



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

**Statement by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism**

**“Protecting Children Affected by Terrorism: A Global Priority”**

**A Joint UNOCT/UNCCT UNODC High-Level Event**

**To launch the UNOCT/UNCCT Handbook: “Children Affected by the Foreign-Fighter Phenomenon: Ensuring a Child Rights-Based Approach”  
and**

**To present the UNODC Comprehensive Training Package on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups**

**30 September 2019 - New York**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to start by welcoming you to this important event, which is co-organized by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

We are also grateful to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom of Belgium for their generous support, without which the development of the Handbook that we launch today on “Children affected by the Foreign-Fighter Phenomenon: Ensuring a Child Rights-Based Approach” would not have been possible.

We also thank Saudi Arabia and Japan for their co-sponsorship of this event, and the European Union and Japan for their significant engagement and support to partners on this important topic.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issue of children affected by terrorism, especially those affected by the foreign-fighter phenomenon, is transnational.

Designated terrorist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Boko Haram, have kidnapped, recruited and abused scores of children across national boundaries.

Many children have also travelled across borders with their families, members of which may be affiliated with armed groups, including designated terrorist groups.

We are now facing a problem that is as complex as it is unprecedented. Thousands of children of ISIL fighters and followers remain trapped in Syria and Iraq and are facing a multitude of challenges, including dire humanitarian conditions, with no end in sight.

Those born in areas under the control of armed and designated terrorist groups often lack birth registration or identity documentation and are at risk of statelessness.

In resolution 2396, the Security Council called upon Member States to assess and investigate suspected terrorists, including their children, and to take appropriate action, such as prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating these individuals.

However, some children, who themselves are merely alleged to be associated with these groups, are systematically arrested, detained, prosecuted and even convicted and sentenced to harsh penalties, in contravention of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law.

Last year, in his report on the Effects of Terrorism on the Enjoyment of Human Rights, Secretary-General Guterres emphasized that “the recruitment of children, regardless of the circumstances and methods employed, constitutes a violation of international law and leads to violence and exploitation. The recognition of child recruits as victims of crime is essential to giving them access to their rights as such, including the right to repatriation and rehabilitation measures.”

At the request of the Secretary-General, my Office coordinated an inter-agency effort to develop a set of “Key Principles for the Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women and Children with Links to UN Listed Terrorist Groups.”

These Key Principles, which were published in April, provide guidance to the United Nations system in offering practical assistance to Member States.

We also hope that Member States can take them into account when developing their own policies and programmes.

The Key Principles reiterate that all policies and actions affecting children should be firmly based on the principle of the “best interests of the child” as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and that children must be seen first and foremost as victims.

Complementary to the Key Principles, my Office developed this Handbook to support Member States in ensuring a human rights-based treatment of children affected by the foreign-fighter phenomenon, including in relation to the requirements under Security Council resolutions 2178 and 2396.

The Handbook incorporates the outcomes of two expert meetings with relevant UN agencies, civil society organizations and think tanks and three regional consultative meetings with government officials in South-East Asia, Europe and the Middle East and North Africa.

It provides guidance on relevant international human rights and humanitarian law and standards concerning eight issues in relation to children affected by the foreign-fighter phenomenon:

- First, ensuring child rights while addressing security concerns;
- Second, ensuring the right to nationality;
- Third, preserving family unity;
- Fourth, repatriation;
- Fifth, rehabilitation and reintegration;
- Sixth, juvenile justice;
- Seventh, deprivation of liberty; and,
- last but not least, data collection and exchange.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre within my Office and UNODC are committed to combining our efforts on children affected by terrorism to provide technical assistance to Member States upon request.

Moving forward, we will work together to support Member States in the implementation of the key guidance provided in this Handbook as part of our broader efforts to address the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and their families.

Let me close by underscoring how critical it is to ensure a human rights-based approach in the treatment of children affected by terrorism, and to ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration to prevent them from being recruited by armed groups, including designated terrorist groups.

I hope this Handbook will help Member States to adopt such an approach, not only to address current challenges, but also to help secure a future free from terrorism.

Thank you.