

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)

**Open meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee
on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2354 (2017)
on countering terrorist narratives**

*Tuesday, 29 May 2018, United Nations Headquarters, New York
Conference Room 4*

Closing remarks by

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Excellencies, members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, I would like to express my personal appreciation to all of the excellent speakers who have shared their insights with us today.

I would also like to thank all of you who joined us in our discussion of challenges and opportunities in countering terrorist narratives in accordance with Security Council resolution 2354, which was adopted almost exactly one year ago.

In the year since the resolution's adoption, we have of course seen many profound changes on the ground — not least, the successes achieved against ISIL on the battlefield.

As an entity that occupies and controls large swathes of territory, ISIL exists no more.

However — as the members of the Committee are well aware — ISIL as a core “platform” and as a “brand” is still very much in existence.

And it continues to pose a significant threat to international peace and security.

In its new guise, ISIL has proven particularly adept at harnessing information and communications technologies to recruit new members and to incite and plan attacks around the world.

And the narratives of ISIL and other terrorist organizations continue to resonate with many different audiences.

Those audiences may have varying profiles, but all share the characteristics of vulnerability and susceptibility that ISIL seeks to exploit.

And in many Member States, it is young people that are the most vulnerable.

Terrorists' increasing exploitation of the Internet and social media to spread propaganda requires a robust response from the international community.

That response must, of course, be led by Member States, acting in cooperation with one another and with the United Nations.

And it is the nature of that response that has been the focus of our discussions today.

Of course, speech that either intends to incite terrorist violence or creates the danger of inciting terrorist violence is rightly prohibited by the criminal laws of Member States across the globe.

This is consistent with international human rights law.

The right to freedom of expression, including under article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, is not absolute.

But our discussions have also made clear that repressive measures – and the taking down of online content intended to incite violence – will not alone be sufficient to counter the threat posed by terrorist narratives.

Terrorist messages must be addressed in their substance – if not directly, then through counter-messages.

Those counter-messages must expose and refute the flaws and the hatred contained in terrorists' appeals, using compelling arguments that are founded on reason and analysis and framed in a targeted and thoughtful manner that resonates with terrorists' intended audiences.

But nor is it enough simply to rebut their arguments.

We who oppose terrorism must also offer positive arguments that promote shared values, community solidarity, and human rights.

Our arguments must address the very real concerns that terrorists seek to exploit and they must propose alternative avenues towards conflict resolution, justice, and empowerment, which respect the values and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

We must also help build more resilient communities, through genuine partnerships with civil society, community and religious leaders, young people, academics, the private sector and other non-governmental actors.

We must also recognize the crucial role that women can play in preventing radicalization, both in their families and in the community.

All these actors have a vital role to play because they also stand in opposition to terrorism.

But these partnerships must be based on a foundation of trust and respect, including for the rights of those in civil society.

Non-governmental actors should be seen, not as working *for* Governments, but rather as working *with* them, voluntarily.

And due regard must be paid to their security and independence.

This point was clearly stated by the Committee in its Madrid Guiding Principles, adopted in July 2015.

In conclusion, allow me to congratulate all participants today for their invaluable contributions.

Countering terrorist narratives is indeed an endeavour in which all concerned actors must act together.

For only by acting together shall we ensure that our voices drown out those of the terrorists.

Thank you.