

**UNOCT/Kingdom of Spain Conference Virtual Dialogue
on “Human rights and civil society partners on building a better paradigm to
prevent and counter terrorism”**

The role of civil society

Malaga/virtual platform, Wednesday, 26 May 2021

Remarks of

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Excellencies, colleagues, civil society representatives, distinguished participants,

I am grateful to the Kingdom of Spain and to our colleagues at the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism for giving me the opportunity to take part in today’s virtual dialogue.

The role of civil society is a topic that arises regularly in the context of CTED’s interactions with Member States and its consideration of its own working methodologies.

In accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2395 of 2017, CTED has engaged with non-governmental actors, including civil society actors, for many years.

We also encourage Governments to do so as part of their overall strategies to effectively counter and prevent terrorism, based on a whole-of-society approach.

Although there appears to be fairly broad agreement that civil society is a crucial partner in our common efforts to counter and prevent terrorism and violent

extremism conducive to terrorism, our progress in fully realizing this commitment and this partnership is undeniably uneven.

Civil society is all too often absent from critical discussions, and its input into multilateral policymaking and trends analysis at the United Nations is not always assured.

I therefore believe that we still have quite a way to go in order to achieve a meaningful role for civil society in the counter-terrorism context.

There can be no doubt that partnership with civil society enjoys the strong support of the Security Council.

In many resolutions (stretching all the way back to resolution 1624 (2005), its seminal resolution on terrorist incitement), the Council has emphasized that Member States have much to gain from working closely with civil society in many areas.

Moreover, Council resolution 2395 (2017), which extended our mandate, encouraged us to meet with civil society organizations in the context of the country assessment visits conducted on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, at the behest of the visited State.

Our mandate in this area is therefore clear.

Let me briefly describe the benefits of such engagement, as well as some of the risks and challenges.

Engagement with civil society can help make CTED's assessments on the Committee's behalf more comprehensive, fact-based, and useful, because civil society

actors often have unique perspectives on the impact of terrorism and counter-terrorism on the ground.

Their views can therefore provide an additional dimension to the views of Governments (which of course are CTED's primary partners).

Developing such effective lines of communication is vital to achieving a true understanding of the approaches being taken by States to counter terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

Whenever we have included civil society partners in our own work, we have always benefited from their independent perspectives, which derive from their close interaction with local communities at the grassroots level (during which they hear first-hand about people's concerns and gain insights into their perceptions of State actions).

However, we must also be realistic about the challenges, including the considerable security risks faced by civil society organizations.

We cannot discuss civil society's role in counter-terrorism efforts without also taking account of the difficult, and sometimes repressive, environments in which CSOs often find themselves.

States are often reluctant to engage too closely with civil society because they do not wish to expose themselves to criticism.

In turn, CSOs often take a substantial risk in expressing their concerns about Government, because they may find themselves subject to reprisals.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and others have been clear about the risks to CSOs working in the counter-terrorism space.

And we must always be mindful of those risks.

We must also recognize that women's CSOs have been shown to be at particular risk of repression and face particular challenges in this area.

We must do all that we can to help ensure that all relevant actors — including CSOs — are able to conduct their operations in full respect for the rights to personal security, freedom of expression, and freedom of association.

Excellencies, distinguished participants,

Over the past year or so, CTED has been engaged in a process aimed at enhancing its engagement with CSOs and promoting the development of positive partnerships.

We have organized a number of informal round-table discussions with civil society, and we have also brainstormed internally on ways to strengthen our engagement in a way that is consistent with the relevant Council resolutions and the guidance of the Counter-Terrorism Committee.

When we organize workshops and open meetings of the Committee, we always aim to bring Member States and civil society actors together to discuss the best ways to work together, share good practices, and learn from one another's experiences.

I can assure you that CTED will continue to strengthen and promote meaningful, transparent, inclusive and protected partnerships with CSOs, in accordance with our

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)

mandate, and to ensure that this engagement remains an integral part of all our activities.

Thank you.