective approach to counter-terrorism, founded on security, economic development and religious reform. In order to effectively counter the extremism and intolerance that drove incitement to commit terrorism, it was also important to address the conditions conducive to the spread and incitement of terrorism. In that regard, Morocco had shared its analysis of the root causes of insecurity, extremism and intolerance at the national and regional levels. Speakers had underlined the key role to be played by religious leaders in the fight against incitement to commit terrorist acts and the dissemination of extremist religious ideas. They had also provided greater insight into the important role to be played by Member States in facilitating and deepening intra- and interreligious dialogue and thereby discrediting the use of religious narratives to justify terrorist acts. Participants had learned how Mali, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire worked with Morocco to develop and implement training programmes for religious leaders, as well as about their national strategies to prevent and combat incitement. Speakers had also shared their experiences in helping religious leaders prevent the use of religion for terrorist purposes and to promote the principles of moderation, tolerance and respect for others. The open briefing had also deepened participants' understanding of the benefits of sharing good practices for the implementation of resolution 1624 (2005). CTED worked to gather and develop regional and international good practices aimed at deepening dialogue among civilizations and religions, and the open briefing had demonstrated the value of continuing to promote such practices. The recently adopted Security Council resolution 2178 (2014) stressed the need to combat violent extremism as an essential response to the threat to international peace and security posed by foreign terrorist fighters. It also encouraged States to empower religious leaders to develop approaches to combat the rise in violent extremism and to promote social integration and cohesion, as well as authentic Islam. The Committee and CTED would continue to support tailored counter-terrorism programmes that were based on the universally shared values of the Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular the right to freedom of religion, expression and opinion. Pursuant to resolution 2178 (2014), CTED would continue to support the Committee in tackling the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters by promoting partnerships of trust with Governments, religious and community leaders, and broader society. Member States should study closely the content of the programmes developed by other States and share their own practices with other States. The emphasis placed by many speakers on the important role to be played by women was very welcome.

H.E. Ms. Raimonda Murmokaitė, Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, said that the open briefing had revealed the fundamental importance of issues relating to terrorist incitement, as evidenced notably by the recent terrifying and cowardly instances of terrorist executions. The international community must strengthen its efforts to alter the mindset of

those who sought to abuse religion for terrorist purposes, and the role to be played by religious leaders in those efforts was of the utmost importance.

H.E. Mr. Ahmed Toufik, Minister of Habous and Islamic Affairs, Kingdom of Morocco noted that terrorists sought to undermine all Schools of Islam to create a vacuum for the dissemination of their violent and depraved messages.