

Security Council Arria-formula meeting

“The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism”

Wednesday, 16 June 2021, 3.00 p.m. EDT

Statement of

**Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninsx,
Executive Director, CTED**

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I welcome the initiative of Tunisia to arrange this timely Arria-formula meeting to discuss one of the most critical issues on the current global agenda.

Over the past 18 months, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented all Member States with complex and constantly evolving challenges.

And it has had an impact on all policy areas, including counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism.

Today, I will briefly focus on some of the key issues identified through CTED’s ongoing analysis of the situation, which we continue to share in our biannual analytical reports (including our most recent report, published yesterday and available on our website).

Firstly, it is clear that terrorist and violent extremist groups have sought to exploit the social restrictions and political instability resulting from the pandemic.

They have integrated COVID-19 into their propaganda and spread disinformation and conspiracy theories, both online and offline, in an attempt to broaden their appeal through new alliances.

And there is concern around the potential abuse of financial systems by terrorists, including relief payments, donation campaigns, and pandemic-related fraud schemes.

We have also focused on the impact of Member States' responses to COVID-19.

In fighting the pandemic, some States implemented policies and emergency measures – including curfews and restriction of movement – that have been criticized for their suppression of dissent and other human rights violations.

Those violations have contributed to fear and resentment among vulnerable populations.

The introduction of enhanced border-control measures and restrictions has succeeded in curtailing terrorist movements, disrupting their ability to conduct attacks, recruit, and conduct other operational activities.

However, pandemic-related border-management and law enforcement measures (including the introduction of new technologies and procedures at points of entry) may also raise significant human rights concerns if they are retained over the long term.

Pandemic-related restrictions have also impacted humanitarian access and outreach in multiple regions around the world, affecting the communities most at need of humanitarian support who continue to face disease, lack of livelihood opportunities and exclusion from public health systems.

As highlighted in our report, we must focus on potential long-term impacts.

We also stress that economic challenges and growing societal polarization, exacerbated or caused by COVID-19, may intensify existing grievances that are conducive to terrorism and violent extremism.

This is especially relevant for Member States facing fragile socio-political conditions, which are often aggravated by terrorist threats.

As the Secretary-General recently noted: the pandemic has pushed an estimated 114 million people into extreme poverty.

A global economic slowdown and reduction in international assistance will likely further weaken governance structures and severely undermine the delivery of essential services.

The pandemic will also likely preserve (and in some cases, increase) gender inequality.

The socio-economic fall-out from the pandemic has reinforced traditional gender roles, increasing the care burden for women and undermining their economic security.

Violence against women has increased dramatically, both online and offline.

It is therefore vital that Member States integrate and mainstream gender considerations into all post-pandemic recovery efforts and implement gender-responsive policies.

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Although the continued roll-out of vaccinations brings considerable hope, uneven distribution (or the “vaccination divide”) and an uneven recovery risk further fuelling many of these drivers of conflict and insecurity.

We must remain alert to the potential for a period of heightened grievances, which terrorists will seek to exploit to recruit men and women from across the globe.

This challenge demands a continued coordinated global response, both to the pandemic and to the global terrorist threat.

We have already seen how COVID-19 responses have redirected resources from several longstanding counter-terrorism policy challenges.

Decreased funding and pandemic restrictions have also resulted in the halting of CVE interventions, as well as a reduction in the delivery of security assistance and training and capacity-building efforts.

As international efforts continue to be rightly focused on addressing the virus, we must nonetheless be careful not to jeopardize our significant counter-terrorism and CVE initiatives and achievements.

The pandemic and its impact pose unprecedented challenges to the international community.

In response, we must take collective action to strengthen regulatory, institutional and operational capacities; enhance information-sharing and cooperation; mobilize all sectors of society; and build upon lessons learned in order to create and sustain the “new normal”.

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)

Counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism should remain high on the international peace and security agenda.

In this context, we must continue to take a comprehensive and coordinated global approach, based on universal values of justice, equality, and human dignity.

And this can only be achieved through a multilateral effort and through a “One-UN” approach that not only provides assistance to Member States in their efforts to implement effective, human rights compliant, and gender-responsive counter-terrorism measures, but also prioritizes addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism and violent extremism.

Thank you, Mr. President.