



# Security Council

Distr.: General  
31 July 2019

Original: English

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## **Ninth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat**

### **I. Introduction**

1. In adopting its resolution [2253 \(2015\)](#), the Security Council expressed its determination to address the threat posed to international peace and security by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant<sup>1</sup> (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) and associated individuals and groups. In paragraph 97 of the resolution, the Council requested that I provide an initial strategic-level report on the threat, followed by updates every four months. In its resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#), the Council requested that I continue to provide, every six months, strategic-level reports that reflect the gravity of the threat, as well as the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat.

2. This is my ninth report on the threat posed by ISIL to international peace and security.<sup>2</sup> The report was prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,<sup>3</sup> in close collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism, other United Nations entities and international organizations.

3. It is noted in the report that, in the aftermath of the territorial defeat of ISIL, ISIL continues to aspire to global relevance, in particular through its affiliates and inspired attacks. The continuing concerns posed by returning fighters and their family members are also noted. Moreover, the report highlights ongoing threats and challenges, including the fact that the current lull in directed attacks by ISIL may be temporary, and the urgent need to address the processing and repatriation of detainees and internally displaced persons, including having to confront humanitarian, logistical, jurisdictional and human rights challenges while addressing security concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> Listed as Al-Qaida in Iraq (QDe.115).

<sup>2</sup> See [S/2016/92](#), [S/2016/501](#), [S/2016/830](#), [S/2017/97](#), [S/2017/467](#), [S/2018/80](#), [S/2018/770](#) and [S/2019/103](#).

<sup>3</sup> The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions [1526 \(2004\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban associated individuals and entities.



## II. Threat assessment

### A. Overview of threat/Middle East

4. The period under review saw the completion of the military defeat of ISIL in the Syrian Arab Republic, with the fall of Baghuz in March 2019. Many ISIL fighters died trying to defend the last remnant of the so-called “caliphate”. A larger number, both fighters and dependents, left the area before and after it fell, forming part of a wave of internal displacement into camps and detention facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. The population of Hawl camp alone increased more than sevenfold in early 2019, to more than 70,000, generating acute humanitarian and security concerns among Member States.

5. The evolution of a covert ISIL network at the provincial level in Iraq since 2017 is now being mirrored in the Syrian Arab Republic, with attacks increasing in areas controlled by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. ISIL personnel, including some senior figures, are also reported to have taken refuge in governorates where hostilities are ongoing. The high concentration of extremist elements, including foreign terrorist fighters in these areas, is assessed to pose a serious potential threat.<sup>4</sup>

6. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi<sup>5</sup> is reported to be in Iraq, along with most of the mainly Iraqi leadership of the ISIL leadership, while others also remain in or close to the former “caliphate” area. The difficulty in meeting, communicating and moving money and supplies has necessitated the delegation of authority, including to regional affiliates. The ISIL core has continued the process of drawing down to protect its essential personnel and functions. It is unable to support foreign terrorist fighters, preferring to focus on the survival of its leaders and Syrian and Iraqi fighters after its territorial defeat.<sup>6</sup>

7. ISIL insurgency activity in Iraq, including the burning of crops, is designed to prevent normalization and reconstruction, in the hope that the local population will ultimately blame the Iraqi authorities. A similar approach is anticipated in the Syrian Arab Republic. ISIL still has many fighters and other supporters and is pursuing a strategy of consolidating and creating the conditions for an eventual resurgence, an outcome that cannot yet be ruled out in parts of the former “caliphate” area.

8. By contrast, ISIL is not well established in the Arabian Peninsula. In 2018, three attempted operations by ISIL were disrupted in Saudi Arabia, leading to the death of six terrorists and eight members of the security forces in what were described as rudimentary plots planned mostly by lone actors. In Yemen, fighting between Al-Qaida and ISIL has continued to weaken both. Given its lack of local acceptance, and the range of forces confronting it, ISIL in Yemen is assessed as unlikely to recover in strength or attract foreign terrorist fighters.

9. Meanwhile, ISIL continues to aspire to global relevance, as illustrated by Baghdadi’s video late in April 2019, which highlighted its affiliates. The dispersed, delegated leadership approach entails giving specific better-established ISIL affiliates responsibility for supporting lesser or newer ones. This approach also extracts maximum propaganda value from inspired attacks, as demonstrated by the leadership’s reaction to the Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka, which Baghdadi celebrated but was not aware of before they happened. With the exception of the Easter Sunday bombings, these inspired attacks on which ISIL is currently hoping to

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<sup>4</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>5</sup> Listed as Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai (QDi.299).

<sup>6</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

rely on often lack tradecraft and resources, so that many are disrupted and those that succeed tend to be relatively low-impact.

10. Member States expect the current lull in directed international attacks to be temporary. They expect ISIL to revive its external operational capability as soon as circumstances allow, either in the core area or in the area of its affiliates. The latter tend to be localized conflict zones that attract foreign terrorist fighters from within the region or others who have a cultural affinity with it. Afghanistan remains the best established of these and is one where external attack planning ambitions exist, and a capability may follow. Notwithstanding significant ISIL activity in West Africa and South-East Asia, it is not clear that these presences are focusing beyond regional issues.

11. The loss of territory by ISIL coincides with an end to the group's ability to generate revenue from local populations and extractive industries, in particular the petroleum sector. At the same time, the group is left with significant residual wealth, estimated to be as much as \$300 million, with none of the financial demands of controlling territory and population. The group is believed to be capable of directing funds to support terrorist acts both within Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and abroad, while encouraging increased financial self-sufficiency throughout its network. Notwithstanding the spread of new payment technologies, cash couriers and unregistered money service businesses or *hawaladars* remain the most common methods of transferring funds to and from ISIL. These methods are also among the most difficult for authorities to identify and interdict.

12. According to one Member State, the past looting of Iraqi antiquities at historical sites in Nineveh, Diyala, Anbar and Kirkuk Provinces was financially motivated. Returnees from the conflict zone who had held finance positions reported that ISIL had created a unit within the Diwan for Natural Resources specifically responsible for the selling of antiquities. When that Diwan was dissolved, the unit moved to the Diwan of Finance. Details of antiquities traded and the current location of any stored antiquities are assessed to be known only to ISIL leaders.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Foreign terrorist fighters*

13. Member States remain concerned about the challenges posed by foreign terrorist fighters, returnees and relocators, even though relocators have not yet appeared in large numbers and returnees have not yet emerged as leading terrorist actors. Estimates by several Member States of the attrition rate at the global level for foreign terrorist fighters average 25 per cent killed and 15 per cent unaccounted for. Set against an approximate initial figure of 40,000 who joined the "caliphate", these percentages would suggest that between 24,000 and 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters are alive.<sup>8</sup>

14. Member States have different approaches to processing and repatriating women, including internally displaced persons. Factors taken into account under each approach include whether mothers and children are held together, the difficulty of establishing parentage and the nationality of minors and the specific legal protections afforded to minors. Regardless of the complexities, the conditions in overcrowded camps such as Hawl make it clear that these challenges, if ignored, will not resolve themselves. Nevertheless, the logistical, jurisdictional and human rights complexities of addressing detainees and displaced persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and to some extent in Iraq, require concerted efforts and have increasingly become the focus of international attention.

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<sup>7</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>8</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

15. The threats posed in the short term by adult detainees and in the medium to long term by minors who are often traumatized and may become increasingly radicalized have the potential to grow more serious, with consequences for social integration and the potential risk of violence, including possible terrorist attacks in the future. Some individuals may join Al-Qaida or other listed groups if the underlying factors that gave rise to ISIL remain unaddressed. Challenges in the justice and corrections systems in a number of countries, if not properly addressed, can also end up creating the conditions for radicalization in prison and increase the risk of future attacks.

## **B. Regional trends**

### **1. Africa**

16. In Libya, fighting around the capital, which began with the Libyan National Army offensive in April 2019, created a security vacuum in the southern governorates, especially in Sabha and Awbari. This vacuum was exploited by ISIL, and its members were able to launch several attacks on a number of cities, including Zillah, Fuqaha' and Fazzan. In addition, in April 2019, the Government of National Accord was able to apprehend an ISIL member plotting to carry out attacks in the capital. Notwithstanding their dwindling numbers, ISIL fighters continue to pose a threat in the subcoastal region extending from the oil fields in the east to the borders with Algeria in the west. The group reportedly maintains control over some cash reserves that it had seized from Sirte while the city was under its control. ISIL is also said to be trying to invest in small and medium-sized enterprises in major coastal cities. Other sources of income include the extortion of citizens and the taxation of human trafficking networks. In addition, it was reported that at least 1 million euros was paid as ransom to free workers belonging to an oil company in southern Libya.<sup>9</sup>

17. A number of terrorist cells affiliated with ISIL were disrupted in Morocco. Some of those apprehended had reportedly returned from fighting in the core conflict zone in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, aided by trafficking networks and forged European identification documents. In Sinai, the area of operations of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which pledged allegiance to Baghdadi and is reported to include up to 1,000 members, is confined to locations around three towns constituting approximately 3 per cent of the area of the Peninsula.<sup>10</sup> Egypt asserts that the group is a local phenomenon without any operational or financial ties to the ISIL core.

18. With regard to returned foreign terrorist fighters from the core conflict zone to North Africa, the movement of fighters in small numbers to Algeria and Libya was detected through the Sudan. Algeria reportedly intercepted approximately 100 Syrians who had attempted to enter the country through its southern borders, with assistance from criminal networks, after having transited Turkey and the Sudan using falsified documents.<sup>11</sup>

19. West Africa, meanwhile, has witnessed a striking increase in ISIL and Al-Qaida-linked recruitment and violence. National borders in the region are porous and national authorities ill-prepared to address the threat.<sup>12</sup> For example, one border area, the "W Regional Park" in Benin, Burkina Faso and the Niger, is being used increasingly as a base by Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and other terrorist groups. Some of these are Al-Qaida-aligned but are willing to cooperate with ISIL

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<sup>9</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>10</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>11</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>12</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

affiliates and collectively encroach across the borders into coastal States. Two French nationals were abducted in Pendjari park in Benin in May 2019.

20. The attacks of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, mostly in Mali and the Niger, are now being publicized by Islamic State's West Africa Province, based in Nigeria, demonstrating hub-and-spoke coordination between the two affiliates in the wider region. They may have cooperated in the May 2019 attack on Nigerien forces in Tongo Tongo and aspire to turn the Nigerian city of Sokoto into a joint logistical base.<sup>13</sup>

21. Islamic State's West Africa Province continues to operate mainly in Nigeria's north-eastern Borno and Yobe Provinces in the Lake Chad Basin, while it has also increased pressure on defence and security forces in Diffa, the neighbouring region of eastern Niger.<sup>14</sup> Islamic State's West Africa Province has also continued at an intense operational tempo, with a high level of violence and attrition against local security forces. It is believed to have some 4,000 fighters, in which respect it now ranks alongside Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (QDe.161) as the strongest ISIL regional affiliate. It is also seeking to attract foreign terrorist fighters, with only very limited results to date.

22. In Somalia, Member States reported that the previous uneasy calm between Al-Shabaab and ISIL had not lasted long. In Puntland, where ISIL had made minor inroads, and in Mogadishu, clashes broke out early in 2019. ISIL in Somalia came under pressure both from Al-Shabaab and from continuing enforcement operations of the African Union Mission in Somalia. Al-Shabab was then able to occupy some ISIL bases in Puntland and force ISIL underground, even in its Ceelasha Biyahastronghold near Mogadishu. Notwithstanding those reverses, ISIL managed to retain some operational bases and could still conduct limited assassination operations against business figures and government officials in Boosaaso.

23. The territorial losses of ISIL in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and the weakened state of its Somalia affiliate were reported by Member States to have given momentum to Madina Tawheed Waljihad,<sup>15</sup> a group that emerged in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in November 2017. Madina Tawheed Waljihad hoisted the ISIL flag and pledged allegiance to Baghdadi at its base in Medina, Beni Region, North Kivu. Although the ISIL core has not yet formally accepted the Madina Tawheed Waljihad pledge of allegiance, the group continues to try to communicate with them and to attract relocating foreign terrorist fighters to augment its ranks. Some Member States attribute increased activities by Madina Tawheed Waljihad operatives, most of them self-radicalized lone actors, to Baghdadi's 22 August 2018 speech instructing fighters to deploy to various locations, including Central Africa. Madina Tawheed Waljihad was further encouraged by Baghdadi's April 2019 video, featuring a banner of the Islamic State's Central Africa Province alongside its other affiliates, and started to operate under the Islamic State's Central Africa Province banner.

24. Member States from the region expressed concern throughout early 2019 about the increased momentum and frequency of operations by Islamic State's Central Africa Province. Although at a nascent stage, they assess that the group has the potential to evolve, attract relocators from the region and beyond, and build connections with other ISIL affiliates in Africa. One Member State reported that ISIL in Somalia had been instructed by the ISIL core to move funds to other regional affiliates, including one instance in which it was tasked with providing financial support for operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<sup>13</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>14</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>15</sup> Also known as Madina Tawheed wal Muwahedeen.

25. Some other Member States offer the alternative perspective that ISIL claims may be opportunistic, given that they see no evidence of ISIL directing the attacks or having contact with the perpetrators. While acknowledging that the ISIL threat in Central Africa is evolving, these Member States assess Islamic State's Central Africa Province as a rebranding of the Allied Democratic Forces–National Army for the Liberation of Uganda movement, which they see as primarily concentrating on survival and lacking developed operational capabilities.

## **2. Europe**

26. During the reporting period, a reduced incidence of successful attacks was reported, but Member States in the region judged that the risk remained high. Notwithstanding online propaganda that highlights various attack methodologies and online tutorials on how to build home-made chemical and biological weapons, the threat of ISIL using weapons of mass destruction is assessed to remain low owing to the complexity of building and delivering such devices undetected by authorities.<sup>16</sup>

27. Member States expressed growing concern about homegrown terrorism and the related potential for domestically driven, inspired attacks at a time when ISIL finds it difficult to send operatives to Europe. Meanwhile, a relatively high disruption rate of attacks was noted, owing to poor tradecraft and the low sophistication of would-be attackers.

28. Radicalization in prison remains a major concern in Europe. Prisons can provide a venue for radical ideologies to be shared among inmates afflicted by poverty, marginalization, discrimination, low self-esteem and violence.

29. According to regional Member States in the region, an estimated 5,000–6,000 foreign terrorist fighters travelled from Europe to the conflict zone in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Of those, 75 per cent joined ISIL. The number reported killed amounts to 30 to 40 per cent, while 10 to 15 per cent remain detained in the region, 10 to 15 per cent may have relocated and 30 to 40 per cent may have returned to Europe. Many remain unaccounted for.

30. Member States report that most returnees, notwithstanding having become disillusioned with terrorist practices or disappointed with life under ISIL, retain extremist views. Concerns therefore remain high about the risk posed by returnees, in particular the most combat-hardened fighters, upon release from prison, and the sometimes-limited effectiveness of deradicalization programmes.

31. Member States in the region continue to highlight the challenges posed by dependents of European foreign terrorist fighters living in detention or other camps in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Data collection on the number of repatriated European nationals remains a challenge.

## **3. Asia**

32. The attempted travel of Central Asian foreign terrorist fighters to the Syrian Arab Republic, and, to a lesser extent, Afghanistan, continues, albeit on a much smaller scale than in previous years. Since 2012, approximately 1,500 fighters from Tajikistan and the same estimated number of Uzbek nationals joined established terrorist groups, with 45 percent believed to be alive.<sup>17</sup> In addition, approximately 2,000 nationals of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States are detained in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. Since the start of 2019, 524 of

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<sup>16</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>17</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

this number, almost all women and children, were repatriated by Kazakhstan, 156 by Uzbekistan and 84 by Tajikistan.

33. Online propaganda in Central Asian native languages promotes travel to the conflict zone, fundraising and the establishment of sleeper cells in their home countries. The Member States in the region are concerned about new fighters and terrorist sympathizers who are recruited and ordered to stay in their home countries. In 2019, as a result of a joint operation conducted by special services in the region, 26 ISIL members were arrested, some of them returnees.<sup>18</sup>

34. Central Asian countries remain concerned about the terrorist threat emanating from northern Afghanistan, where Central Asian groups cooperate with organized criminal networks engaged in drug trafficking across the Afghan-Tajik border, also using these routes to have fighters enter Central Asia. These groups and individuals are ostensibly aligned with the Taliban and Al-Qaida, but Member States are concerned that some of them harbour sympathies with ISIL and might one day decide to join Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, which currently has a Central Asian contingent of approximately 200 fighters. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan losses in eastern Afghanistan prompted a leadership change in the first half of 2019, which took place in the presence of a visiting delegation of leaders of the ISIL core. Both entities are assessed to maintain a close command-and-control relationship.

35. In 2019, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan suffered a number of military defeats and was forced to decrease the regularity of its attacks. The group tried to infiltrate Paktiya and Logar Provinces in south-eastern Afghanistan but was ultimately unsuccessful. The group is still concentrated in Nangarhar and Kunar Provinces and has no visible, organized presence outside eastern Afghanistan. On the basis of a range of Member State assessments, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan currently numbers between 2,500 and 4,000 fighters, including foreign terrorist fighters.<sup>19</sup>

36. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan is reported by Member States to maintain a robust capability to derive income from the exploitation from local mineral, lumber and talc resources. The group also engages in extortion of the local population and kidnaping for ransom. There is broad agreement among Member States that it continues to eschew involvement in the narcotics business.

37. Member States in the South Asia region expressed concern about dynamics of ISIL activities within the region. As ISIL continues its evolution into a global network inspiring and directing terrorism, it seeks to build platforms for operations in areas where it has not been active before. Notwithstanding the claim of responsibility by ISIL, Member State investigations revealed that the ISIL core did not direct or facilitate the attacks or even know about them in advance. It was a locally instigated and led attack inspired by ISIL ideology. The bombings were conducted by local groups, National Towheet Jama'at and Jammiyatul Millatu Ibrahim, albeit with some foreign connections: some of the suicide bombers had travelled to the Syrian Arab Republic and received weapons training with ISIL.

38. ISIL affiliates continue to demonstrate an ability to launch attacks in South-East Asia, targeting places of worship. The role of women in planning and executing attacks is a worrying development. The attack on 27 January 2019 by the Abu Sayyaf Group, an ISIL affiliate, on a Roman Catholic cathedral in southern Mindanao, the Philippines, caused one of the highest death tolls in the region from a single attack, killing at least 20 people and wounding more than 100. Indonesian authorities

<sup>18</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>19</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

disrupted a terror plot by Jamaah Ansharut Daulah in May 2019 involving bombs timed to detonate at the time of the country's elections. Malaysian authorities announced the arrest of terrorists who had received explosives training from Jamaah Ansharut Daulah and who were targeting non-Muslim places of worship. Member States have expressed concern that the explicit targeting of places of worship in South-East Asia and Sri Lanka may reflect a new trend in ISIL operations.

### **III. Updates on responses to the evolving threat**

#### **A. Overview**

39. Since my previous report, the United Nations, Member States and international, regional and subregional organizations continue to strengthen, refine and promote the use of effective tools and measures to address the threat posed by ISIL, its affiliates and supporters, and by returning or relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

40. The United Nations has continued to galvanize international cooperation through a series of regional conferences that the Office of Counter-Terrorism has been organizing as a follow-up to the first-ever High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States that I convened in New York in June 2018. The first conference in this series, hosted by the Government of Tajikistan in cooperation with the United Nations, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, was held in Dushanbe in May 2019 on "International and regional cooperation on countering terrorism and its financing through illicit drug trafficking and organized crime". A conference on a "Whole-of-society approach' to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism" was held in Mongolia in June 2019. The African Regional High-level Conference on Counter-Terrorism and the Prevention of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism, inaugurated by the President of Kenya and me in Nairobi in July 2019, also confirmed that, while Member States have the primary responsibility for countering terrorism, they benefit from strengthened regional and subregional cooperation and from coordinated assistance to support the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. In total, 1,497 delegates attended the conference in Nairobi.

41. In April 2019, my Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism also chaired the second meeting of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact Coordination Committee, which approved the revitalized structure of the Global Compact working groups and their relevant terms of reference and workplans for the period 2019–2020. The Committee also directed the development of a joint programme of work for 2019–2020, which will be implemented through streamlined "All-of-United Nations" working groups based on the thematic priorities of Member States and aligned with the four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

#### **B. Responding to the loss of territorial control of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant**

##### *Current situation and repatriation efforts*

42. Member States continue to face multiple challenges in bringing ISIL members and affiliates and supporters, including foreign terrorist fighters, to justice with fair trial guarantees and in accordance with their obligations under international law. Since my last report, thousands of suspected ISIL fighters, and an even greater



number of suspected ISIL-affiliated women and children, have been detained in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic following the loss of territorial control of ISIL. Their detention has raised questions regarding jurisdiction, evidence and criminal responsibility, which require urgent resolution, including from the perspective of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

43. The deteriorating situation faced by thousands of people, some with links to United Nations-listed terrorist groups, most of whom are women and children, who remain stranded in overcrowded camps in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic is increasingly untenable. These individuals have limited access to food, medical care, a fair trial and other fundamental rights and services.

44. In March 2019, the United Nations system developed key principles for the protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children with links to United Nations-listed terrorist groups. The aim of the principles is to enhance the coherence of United Nations activities in this area to better assist Member States, including by using the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact framework. I believe that these principles will also assist Member States in their efforts to design and implement policies and action in line with international law, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law.

45. Member States have primary responsibility for their own nationals, including in the provision of consular services, legal documentation and other fundamental rights and services, as well as in criminal prosecution. Policies and actions that lead to statelessness should be avoided, including from a security perspective.

46. While some Member States have repatriated or are in the process of repatriating their nationals, others are yet to develop clear policies on how to handle such cases. I recognize that Member States face significant legal, practical and operational challenges relating to the repatriation of their nationals, including women and children, from territories previously controlled by ISIL.

47. Several Eurasian States, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, have repatriated young children, including orphans, from Iraq or the Syrian Arab Republic. Kazakhstan was among the first States to undertake a large-scale operation to repatriate its nationals (mainly women and children) from the Syrian Arab Republic. In May 2019, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism concluded a visit to Kazakhstan, in which she noted the country's pivotal role in efforts to repatriate its citizens who had travelled to ISIL-held territories to join the group. In June 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern at the fate of detained family members of alleged ISIL fighters, calling upon States to repatriate their citizens, and for those with proven links to crimes committed by ISIL, to be prosecuted for those crimes in accordance with international standards.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Prosecution*

48. Member States, with the support of relevant United Nations entities, should continue to work with those States most affected by ISIL to bring their nationals to justice, including through the implementation of the 2018 addendum to the guiding principles on foreign terrorist fighters.

49. Pursuant to its counter-terrorism law, Iraq has prosecuted suspected Iraqi and foreign ISIL members accused of committing terrorism offences in Iraq or in

<sup>20</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24724&LangID=E](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24724&LangID=E).

neighbouring conflict zones. United Nations entities in Iraq have reported ongoing challenges in upholding the right to a fair trial. In April 2019, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions called upon Iraq to ensure that the prosecution of ISIL leadership is carried out in a transparent, fair and thorough manner and to include the participation of victims in the legal process.

50. In June 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>20</sup> made clear that all individuals – men and women – who are suspected of crimes should face investigation and prosecution with guarantees of due process. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq continues to monitor and report on the treatment of individuals detained in camps, as well as the application of the counter-terrorism law of Iraq, with a view to assisting the Government of Iraq in ensuring that the law is applied in accordance with international human rights standards and includes access to justice for victims of crimes committed by ISIL.

51. Challenges identified in my previous report regarding risks of radicalization to violence in prisons persist in many Member States. They include a lack of adequate tools to assess the risks posed by prisoners or assess their needs and insufficient capacity to detect early signs of radicalization to violence. In many Member States, these challenges are further compounded by a lack of resources, prison overcrowding and poor conditions of detention and treatment of prisoners, contrary to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

52. The lack of separation between pre-trial and post-trial detainees poses the risk of spreading violent extremism that may be conducive to terrorism. The detention of individuals in such conditions can hinder the capacities of States to address the facts and grievances that may spur prisoners to join violent extremist groups, as highlighted in my Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

#### *Rehabilitation and reintegration*

53. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, acting in close cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, through the joint project on violent extremist prisoners, continue to provide assistance to Member States aimed at strengthening security and safety in prisons and enhancing risk and needs assessments, rehabilitation and social reintegration. Training activities relating to raising awareness and expertise in prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies include the effective use of alternatives to imprisonment to decrease the unnecessary use of imprisonment and pre-trial detention, including for terrorism-related offences. Since my previous report, prison staff in beneficiary countries have been trained in prison security techniques.

54. Efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate prisoners into society, including those convicted of terrorism offences, need to be further strengthened to provide prisoners with alternatives to violent extremism and to prevent recidivism. Many States continue to encounter significant challenges in their efforts to comply with the requirement of the Security Council to develop and implement comprehensive and tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for suspected terrorists and returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters. Those challenges include knowledge gaps about the location of returnees and relocators, and insufficient enabling legislation, law enforcement capacity or inter-agency cooperation. In many cases, Member States have introduced measures that address only one aspect of the required response, such as the development of disengagement programmes in prisons, but are not situated within a comprehensive, whole-of-government prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration umbrella. Large numbers of suspects continue to be

detained, in the absence of policies or legal provisions that enable the relevant government institutions to manage large caseloads within a reasonable time frame or to implement tailored responses that incorporate specific considerations relating to women or children.

55. For some African Member States that have expressed increased interest in the development and implementation of transitional justice approaches, there is a need to anchor these in coherent policies and ensure compliance with Security Council resolutions and international human rights standards, in particular where travel back and forth across borders, such as in the Lake Chad Basin, is common. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continues to work with UNODC, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other United Nations entities to assist States in developing regional approaches to screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration, as part of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. Those approaches recognize the need for informed decision-making by the relevant authorities, facilitated by an initial screening process that is based on clear criteria and implemented by an inter-agency body.

56. With the assistance of IOM and supported by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the Government of the Niger has made significant progress in screening some 200 individuals associated with Boko Haram who have been held at the Goudoumaria camp since 2017. The law enforcement unit responsible for terrorism investigations has made recommendations with respect to each individual, whether for further investigation, prosecution or diversion into rehabilitation. The criteria used in making those recommendations have included the commission of a terrorist offence and its seriousness, as well as other factors, such as age and the conditions under which the individual joined Boko Haram. Cameroon and Chad are considering establishing similar screening systems.

57. Although these efforts are to be welcomed, significant challenges remain and are further compounded by consideration of the use of amnesties or exemptions from prosecution to incentivize surrenders. When such approaches lead to impunity for gross violations of human rights, they violated international legal standards, frustrate victims and communities and undermine compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions. The national approaches being developed by the Lake Chad Basin States to deal with persons associated with United Nations-listed terrorist groups should be based on laws and policies that are compliant with the applicable international legal frameworks and ensure accountability and the rights of victims, including to reparation.

58. Member States continue to encounter challenges in developing tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies that consider the roles, motivations and experiences of women linked to terrorist groups. To assist Member States in developing and implementing gender-sensitive approaches to the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of women linked to terrorist groups, UNODC published the *Handbook on Gender Dimensions of Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism*. Capacity-building activities on the gender dimension and women's rights have been delivered in several States in North and West Africa. In Iraq, UNODC is supporting the efforts of the Government to strengthen the role of women in law enforcement and in judicial institutions dealing with terrorism cases.

59. In February 2019, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, in its trends report entitled "The gender dimensions of the response to returning foreign terrorist fighters: research perspectives",<sup>21</sup> found, among other things, that

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<sup>21</sup> Also available in Arabic at [www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/03282019\\_Trends\\_Report\\_Arabic.pdf](http://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/03282019_Trends_Report_Arabic.pdf).

(a) significant knowledge gaps remained with respect to the number and profiles of women who travelled to and returned from ISIL-held territory, owing to inconsistent gender-disaggregated data collection; and (b) women tended to receive more limited rehabilitation and reintegration support, potentially putting them at greater risk of marginalization and re-radicalization. The Directorate continues to work in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to further strengthen the evidence base on the drivers of women's radicalization to terrorism and the impact of counter-terrorism strategies on women's human rights.

60. Efforts have also been made to assist Member States in preventing and responding to violence against children recruited and exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups. UNODC has developed a training package consisting of the *Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: the Role of the Justice System* and three corresponding training manuals.

### C. International judicial cooperation

61. International cooperation, including through mutual legal assistance and extradition, remains key to addressing transnational operational challenges that national judicial and law enforcement authorities frequently encounter in terrorist cases. States should also consider developing and participating in regional inter-agency judicial and law enforcement cooperation platforms or networks to facilitate the timely gathering and sharing of information and evidence relating to suspected terrorists, in accordance with international law.

62. The United Nations is facilitating such cooperation. For example, in the Middle East and North Africa region, UNODC has supported the development of a specialized network of focal points for judicial and law enforcement cooperation on terrorist cases, including cases relating to foreign terrorist fighters: the Multi-Agency Task Force for the Middle East and North Africa Region. Within the Task Force, focal points work together to analyse operational challenges encountered in cases involving foreign terrorist fighters, share good practices in response to those challenges, discuss ongoing cases and exchange information. The Task Force, with the support of UNODC, has developed a practical guide to the preparation and transmission of effective cooperation requests to its constituent Member States.

#### *Digital evidence*

63. The United Nations has responded to requests from Member States for assistance in preserving and obtaining admissible digital evidence in a timely manner for use in court cases relating to terrorism, including foreign terrorist fighters. The International Association of Prosecutors and UNODC, in close cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, have continued to provide technical assistance to Member States seeking to address terrorist abuse of information and communications technologies and to bring perpetrators to justice, within the framework of the global initiative on strengthening the capacity of central authorities, prosecutors and investigators in preserving and obtaining electronic evidence in counter-terrorism and related cross-border investigations. During the reporting period, States of sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, South-East Asia, the Pacific Islands and Latin America received technical assistance in order address the main challenges and good practices associated with the use of electronic data, including through engagement with the private sector. The project's *Practical Guide for Requesting Electronic Evidence Across Borders* is currently being used to train relevant officials.

## **D. Supporting victims of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and ensuring accountability**

### *Investigative efforts of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant*

64. The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) has made significant progress in operationalizing its mandate to support efforts in Iraq to hold ISIL accountable for its crimes by collecting, preserving and storing evidence of acts that might amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Core staffing, facilities and initial evidence-collection practices are now in place and initial documentary, digital, testimonial and forensic material is being collected in accordance with the team's investigative strategy (see [S/2019/407](#)), which emphasizes the forensic analysis of mass grave sites and the exhumation of victims' remains. In March and April 2019, the first set of excavations took place in the village of Kojo, in Sinjar, in north-western Iraq, in cooperation with the Government of Iraq.

### *Conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant*

65. On 23 April 2019, the Security Council adopted resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#) on sexual violence in armed conflict. The Council, in the resolution, reiterated that sexual and gender-based violence can be part of the strategic objectives and ideology of, and used as a tactic by, terrorist groups, and recognized the victims of sexual violence perpetrated by terrorist groups as victims of terrorism, with the purpose of rendering them eligible for official support and redress as victims of terrorism.

66. It is essential to comprehensively address the needs of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, including by upholding the rights of families with alleged affiliations to ISIL and other United Nations-listed terrorist groups, and to improve service delivery and support for survivors in all settings. All Member States should investigate and prosecute ISIL operatives for their crimes, including crimes of sexual violence and trafficking in persons, and to do so in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in particular regarding ensuring a fair trial. Any State hosting refugee populations who are victims of crimes of sexual violence committed by ISIL should also ensure that local prosecution services provide those individuals with access to formal justice in a victim-sensitive manner.

67. I am extremely concerned at the situation of victims of sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence committed by ISIL fighters who are currently displaced in camps. Those victims, and in some cases their children born of sexual violence, have not been reintegrated into their communities of origin. While the efforts of Member States to identify missing women and children who were abducted by ISIL continue, further assistance is needed to locate and reunite families when possible and provide reintegration services and support for victims, including victims of sexual violence and abduction.

68. My Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict continue to help the Government of Iraq to work towards the full implementation of the Joint Communiqué on bringing ISIL perpetrators of sexual violence to justice and providing redress and relief to survivors. Member States should support the Government in its efforts to recover from the devastating impact of sexual violence perpetrated by ISIL on Iraqi communities. Member States should ensure the legal recognition of children conceived through rape as victims of sexual violence and put in place special birth registration procedures to protect them from becoming stateless

and provide them with opportunities to obtain essential services. Religious and traditional leaders are strongly encouraged to alleviate stigma and support the reintegration of women and their children into their communities.

## **E. Counter-financing of terrorism**

69. Preventing ISIL and its supporters from raising, moving and using funds remains a key component of international efforts to counter the group's threat. Since my previous report, the Security Council has undertaken various initiatives aimed at strengthening the responses of Member States, the international community and the United Nations in this area. In January 2019, at a Security Council Arria formula meeting on preventing and countering the financing of terrorism, there was discussion on gaps in responses by States and on ways to further strengthen legal and institutional frameworks established to counter terrorism financing.

70. On 28 March 2019, the Security Council adopted resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#), under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the first-ever Council resolution devoted solely to preventing and suppressing terrorism financing. The resolution brings a new focus on assessing and understanding terrorism financing risks, the strategic role of financial intelligence in counter-terrorism efforts and the importance of public-private partnerships and effective domestic and international coordination, cooperation and information-sharing. The Council, in the resolution, also urged States implementing counter-financing of terrorism measures to consider the potential effect on exclusively humanitarian activities carried out by impartial humanitarian actors in accordance with international humanitarian law. The resolution will enable the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to strengthen its counter-financing of terrorism assessments by conducting targeted and focused follow-up visits and by issuing, in consultation with the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, an annual thematic summary of gaps to assist in the design of tailored capacity-building programming by United Nations entities.

71. During the reporting period, the Office of Counter-Terrorism received a growing number of requests from Member States and Financial Action Task Force-style regional bodies for support in their efforts to assess the vulnerability of their non-profit sectors to abuse for terrorism-financing purposes and ensure that measures are targeted and effective. It is imperative that measures in this area are not overly broad so as to negatively affect the operational capacity of civil society organizations writ large. This is a result of United Nations efforts to raise awareness of the vulnerabilities of some non-profit organizations to terrorist financing and of the need for targeted responses to address these, while preserving the vital role played by civil society and non-profit organizations in ensuring holistic approaches to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism. This included an expert consultation in Mauritius in February 2019, organized by the Office of Counter-Terrorism in cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, which helped to strengthen participants' understanding of the international standards on combating the abuse of non-profit organizations. In response to resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#), the Office will expand its global capacity-building programme on the counter-financing of terrorism to include modules on the non-profit sector, the sharing of financial intelligence, public-private partnerships, financial inclusion, the activities of cash couriers and terrorist asset-freezing.

72. The United Nations and international and regional organizations continue to address the linkages between international terrorism and transnational organized crime. In February 2019, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate published a study on the linkages between human trafficking, terrorism and terrorism financing entitled *Identifying and Exploring the Nexus between Human Trafficking,*

*Terrorism and Terrorism Financing.* In April 2019, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) and concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) held a joint special meeting to discuss regional specificities, responses and lessons learned in addressing the connections between terrorist and criminal groups. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute developed a policy toolkit<sup>22</sup> on “The Hague good practices on the nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism”, published by the Global Counterterrorism Forum, which identifies gaps and challenges to be urgently addressed in this area.

## **F. International law enforcement cooperation**

73. On 7 May 2019, the Office of Counter-Terrorism launched the Counter-Terrorism Travel Programme to assist Member States in enhancing their capacity to prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute terrorist offences and serious crime, including related travel, by using travel information such as advance passenger information and passenger name record data in accordance with the relevant requirements of Security Council resolutions 2178 (2014) and 2396 (2017). The Programme supports improvements in the use of existing international databases, such as those of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), and enhanced information exchange. It is coordinated by the Office and implemented in partnership with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Office of Information and Communications Technology and UNODC. It is essential that appropriate safeguards be put in place whenever personal data are being exchanged to ensure that the use, retention and destruction of the data comply with international human rights standards. The support package provided by the Programme includes assistance regarding the legal, operational, transport industry and technical aspects of building or enhancing national detection capacity, including the appropriate safeguards to ensure that such data are collected, used and shared with the full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

74. In March 2019, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate hosted an open briefing to raise awareness of and strengthen the understanding of the United Nations compendium of recommended practices for the responsible use and sharing of biometrics in counter-terrorism. At the briefing, Member States received information on good practices in the field of biometrics and on how biometric systems should be developed and managed in accordance with the human rights obligations of States.

75. In May 2019, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in coordination with the UNODC global Airport Communications Project, delivered a training to build capacity at international airports to address the threats posed by terrorists, foreign terrorist fighters, returnees and relocators, under the framework of the Office of Counter-Terrorism’s global Border Security Management Programme.

76. Attacks recorded during the reporting period are proof of the continued interest of ISIL in targeting critical infrastructure and “soft” targets, including places of worship. In March 2019, I tasked the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to develop an action plan to support Governments in their efforts to protect religious sites and to develop concrete and action-oriented

<sup>22</sup> Available at [www.unicri.it/in\\_focus/on/Policy\\_Toolkit\\_nexus\\_crime\\_terrorism](http://www.unicri.it/in_focus/on/Policy_Toolkit_nexus_crime_terrorism).

recommendations that can help to ensure the safety of religious sites. Meanwhile, various United Nations entities have continued their engagement on the topic, such as under the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact working group on emerging threats and critical infrastructure protection. For example, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and INTERPOL held two regional workshops on South-East Asia in Singapore, in January and March 2019, and a third workshop focusing on Sahel, the Maghreb and West Africa in Tunis, in April 2019. Similarly, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism brought together Member States and local government, cities, civil society organizations and the private sector at an open briefing in June 2019 to discuss ways of collaborating in order to protect soft targets. At the briefing, the importance of ensuring that all measures comply with the international human rights obligations of States and the private sector's responsibility to respect human rights was also emphasized.

77. In May 2019, the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate highlighted the need for greater efforts to address the potential risk posed by the use by terrorists of unmanned aircraft systems against both critical infrastructure and soft targets.<sup>23</sup>

## **G. Countering terrorist narratives and engaging communities in approaches to prevent and counter violent extremism**

78. In May 2019, the Office of Counter-Terrorism signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNODC to design and implement a joint programme to support parliamentary action on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism through a whole-of-society approach. Under the joint programme, they convened two regional conferences: one in the Middle East and North Africa region, focusing on foreign terrorist fighters, and the other in the Sahel region.

79. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate have piloted a model of co-delivery of tailored capacity-building in preventing and countering violent extremism through strategic communication that builds expertise in countering terrorist narratives. This co-delivery was successfully trialled in May 2019 at a workshop with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's Centre of Excellence in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. That workshop also marked the first time that the Office had partnered with a regional organization in the area to seek its input prior to the delivery of a workshop targeting Member States of the region. The Office and the Directorate will continue to work together to provide practical capacity-building on global good practice in countering terrorist narratives.

80. The Office of Counter-Terrorism has worked directly with a range of civil society organizations to assist them in building capacity to provide alternative narratives to those of terrorist and violent extremists. In May 2019, the Office delivered a workshop in partnership with UNDP in Jordan, focused on building the capacity of grassroots civil society organizations working with young people. In March 2019, the Office delivered a capacity-building workshop with the Government of the Philippines and UNDP that brought together civil society and government representatives to ensure that communities had a voice in the national strategy to

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<sup>23</sup> See [www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CTED-UAS-Trends-Alert-Final\\_17\\_May\\_2019.pdf](http://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CTED-UAS-Trends-Alert-Final_17_May_2019.pdf).



prevent and counter violent extremism in the Philippines and a role in its implementation.

81. In June 2019, I launched the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. Led by the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and involving 13 other United Nations agencies, the strategy is intended to enhance United Nations efforts to address the root causes and drivers of hate speech and facilitate effective United Nations responses to the impact of hate speech on societies. This is of particular importance in the context of the development of effective counter-narratives. The strategy is designed to support and enhance United Nations efforts in all related areas, including preventing conflict and terrorism and ending violence against women.

82. Through its “Reviving the spirit of Mosul” initiative, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has continued to implement an education component on preventing violent extremism as part of the rebuilding of Mosul’s education system, including through capacity-building to teachers, families and communities. In the Sahel, UNESCO is implementing a multisectoral programme on the promotion of peace and sustainable development through strengthening the competencies of young people for life and work in the Sahel in nine States, including teacher training and the production of the online “Journal Rappé” (rapped news site).

#### **IV. Observations**

83. Notwithstanding the territorial collapse of ISIL, Member States must remain vigilant to the global threat of terrorism, including by addressing terrorist narratives, preventing radicalization in prisons and addressing other conditions that create vulnerabilities. Concerted efforts are also required with regard to the reintegration and rehabilitation of men, women and children stranded, especially in conflict zones. The United Nations system stands ready to assist Member States in that regard, and I encourage all Member States to benefit from the key principles for the protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children with links to United Nations-listed terrorist groups.

84. I remain deeply concerned about terrorist attacks against soft targets, including places of worship, and encourage all United Nations entities to support Member States in their efforts regarding the protection of religious sites, in particular by providing a forum for the sharing of good practices. I am similarly concerned about the rise in hate speech and will continue to urge the implementation of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action Against Hate Speech. I will also ensure that the United Nations system continues to provide support to Member States in addressing the financing of terrorist activities, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#), as well as in addressing the link between transnational organized crime and terrorism, as requested by the Council in its resolution [2482 \(2019\)](#).

85. I am also pleased to note that the United Nations will continue to support efforts in support of multilateral, international and regional cooperation to counter terrorism through the series of regional conferences that the Office of Counter-Terrorism is organizing jointly with Member States and regional organizations. Discussions at these conferences have proven to be fruitful, and in that regard I continue to encourage follow-up on their concrete outcomes to contribute to the Counter-Terrorism Week in June 2020, including the first-ever Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism, to be held as part of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations.