

Open meeting on
“Countering terrorist narratives and
preventing the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes”

United Nations Headquarters, ECOSOC Chamber

Thursday, 19 October 2023, 10.00 a.m.–1.00 p.m. EDT

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Opening Statement of

H.E. Mr. Mohamed Abushahab

Chair

Counter-Terrorism Committee

Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you all to this open meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee. I would like to acknowledge the representatives of Member States, as well as those of international and regional organisations, civil society organisations, and private companies, and academia, who have joined us for this timely meeting.

First, some housekeeping — for those of you active on social media, I encourage you to use the hashtag #CTNarratives in your posts about this meeting. Please also note that this meeting is being webcast live on UN Web TV and the recording will be available on the Committee’s website afterwards.

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As you may know, this open meeting on countering terrorist narratives is held in accordance with Security Council resolution 2354 (2017). Unsurprisingly, many of the new challenges related to terrorist narratives are occurring in information and communications technologies (ICT), exemplified by the rapid developments related to artificial intelligence. This includes a growing concern regarding the intersection between terrorism and video games. While this relationship is often complex, gaming platforms and applications offer terrorist groups new opportunities to radicalise to violence, recruit, and spread their disinformation to young people. Also, as technology and social media companies become better at addressing terrorist content from digital platforms, terrorist groups often relocate their content to other obscure and encrypted websites and platforms. This makes it more difficult to locate, identify and counter terrorist content.

We are fortunate to have distinguished panellists with us here today who will be speaking to these issues and more.

Despite increased global connectivity, one third of all people are without access to the Internet; this is also why, collectively, we need to learn more about local and community efforts to counter terrorist narratives beyond the digital domain — and better understand the links between online narratives and offline effects.

Nonetheless, the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes remains a growing concern. We have seen clear progress at the United Nations over the past 18 months in relation to countering this threat. A key outcome of the CTC special meeting held in India in October 2022 was the adoption by the Committee of the Delhi Declaration on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes. In this regard, I recognize the achievements of my predecessor as Chair of this Committee — the Permanent Representative of India, Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj.

The Delhi Declaration reflects the Committee's intention to develop a set of non-binding guiding principles to assist Member States to counter the threat posed by the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes. These non-binding guiding principles will recognise the opportunities offered by the same set of technologies to counter the threat of terrorism, consistent with international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as applicable.

Countering terrorist narratives requires a comprehensive and whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. So does the development of positive narratives and credible alternatives, which could include efforts to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence and strengthen the resilience of communities and individuals against the hateful messaging of terrorists. It is also critical for States to foster an enabling and safe environment for all. This is why today, in this room, we have ensured the presence of all key actors: governments, representatives of the ICT industry, civil society representatives, and academics, embodying a whole-of-society approach.

Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I look forward to a productive meeting and to your deliberations on these crucial issues.

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Thank you.