

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)

2023 Counter-Terrorism Week Side Event

“Addressing the linkages between the destruction and illicit trafficking of cultural property and terrorism: scope of the threat and responses to the phenomenon”

**CTED-United Nations Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization-Italy (Sponsoring State)**

22 June 2023, 13:15-14:30 EDT, Conference Room 11, Hybrid format

Opening Remarks

Assistant Secretary-General Natalia Gherman

Executive Director

CTED

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to today’s event on the linkages between the destruction and trafficking of cultural property and terrorism. CTED is pleased to have organized this event with UNESCO and the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations, as a testament to our enduring partnership on the issue.

I would like to extend a sincere thank you to the Permanent Mission of Italy for sponsoring this event and for their unwavering commitment to the protection of cultural heritage at large.

Today's discussion could not be timelier, as we see renewed engagement on the issue of the protection of cultural heritage at the regional and international levels.

Nevertheless, the linkages between the destruction and trafficking of cultural property and terrorism remain poorly understood, difficult to assess, and seldom addressed.

When condemning the unlawful targeting of cultural heritage in armed conflict, the Security Council reminded us of the way in which, in certain contexts, the destruction of cultural heritage by terrorist groups represents a clear attempt to deny historical roots and cultural diversity.

Cultural heritage is an integral part of people's identity and social cohesion. Its intentional destruction should be considered an affront to humanity as a whole.

The Council has also made it clear that the looting and trafficking of cultural property constitute an important source of revenue for terrorist groups.

In September 2022, CTED organized, in close collaboration with UNESCO and the Permanent Mission of Italy, a round-table discussion with academia and civil society which shed light on different dimensions of the phenomenon. Our distinguished experts today will help us to delve further into the scope and nature of the linkages with terrorism and discuss ongoing efforts and best practices to address them, including through comprehensive and multilateral approaches.

Distinguished guests,

In resolution 2617 (2021), the Security Council recognized that CTED is uniquely positioned to raise awareness of the issue and of the importance of Member States' cooperation in addressing different aspects of the illicit traffic of cultural property for terrorist purposes, in accordance with relevant legal frameworks.

Allow me to share a couple of observations, in this regard, stemming from CTED's engagement with Member States on the issue on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee.

First, States have at their disposal a set of comprehensive legal and policy tools to effectively prevent and counter the destruction and

illicit trafficking of cultural property by terrorist groups and facilitate international cooperation.

Nevertheless, lack of implementation and limited harmonization of these instruments continue to hamper these efforts, including with respect to the criminalization of relevant offences and the imposition of proportional and dissuasive criminal or administrative sanctions.

As reaffirmed in resolution 2347 (2017), international cooperation plays an indispensable role in crime prevention and criminal justice responses to counter trafficking in cultural property and related offences in a comprehensive and effective manner.

Secondly, CTED continues to note that the role of the illicit trade in cultural property in facilitating terrorism financing receives limited attention and goes largely undetected and is rarely investigated.

Against this backdrop, CTED is pleased to announce that it is embarking on a joint initiative with UNESCO and the International Association of Prosecutors - who join us virtually today and will be able to further elaborate on it – aimed at mapping and enhancing the criminal justice responses of Member States to the destruction,

looting and illicit trade of cultural property and their linkages with terrorism.

Thank you again for joining us. I look forward to the discussion ahead.