

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
REMARKS ON THE OPENING OF MULTIMEDIA EXHIBITION:
“SURVIVING TERRORISM: VICTIMS’ VOICES”

New York, 17 August 2018

[as delivered]

Distinguished representatives of the victims and survivors of terrorism,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to welcome you this morning and to launch the exhibition to commemorate the first International Day of Remembrance of, and of Tribute to, the Victims of Terrorism.

Terrorism is one of the most challenging issues of our time and a serious threat to international peace and security. No country can consider itself immune, with almost every nationality in the world falling victim to terrorist attacks. The number and deadliness of these ruthless attacks on civilians has increased in recent years, shattering countless communities and individual lives.

The recent despicable attack on an education centre in Kabul, targeting children, is again something that shocked us all. I wanted to express to your people my deep solidarity.

The United Nations itself is regularly targeted. This week sees the 15th anniversary of the attack on the headquarters of the United Nations mission in Iraq, in which 22 people lost their lives. Many of them were United Nations staff, including our Special Representative, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Earlier this year, I visited Mali, where terrorists threaten our peacekeepers and civilian staff on a daily basis.

From Tajikistan to the United Kingdom, from Baghdad to Barcelona, ruthless attacks have shaken us all to the core.

But after terrorist attacks, we rarely hear about those who were killed and injured. Their stories too often go untold. Ordinary women, men, girls and boys, going about their daily lives, attending markets, schools, places of worship, sports events or concerts, or even standing in line to vote, when their lives were ended or changed forever.

And we rarely hear about their surviving families, friends and communities, who must learn to live with the burden of terrorism for their entire lives.

We rarely hear these stories. We hear numbers, and we move on.

It is time to stop and to listen to the victims and survivors of terrorism. It is time to raise up their voices and recognize the impact terrorism has on their lives.

We need to support victims and provide them with long-term assistance, including financial, legal, medical and psychosocial support.

Supporting victims and their families is a moral imperative, based on promoting, protecting and respecting their human rights.

It is also an effective means of countering the evil of terrorism, which aims first and foremost to alienate and to divide our societies. To support victims and to listen to their voices is a meaningful way for us to prove that we care – and to negate the terrorist [narrative].

I am very grateful to Under-Secretary-General [Vladimir] Voronkov for having put in the Office of Counter Terrorism the victims in the centre of our counter-terrorism policy.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The victims of terrorism are some of the most important voices we have in countering this global menace.

We can all learn from those who have experienced terrorism. Communities around the world are demonstrating their resilience in response to terrorist attacks. They are countering terrorism and violent extremism in their everyday lives, in their schools and in their places of worship.

They consistently call for more information to be shared during investigations, for more victim-centered criminal processes, and for justice.

Failing to support their calls would be failing in our responsibility to humanity.

When we lift up the victims and survivors of terrorism, when we listen to their voices, when we respect their rights and provide them with support and justice, we are honouring our common bonds, and reducing the lasting damage done by terrorists to individuals, families and communities.

The exhibition we will be seeing is a unique contribution to that goal. For the first time, we have gathered in one place the testimonials of individuals whose lives have been affected by terrorism, to hear first-hand how this has impacted their lives, and what they have achieved.

I applaud the courage and resilience of everyone represented here.

I thank those who are with us here today and who are willing to speak out against terrorism, and I thank the thousands of others who stand up and speak out every day, everywhere.

We are here for you and we are listening to you.

Your voices matter. Your courage in the face of adversity is a lesson inspiring us all.

Commemorating the forthcoming International Day of Remembrance, and of Tribute to, the Victims of Terrorism on the 21st of August is an opportunity to recognize, honour and support victims and survivors, and to lift up the voices of those left behind.

The United Nations stands in solidarity with you.

Thank you.