

Second Counter-Terrorism Week

Countering and Preventing Terrorism in the Age of Transformative Technologies: Addressing the Challenges of the New Decade

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

29 June 2021, 1.30 p.m. - 3 p.m. EST

Background Note

Introduction

This side event is organized by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) in cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with the support of the Permanent Mission of Japan and Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

The event is part of an array of UN initiatives in countering the misuse of new technologies. This includes the UNOCT/UNCCT Global Counter-Terrorism Programme on Cybersecurity and New Technologies, which supports Member States, international and regional organizations, as well as United Nations entities, in raising awareness of the terrorist cyber threat and enhancing technical capacities required to prevent, mitigate against and respond to terrorist and violent extremist groups misusing new technologies, such as the Internet, encryption and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The programme also serves to enhance capacities of requesting Member States to counter and investigate terrorist activities by raising their awareness and exploring the risk-benefit duality of this technology.

Additionally, the event represents UNICRI’s relevant work in the field on AI. Since 2015, UNICRI, through its Centre for AI and Robotics, has sought to enhance understanding of AI, as well as the broader ecosystem of related technologies, from the perspective of crime, terrorism and other threats to security. Through research, multi-stakeholder discussions and awareness-raising, UNICRI supports Member States to understand both the opportunities and potential pitfalls presented by the use of these technologies, as well as the threat and risk of their malicious use.

This event also falls within OHCHR's work on counter-terrorism, digital technologies, and human rights. OHCHR has organized expert consultations and published reports to explore the challenges that the right to privacy and other human rights face in the digital age, as requested by relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. Moreover, in 2019, OHCHR launched the B-Tech Project which provides authoritative guidance and resources for implementing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human rights (UNGPs) in the technology space. OHCHR is connecting these initiatives to the counter-terrorism space, offering guidance and support to Member States and companies on how these technologies can be used without adverse human rights impacts.

Background

AI is a powerful tool that is increasingly being used in both the public and private sectors to make people and society at large healthier, wealthier, safer and more sustainable. The United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, has indicated that, if harnessed appropriately, AI can play a role in the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring peace and prosperity for all. It is, however, an enormously powerful technology that is not without its challenges. If not used properly and with appropriate safeguards, this technology can hamper fundamental freedoms and infringe upon human rights, such as the right to privacy, equality, non-discrimination, and freedom of opinion.

In 2020, UNOCT/UNCCT and UNICRI launched a joint research initiative to take stock of advancements in AI from the counter-terrorism perspective. This initiative, which is funded with generous contributions from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Government of Japan, seeks to explore the dual nature potential of this technology.

Through this initiative, UNOCT/UNCCT and UNICRI have examined some of the more concerning aspects of the advent of this technology, including the possibility of its use with malicious intent by terrorist groups and individuals to spread terrorist propaganda and disinformation, as well as the vulnerability of AI systems embedded into critical infrastructure through cyberattacks targeting the integrity of the data upon which these systems are based. The initiative also explored the possibility of how AI might be leveraged to support counter-terrorism efforts, in particular to combat terrorist use of the Internet and social media in the regions of South and South-East Asia. It is well established that big tech platforms increasingly make use of AI, to detect terrorist and extremist content online, but the other applications to support law enforcement and counter-terrorism agencies such as complex event processing or social network mapping and analysis remain under-explored.

Additionally, in the context of the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Working Group on Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and the Rule of Law while Countering Terrorism and Supporting Victims of Terrorism (the Global Compact Working Group on Human Rights) and with the generous support of seed funding provided by UNOCT/UNCCT, OHCHR in cooperation with UNOCT/UNCCT and UNICRI have analyzed the human rights perspectives to the use of AI in counter-terrorism, with the goal of providing practical guidance and recommendations to Member States, technology providers, and United Nations entities to support them in using AI to counter terrorism in full compliance with human rights. This initiative looks at how the emerging more powerful technologies can affect counter-terrorism: by organizing and interpreting a vast array of seemingly uncorrelated data; automating decision-making; and predicting behaviour and events at individual and societal level. The initiative examines the human rights risks that come with use of such technologies and sets out a framework for human rights-compliant use.

Objectives and Structure of the Side Event

The objective of this side event is to inform Member States on some of the most pressing issues related to the use and misuse of AI in the context of counter-terrorism. The event will also serve to formally launch two reports of the joint UNOCT/UNCCT and UNICRI research initiative: i) *Algorithms and Terrorism: The Malicious use of Artificial Intelligence for Terrorist Purposes*; and ii) *Leveraging Artificial Intelligence to Combat the Terrorist Use of the Internet and Social Media – A Focus on South and South East Asia*, and provide an opportunity to present the Global Compact Working Group on Human Rights' in-progress report on *the Human Rights Perspectives to the Use of AI in Counter-Terrorism*.

Representatives from OHCHR, UNOCT/UNCCT and UNICRI will provide insights into all three reports, while experts who have contributed to the expert group meetings organized in connection with the drafting of these events will discuss some of the nuances of the risk-benefit duality of AI from a counter-terrorism perspective. The discussion will be contextualized in light of the *Regulation on the European Parliament and of the Council – Laying Down Harmonized Rules on Artificial Intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act) and Amending Certain Union Legislative Acts* recently published by the European Union – being the first-ever proposed legal framework on AI.

Agenda

Time	29 June 2021
13:30-13:35 EST	Welcome remarks , by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) – recorded statement
13:35-13:55 EST	Opening remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Antonia Marie De Meo, Director of UNICRI - Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights (TBC) - Ms. Michele Coninsx, Executive Director, CTED - Mr. Olivier Onidi, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, the European Commission - Mr. Tamaura Shu, Political Coordinator, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations
13:55-14:05 EST	Taking stock of the joint United Nations AI counter-terrorism initiatives , by Akvile Giniotiene, Head of Global Counter-Terrorism Programme on Cybersecurity and New Technologies, UNOCT/UNCCT
14:05-14:15 EST	Overview of the report on malicious use of AI by terrorists and the report on leveraging AI to combat terrorist use of the internet and social media , by Irakli Beridze, Head of Centre for AI and Robotics, UNICRI
14:15-14:25 EST	Overview of the report on human rights aspects to the use of AI for counter-terrorism , by Alex Moorehead, Human Rights Officer, OHCHR
14:25-14:45 EST	Panel discussion with Q&A , moderated by Irakli Beridze, UNICRI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Pierluigi Casale (Europol) - Ms. Jennifer Woodard (INSIKT Intelligence) - Mr. Michael Veale (University College London)
14:45-14:55 EST	EU perspective – Overview of the new EU AI Regulation , by Ms. Marta Cygan, Director for Audit and Situational Awareness, DG Home, European Commission
14:55-15:00 EST	Wrap-up and way forward , by Mr. Jehangir Khan, Director of UNCCT/UNOCT
Close of Side Event	

Logistics

The virtual platform to be used for the delivery of the workshop is Microsoft Teams.

Access details for joining the meeting will be provided following receipt of confirmation of availability from participants.

The meeting will be conducted in English and will be recorded.

For any questions regarding this event, kindly contact Ms. Balques Al Radwan, UNCCT Associate Programme Management Officer, balques.alradwan@un.org and Mr. Odhran McCarthy, UNICRI New York Liaison Officer and Programme Officer, odhran.mccarthy@un.org.