

2021 United Nations Counter-Terrorism Week

Side event on

**“Building knowledge on counter-terrorism in the age of artificial intelligence:
threats, opportunities and safeguarding human rights”**

Tuesday, 29 June 2021, 1.30-3.00 p.m. EDT

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

Excellencies, distinguished participants,

Allow me to begin by thanking the Government of Japan and the European Union for their support, and thanking the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute for co-organizing this side-event with CTED.

AI is an engine that is increasingly powering our data-driven world.

As terrorists and violent extremists will certainly seek to exploit AI - as they have always sought to exploit other forms of technology - we must remain vigilant and keep up-to-date with the rapid development of this powerful technology:

- **Terrorists could use AI applications to develop more effective ways to disseminate misinformation through “deepfakes” and other manipulated audio-visual content.**

- Terrorism-financing operations could be facilitated by algorithmic cryptocurrency trading strategies, and “smart contracts” manipulated to execute upon malicious events.
- Terrorists could also enhance their cyber capabilities through AI-driven penetration tools and conduct physical attacks through the exploitation and manipulation of autonomous vehicles and drones.

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In accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, CTED continues to support Member States in their efforts to identify innovative ways to prevent and counter the abuse of new technologies for terrorist purposes and to instead harness their potential for good, in full respect for human rights and the rule of law.

This includes proactively promoting and facilitating public-private partnerships.

AI is already proving its usefulness in countering terrorism:

- For instance, AI is heavily used for content moderation and the takedown of illegal or harmful content on social media and other tech platforms.
- AI can also be used to prevent and counter violent radicalization by identifying vulnerability to radicalization to violence and offering alternative messages.
- Another area of AI application for counter-terrorism purposes is biometrics.

CTED and partner agencies, including UNOCT, are promoting the responsible and proper use and sharing of biometrics to identify terrorists, in compliance with

domestic law and international human rights law, and pursuant to Council resolution 2396 (2017).

CTED is also working with relevant partners, such as ICAO and INTERPOL, to strengthen cooperation in promoting the safety and security of the growing use of unmanned aerial vehicles.

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Although the potential benefits of deploying AI systems for counter-terrorism purposes cannot be overstated, the existence of powerful AI tools also raises serious human rights concerns.

This is because of their potential to limit fundamental rights, such as the rights to privacy, freedom of thought, expression and association.

It is imperative that all stakeholders using these tools be subject to independent oversight mechanisms in order to ensure fairness, transparency and accountability.

CTED will continue to promote multi-stakeholder, whole-of-society, engagement aimed at better understanding the relevant risks, opportunities, capabilities and limitations, in order to help ensure that these technologies continue to serve humanity for good.

In conclusion, I wish you all a fruitful discussion on this critical issue.

Thank you.