

Remarks by Dr. Ahmed Abdelaziz
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- 1- At the outset, I would like to thank H.E. Ambassador Moncef Baati, the Permanent Representative of Tunisia and the Chair of the Counter Terrorism Committee for convening this important open meeting of the CTC. I would also like to congratulate H.E. for recently assuming the chairmanship of the CTC, and to wish Tunisia all success in this regard.
- 2- I also ASG Michele Coninx, the Executive Director of CTED for her opening statement this morning. We highly appreciate CTED's vital role and efforts in the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions in the field of counter terrorism, including resolution 2354 of the year 2017 on countering terrorist narratives.
- 3- I will focus my presentation on **four main** elements;

FIRST: Why the focus on narratives? Here I will try to give some background on resolution 2354 which was adopted during Egypt's presidency of the Security Council in May 2017 concurrently with its Chairmanship of the CTC.

SECOND: Egypt's current efforts in countering terrorist narratives domestically pursuant to resolution 2354 and the Comprehensive International Framework to Counter Terrorist Narratives adopted by the CTC in April 2017, which I will refer to simply as the "Framework".

THIRD: Regional approaches to countering terrorist narratives Africa, including Northern and Eastern Africa and the Sahel regions, based on Egypt's experience and knowledge of terrorist narratives, which could be applicable in such regions.

FOURTH and FINALLY: Future prospects, how can we keep the momentum in countering narratives and further enhance the current collective efforts in this regard.

FIRST, why the focus on narratives?

- All forms of terrorism, regardless of geographical origin, political or religious affiliation, whether left-wing, right-wing or affiliated to a certain religion... share one thing in common... They are based on a certain extremist narrative. A very self-righteous mostly narrative vilifying the “other”, thus making it “justifiable” to harm them and even denying them their rights as human beings, including the right to life.. Such narratives are also mostly based on a self-victimization belief.
- Terrorist and extremist narratives give terrorists a lot of moral power in fulfilling their presumably “sacred” missions on earth.. usually coupled with the belief that it is a mission mandated from God. It also helps a lot in recruiting vulnerable targets who are susceptible to such narratives, exploiting their respective grievances resulting from political, socio-economic conditions..
- While terrorist and extremist narratives as such are unacceptable and illegal in many cases, especially when they are conducive to terrorism, they are also “simply wrong”.. for we do not exist as humans to eliminate one another.. no sound interpretation of any religion can lead to that..

- While countering terrorism in material terms (namely security procedures) is extremely necessary, however, it cannot stop terrorism alone. There is another much more difficult “battle of minds” that has to be fought to counter and discredit extremist and terrorist narratives...and provide alternative narratives.
- Egypt has been unfortunate enough to witness first hand and live through terrorism and its narratives.. During the past century, particularly in the 70s and 80s, we have witnessed the emergence of several forms of extremist narratives.. particularly those based on the misinterpretation and falsification of the true teachings of Islam. During the past 9 years, Egypt has been fighting a renewed terrorist narrative with clear political ambition.
- Out of this experience, Egypt was very committed during its membership in the Security Council through 2016-2017 to activate the Council’s and the CTC’s involvement in countering the evolving threat of terrorism. Counter narrative was a key element on Egypt’s agenda in this regard. Egypt was of the view that CT literature lacked a comprehensive framework to counter terrorist narratives.. Therefore, the CTC introduced in May 2017 during Egypt’s chairmanship Comprehensive International Framework to Counter Terrorist Narratives... Also Egypt introduced Security Council resolution 2354 (2017) which was the first SC resolution on counter narratives and which built upon the disperse elements outlined in some previous resolutions such as 1624 (2005) – incitement, and 2129 (2013) – terrorism and ICT.
- Our meeting today, which is mandated by SC resolution 2354 is thus very important to take stock on the developments achieved in countering terrorist narratives since 2354 and plan ahead.

I turn now to...the SECOND part of my presentation where I'll pinpoint Egypt's current efforts in countering terrorist narratives domestically pursuant to resolution 2354 and the CTC Framework:

- Perhaps as an introduction, I would like to refer to a success story that Egypt has had in the 1990s in countering terrorist narratives harbored by some imprisoned inmates implicated in the wave of terrorism of the 70s and 80s.
- During the 1990s, the Egyptian government believing in the necessity of leading the “battle of minds” against narratives, initiated a “dialogue” with prison inmates convicted of terrorism acts with the aim of convincing them to renounce terrorism by proving that the correct understanding of religion (in this case Islam) does not justify terrorism and in fact deplors it, and putting forward alternative narratives also based on religion.
- The program was known as “the Revisions”, and succeeded in de-radicalizing a large number of terrorism convicts. The ultimate outcome was the renouncement of violence by some convicted inmates and a noticeable decrease in terrorist attacks in the years to come. Some of the inmates even went on to become advocates for the renouncement of terrorism and violence, publishing books deconstructing the terrorist and extremist narratives they once embraced.
- Currently, Egypt is committed more than ever to step up its efforts in countering terrorist and extremist narratives. In this regard, H.E. President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, upon assuming office in 2014, launched his initiative aimed at reforming religious discourse .. through calling clerics and religious scholars to revisit inaccurate religious interpretations that could incite extremism, hence providing a healthy counter narrative.

- Furthermore, Al Azhar, “Dar El-Iftaa” and their respective Observatories are acting vehemently to counter extremist ideology and narratives propagated by the terrorist groups by refuting the fallacies and discrediting “takfiri fatwas” (i.e., advice that label others as “infidels”) and developing a counter-narrative based on the true essence of Islam, which calls for tolerance and peace between all religions.
- In this context, Al-Azhar has contributed to the elaboration of the "Human Brotherhood" document signed in February 2019 in Abu Dhabi between His Eminence Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and His Holiness the Pope, which we believe is an important effort in the realm of counter-narrative.
- Egypt supports every regional and international effort aiming at countering terrorism and radicalization, while stressing that this phenomenon should be countered through a comprehensive approach. Egypt also considers that sports, culture, art, media and women have an important preventive and awareness-raising role to play in this regard, particularly amongst youth, through encouraging the values of tolerance and renouncing extremism and violence with the aim of protecting them from the unprecedented gross misuse of new communications technology by terrorist organizations.

I come now to the THIRD part of my presentation, which is regional approaches to countering terrorist narratives in the Northern, Eastern and the Sahel regions of Africa, based on Egypt’s experience and knowledge of terrorist narratives in such regions

- Egypt is a part of the Northern Africa region, so our domestic experience with counter terrorist narrative is by in large applicable to Northern Africa and the

MENA region too. As to the Sahel region, although unique in its own ways, terrorist narrative there is also based on “takfiri” ideology and terrorist narrative shared by terrorist organizations and extremist groups in the MENA region. Thus, one can say that Egypt’s domestic experience and plan of action to counter terrorist narrative is very relevant from a regional prospective.

- Over the past years, Al Azhar envoys have been very useful in carrying to Sahel countries the moderate teachings of Islam. They will continue to do so, in line with Egypt’s own religious discourse reform and counter narrative agenda.
- Egypt possesses a large amount of the know-how to countering terrorist narratives in the Sahel Area.. the necessary adjustments and modifications will have to be thoroughly made though to take into consideration the unique conditions in the Sahel region including tribal and ethnic factors. There is a good opportunity for trilateral cooperation with interested partners in the field of Counter terrorist narratives in the Sahel region.
- Several platforms already exist that can be utilized in this regard. They include to Egyptian Agency for Partnership for Development (EAPD), the Cairo International Center for Conflict resolution, Peacekeeping and Peace building (CCCPA), the African Union Center for Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (AUC-PCRD) hosted in Egypt and the Cen-Sad Counter Terrorism Center also hosted by Egypt.
- Before ending this part on regional approaches, I would like to refer to the expert workshop, titled “Towards a Comprehensive Approach to Countering Extremist Narratives Conducive to Terrorism in the East and Horn of Africa”, which was hosted by CCCPA in Egypt in April 2018 and was organized the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The workshop brought together 70 officials and

leading scholars and practitioners from 24 countries to discuss current and future trends in countering violent extremist narratives in East Africa.

- Amongst the topics discussed by the workshop was the means by which terrorist groups manipulate the complex political, socio-economic, cultural, and historical grievances in East African communities through their narratives and messages so as to recruit individuals, mobilize resources, establish and maintain control over communities. The workshop also examined national and regional strategies, action plans and policies in East Africa; identified both opportunities and challenges facing the implementation of these policies; and explored ways to enhance synergies and partnerships among international, regional and national actors to achieve better collaboration in countering extremist narratives. The workshop was very useful in reaching several findings and drawing up pertinent recommendations for countering extremist narratives in Eastern Africa.

The FOURTH and FINAL part of my presentation is on the future perspective:

- Although 2354 and the Framework presented a good noticeable development in enhancing international efforts to counter terrorist narratives, and indeed a lot has been done since 2017 as evident from the various presentations made today, however it is important to keep the momentum. The annual open meetings of the CTC like our meeting today are definitely key in this regard.
- In this regard, Egypt is **currently working** with UNOCT on preparing a high-level international conference in Cairo during this year titled "Towards A Comprehensive Approach To Combat Terrorism and Extremist Narratives Conducive To Terrorism".

- The Cairo conference should bring together policy makers from the UN member states, heads of regional and international organizations and a number of religious, sports and cultural figures, as well as representatives from the private sector such as providers of internet services and social media platforms.
- This High-level Conference will aim at: a) exchanging views on related best practices and ways and means to face the current challenges; b) launching a "roadmap/ action plan" to address terrorism from a comprehensive and an integrated perspective, and by suppressing its ideological and financial resources and deconstructing extremist narratives conducive to terrorism; c) launching tailored regional capacity-building and training programmes in African countries (the Cairo process) in counter-terrorism related fields in accordance with the national priorities of each country concerned and under the auspices and support of the United Nations.
- The upcoming Seventh Review of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy (GCTS), co-facilitated by the Permanent Representatives of Spain and Egypt, can also be a very good opportunity for Member States to further enhance and develop the language on counter narratives, which could fall under pillars one and two of the Strategy namely addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism and prevention.

THANK YOU