



**UNITED NATIONS**  
**OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**  
**UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT)**

**Opening Remarks**  
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**United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**  
**Eighth International Congress for Victims of Terrorism**

**Nice, France, 21 November 2019**

*Prefect Gonzalez,*

*Mayor Estrosi,*

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Thirty-one years ago, when I was a graduate student in London, I sat down in the dormitory dining hall next to a young medical student from Scotland. We struck up a conversation. She was in London working on a Ph.D. related to finding a cure for Alzheimer's. She was an avid musician and a vibrant humanist. She was one of those people that make the world a brighter and more hopeful place.

We discovered we would both be in New York for Christmas. She was going to see her boyfriend, and I was going to see my parents. We agreed to try to meet up. I took the Pan Am flight to New York a few days before she did. She never made it. A terrorist bomb destroyed her plane over Scotland. She perished with 258 others, including another person who had lived in our same dormitory.

Some 13 years later, just a few days after I had completed a Navy reserve assignment at the Pentagon, terrorists flew a fuel-laden passenger jet into the Navy command center there. The terrorists killed a number of my shipmates on 9/11 and wounded and disabled others.

*There but for the Grace of God, I thought to myself.* And although unscathed myself, my world was changed forever, just as it was for many others that day.

Needless to say, I was thankful when some of those responsible for the Lockerbie bombers were arrested and tried. And I celebrated quietly when Osama Bin Laden met his fate.

But while there are memorials for those who were murdered, I have often asked myself what about the survivors, first responders, and those left behind? And what happens to victims in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, or Nigeria that must grapple with terrorist violence on an almost everyday basis?

Shortly after I started at the United Nations, Under-Secretary-General Voronkov stressed to me the importance Secretary-General Guterres and he place on making victims of terrorism one of the highest priorities of the Office of Counter-Terrorism.

He wondered why the public knows more about Anders Breivik than we do about his victims? Why does the world know more about Osama Bin Laden, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, or Patrick Crusius than:

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Amy O'Neill...Andriy Bazelevsky...Drissa Traore...  
Fahim Hakim...Gabrielle Davis...Hasan Wahab...Idriss Bouzidi Moulay...Nanda Olivia  
Daniel...Nidhi Chaphekar...  
Sarah Tikolo...Thelma Stober...

...or any of the 450 victims from more than 80 countries gathered here today? Or any of the thousands of others who have suffered?

The Secretary-General has challenged us to do more to help victims of terrorism. Because you are not nameless and faceless statistics. Because you are why we do what we do.

Your courage and your ability to create positive change out of adversity, your commitment to improve the recognition of and support provided to survivors at home and around the world—especially those who are struggling to cope and in need of help—is deeply inspiring.

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### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Terrorism is a global challenge that manifests itself in perverse forms across the world.

We see people affected in their own countries while going about their daily lives, or victimized while vacationing or working abroad. We see UN staff and peacekeepers killed in places like Iraq and Mali.

We see victims of sexual and gender-based violence at the hands of terrorists, and children groomed and forcibly recruited into terrorist ranks.

The trauma from these ordeals do not simply disappear.

They scar individuals, families and communities.

They can reverberate from generation to generation.

Combating this scourge requires dedication and a whole-of-society approach.

That is why the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism has taken up the Secretary-General's call to place victims at the centre of our efforts.

We are ready to work with you to find innovative ways to support the rights of victims to recognition, justice and reparations, to uphold their needs for protection and support.

We will continue to work with you to ensure that your voices are not only respected, supported and heard, but acted upon.

And, we will continue to support Member States in their efforts to better support victims and survivors.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

There is a new momentum at the international level to support victims of terrorism – a momentum this Congress is helping to build.

Just this past June the General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution urging international cooperation to assist victims. Two years ago it adopted another consensus resolution that establishes August 21 as the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism.

Led by Afghanistan and Spain, Member States have formed a Group of Friends of Victims of Terrorism at the United Nations to promote and drive this agenda forward.

We need to use these mechanisms to follow through on our promises of solidarity, truth, justice and dignity.

A new regulatory landscape on victims of terrorism must be developed.

Civil society must be more engaged.

The protections for the human rights of victims of terrorism in national legal systems must be strengthened.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In order to help realize these goals, next June the United Nations will hold its first-ever Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism as part of the Second Counter-Terrorism Week which will be dedicated to building institutional and social resilience.

The UN's Global Congress will be a platform to further amplify your voices, your messages, and your concerns and help drown out the terrorists' hateful ideologies.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Terrorists may have murdered our loved ones. They may have shattered bones or left visible and invisible scars. But they do not get to define who you are. Only you can do that. So we are here to listen to you, learn from your experiences and understand how we can strengthen our support to you.

Thank you for the privilege to be able to address you today.

I wish you all a very successful Congress.

Thank you.