



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF
Remembrance of and Tribute
to the Victims of Terrorism

SURVIVING TERRORISM

THE POWER OF CONNECTIONS

International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism

"Surviving Terrorism: The Power of Connections" High Level Event

20 August 2021, 9.00 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. EDT (online)

Statement by Ms. Amy O'Neill

United States

Under-Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
my fellow victims,
Ladies, and Gentlemen,

Thank you, everyone, for the moving and deeply personal words of solidarity and support during the high-level segment today, and for such a moving film, which we will talk more about soon.

Thank you, UNOCT, for all the essential work you do to support victims of terrorism and for opportunity to be here today to talk about the power of connection. It is truly an honor to share this opportunity with fellow victims and survivor friends from around the world.

I would like to welcome you all to this interactive discussion, with victims of terrorism and victims' associations from across the world. In a few moments, I will be introducing our panellists, Mr. Hasan Wahhab Al-Araji, from Iraq, Ms. Emma Craig from the UK, Mr. Bachir Znagui from Morocco and Ms. Maureen Basnicki, from Canada.

Each of them will share their experiences with you, and then we will have an interactive discussion together. But first, I would like to introduce myself and share some words about my experience and the importance of connections.

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My name is Amy O'Neill, and I am a survivor of the Boston Marathon bombing. I was caught up and injured in the second explosion.

There are traumatized victims and survivors all across the world. There are bereaved families and dramatically impacted communities --- due to the murderous, evil acts of terrorism. By design, terrorism is meant to kill us and break us apart, to turn us away from each other, our communities and our governments.

Each terror attack is distinct and unique, and each victim will have a very personal journey following an attack, but no matter where they occur, as we have already heard today, several aspects of the traumatic experience seem to cut across culture, language, and nationality. These common experiences link survivors together. They are the underpinnings for this healing force of connection.

The wounds suffered from terror attacks are both physical and psychological in nature – and they are of equal importance. Both types of injury are long-lasting and complex.

To be terrorized and traumatized is to have an experience with no language.

This means to have no ability to find the words to identify the sensations that have intruded into our bodies, no ability to name the feelings, no ability to articulate what it is that we need from family and friends, resulting in that sense of being unseen and misunderstood.

It is a challenge to make sense of what is happening inside your body and mind, especially without proper support.

Survival is lonely. I was lonely.

Loneliness was the best word to describe my experience. I was lost inside of myself, afraid to tell people what I was thinking about, I could not explain what I was feeling, I became unsure of how I felt about myself, how I felt about the world, so I kept quiet for a very long time. And it was a lonely and private pain.

The power of connection is difficult to describe. But the Victims and survivors -- you will know exactly what I mean.

Connection is what happens when you look into the eyes of another survivor and see --- really see each other. We know the desperate parts in each other longing to connect and feel understood and recognized.

We do not turn away from each other. We can tolerate the intolerable burden of looking, listening, and genuinely acknowledge each other's experiences that terrified and altered us, and do it with compassion.

We trust each other. There is a familiarity in the pain and suffering, and we find lost bits of ourselves in each other.

The connections help us find the words for the indescribable and burdensome identity of "victim."

We guide each other out of the loneliness of survival and the despair of being left behind.

Under-Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
my fellow victims,
Ladies, and Gentlemen,

These connections are not only powerful, but transformational.

Connection can be more potent than any other form of support, which is why events like this one today provide a vital opportunity for victims or survivors to heal--- together through influential and life-changing exchanges.

The International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to Victims of Terrorism serves as a platform for victims to come together, make connections, be seen, discover that common language, and be less lonely. We are now experiencing our pain in a partnership.

Finally, we must not forget about our friends in Afghanistan and in other conflict zones. Being a victim of terrorism is only one of the many layers of trauma they are experiencing, highlighting even more the importance of not forgetting and how vital connection is.

Closing remarks

The ideal partnership should also include recognition and support from the government, psychological services, financial compensation, and support for the existing organizations that are already in existence working with victims of terrorism. This partnership should restore faith that we matter, allow us to build trust with the government that you will protect us and guarantee that we are not forgotten.

Thank you for attending the commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism. To conclude today's event, we will finish with another

musical interlude from the UN Chamber Music Society, who will perform Ave Maria by Charles Gounod. Thank you.

Thank you.