

Side event

***“The nexus between organized crime
and terrorism in the Americas”***

21 June 2023, 17:00 to 18:30

Conference Room 9, United Nations Headquarters and WebEx (Hybrid)

Opening remarks by

Assistant Secretary-General Ms. Natalia Gherman

Executive Director

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)

***Mr. René Alfonso Ruidíaz Pérez, Deputy Permanent
Representative, Permanent Mission of Chile***

Ms. Antonia De Meo, Director of UNICRI

Ms. Alison August Treppel, Executive Secretary of CICTE,

Esteemed delegates and special guests,

Ladies and gentlemen:

I am very pleased to welcome you to this side event on “The nexus between organized crime and terrorism in the Americas”, organized with two of CTED’s most important and long-standing partners, [the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute] UNICRI, and the secretariat of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) of the Organization of American States (OAS), and co-sponsored by the Government of Chile.

The links between terrorism and transnational organized crime are a growing concern to us all and have long been high on the agenda of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Council has recognized and expressed concern about the connection between transnational organized crime and terrorism in several resolutions. Key measures include strengthening legal and operational frameworks; broader matters of good governance; and the fight against corruption and financial crime.

The Council has emphasized the need to coordinate efforts at the local, national, subregional, regional and international levels to respond to this challenge. The Council has also encouraged Member States and the United Nations to continue enhancing their understanding of the nature and scope of the links that may exist between terrorism financing and transnational organized crime. And this brings us to today and the objective of today's event.

Under the guidance of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, CTED has worked to increase its understanding of the terrorism-transnational organized crime nexus and to identify possible responses. The most important way it does this is through its dialogue with Member States, including its assessment visits on behalf of the Committee. CTED's first step is always to understand how the Member States view the nexus. Through that dialogue, it identifies and investigates links between terrorist and criminal groups, and listens to the lessons learned by Member States. CTED also supports

the Committee in dedicated open briefings and by engaging with regional partners.

In addition to its 2019 study on human trafficking and terrorism financing, CTED's most recent Trends Alert highlighted examples of terrorism financing through proceeds derived from the illicit exploitation and trade in natural resources, including oil and natural gas; agriculture, forestry and fishing; wildlife; minerals and precious metals; and charcoal.

Furthermore, discussions about the illicit trade in cultural property for terrorist purposes, organized by CTED in close collaboration with UNESCO and the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations in September 2022 and also as a side-event tomorrow, highlight the scale and intensity of the phenomenon, as well as the use of emerging technologies and social media platforms to advance the illicit trade in cultural property and to generate proceeds from related activities.

CTED has also worked with the FATF on money-laundering and terrorism financing risks arising from migrant smuggling; illicit arms trafficking; and the illicit trade in art, antiquities and other cultural objects. CTED also works closely with the FATF-style regional bodies in the same way. In fact, we are very pleased to be joined by our close partner GAFILAT today.

Throughout this work, CTED has identified key vulnerabilities of Member States. They are common regardless of the exact nature of the nexus. Most noticeably, they include 1. the failure to assess the relevant risks and 2. the lack of financial investigations aimed at tracking the terrorist use of the proceeds of illicit activities.

The key vulnerabilities I have just mentioned are present in the Americas.

In Central America, moreover, several States have strengthened their counter-terrorism capacities, but few have established robust counter-terrorism legal frameworks.

Most still face challenges relating to corruption, insufficient inter-agency cooperation and lack of resources. Although all Central American States have established financial intelligence units, there is considerable variation in their levels of capacity, funding, staffing and output. Central America remains vulnerable to the continued viability of powerful organized crime groups and drug cartels, which cause violence, the erosion of the rule of law and violations of human rights.

In the Caribbean, the increased complexity of the possible links between terrorism and organized crime underscores the growing challenge to Member States' capacity to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate terrorism cases and their links to transnational organized crime. Because of its geography, the subregion is an attractive maritime transit route for the smuggling of drugs, small arms and light weapons, people, and chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear materials.

In South America, Member States have continued to make good progress in preventing and countering terrorism, but significant challenges remain. Despite the general perception that the terrorist threat to the region is low, the region remains vulnerable to terrorism financing; transnational organized crime; and the illicit cross-border movement of funds, arms and people. A positive development we have observed is a significant degree of cooperation and information exchange between the financial intelligence units and the competent authorities, and many units cooperate with counterparts outside the region. In terms of criminal investigations, CTED is working to assess whether national prosecution offices have the authority, capacity, expertise, technical means, and human resources to handle complex terrorism cases.

Throughout the whole region, we observe that many Member States have yet to establish specialized teams with expertise to handle complex terrorist cases. In some subregions, judicial and

prosecutorial capacities and expertise to counter terrorist acts remain limited.

Effective strategies to disrupt the linkages between terrorism and organized crime require a proper understanding and assessment of the risks and the adoption of a risk-based approach. Moving forward, effective responses should include at least the following elements: (1) a comprehensive legislative framework against terrorism, organized crime and corruption; (2) the institutional capacity to carry out complex investigations and ensure inter-agency information exchange; and (3) cooperation and partnership with the private sector and academia to understand and address the issue both strategically and operationally.

The Member States of Latin America and the Caribbean have long been strong and consistent supporters of the work of the Committee and CTED, and we very much value the dialogue we have with them. Just last week, my team of technical experts returned from a successful visit to Chile, where the Government generously hosted

a rich and constructive dialogue with their own technical experts and facilitated fruitful discussions with civil society and the private sector. Chile's sponsorship of today's event offers yet further evidence of its commitment to a multilateral approach to counter-terrorism and to the region's capacity and willingness to play a leading role in shaping that approach.

We look forward to hearing from our colleagues from UNICRI and CICTE about the findings from their joint report. They will certainly offer new elements for our analysis and understanding of the terror/crime nexus in the Americas and will influence how we all move forward.

Thank you all for joining us today.