

**International conference on “Global Challenges and Threats in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Terrorism and Violent Extremism”**

*St. Petersburg, 15 April 2021*

**Opening remarks of**

**Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninsx  
Executive Director, CTED**

*Honourable representatives, excellencies, distinguished colleagues,*

**Allow me to begin by thanking the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism for inviting me to address you today.**

**As Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (or CTED), I am pleased to have the opportunity to inform you about CTED’s recent work on behalf of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee in addressing the global challenges and threats posed by terrorism and violent extremism, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**As the global community continues to grapple with the pandemic, CTED has been at the forefront in assessing and evaluating the impacts of the pandemic on terrorism, counter-terrorism, and countering violent extremism.**

**Although the pandemic does not appear to have increased the threat posed by ISIL or other terrorist groups in the short-term, it has nonetheless exacerbated many**

existing challenges, underlying issues that fuel radicalization to violence, and Member States' capacities to fight terrorism.

Because of the need to focus on combating the spread of the pandemic, many States have diverted counter-terrorism resources to aid their pandemic response and recovery efforts.

We have also seen that over the past year, an increasing portion of the global population has been spending more time online, owing to curtailed employment, educational, and entertainment opportunities.

This has exacerbated the threat posed by terrorist actors, who have taken the opportunity to exploit the Internet and other virtual platforms to spread violent extremist content and to recruit, radicalize, and spread their propaganda.

These challenges cannot be effectively addressed by a single State or international organization, acting alone.

More than ever before, it is essential to ensure a whole-of-society, human rights-compliant and gender-and age-sensitive approach, based on cooperation among a broad range of stakeholders.

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In response to the challenges imposed by the pandemic, CTED is now conducting hybrid assessment visits, each of which will consist of an initial virtual component and a subsequent physical component, to be conducted when the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions allows.

**These assessments continue to reveal the multiple challenges faced by Member States in their efforts to counter the terrorist threat.**

**With respect to challenges relating to returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters and their associated family members, I would like to highlight three dimensions where parliamentarians could play a significant role:**

**The first dimension relates to information-sharing, with respect in particular to collecting, using and sharing biometric data; financial intelligence; intelligence collected through the use of special investigative techniques; and the use of electronic evidence in cross-border counter-terrorism investigations.**

**Although there has been considerable technological progress in this area, many States have yet to develop the laws, policies and institutions required to ensure that these new tools are used effectively, appropriately, and responsibly.**

**Parliaments could play a significant role in ensuring that they are adopted at the national level and are also compliant with the rule of law.**

**The second dimension relates to strategies developed for the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals who return from the conflict zones.**

**Here again, parliaments can ensure that such strategies are effectively monitored and evaluated in full respect for international human rights law.**

**The third dimension concerns family members associated with FTFs, especially children, and women.**

**As victims, returning women and children require significant, tailored and long-term protection, rehabilitation and reintegration assistance.**

**Where women have played other active roles, we encourage States to implement programmes that address the gender dimensions of terrorism and violent extremism.**

**The efforts of parliamentary assemblies in this regard are key to identifying and sharing not only policies and measures that have worked well, but also those that continue to pose challenges.**

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**In order to address all these challenges (including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic) we must continue to enhance multilateralism, international cooperation, and our partnerships, including between international counter-terrorism bodies, parliamentarians and parliamentary assemblies.**

**I wish you all success in your deliberations and look forward to further strengthening our cooperation.**

*Thank you.*