

Keynote address by Mr. Raffi Gregorian,

Director and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism

2022 International Symposium on Protection and Safety

Seoul, 20 October 2022

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank the Presidential Security Service (PSS) of the Republic of Korea for inviting me to deliver this keynote speech on behalf of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

Our world is facing complex and grave threats to international peace and security which include terrorism. According to the Global Terrorism Index, while the number of terrorist attacks increased by 17 per cent in 2021, the number of terrorism-related deaths decreased by slightly more than 1 per cent in the same year.

This decrease was primarily driven by a reduction in the intensity of conflict in the Middle East, as well as progress in counter-terrorism efforts. Hundreds, if not thousands of terrorist attacks have been foiled over the years – many of which are unknown to the public.

Yet, terrorism has continued to evolve. It has become geographically more diverse, ideologically more diverse and tactically more varied, with its impact felt across the globe.

Despite its global reach, nowhere has the impact of terrorism been more evident than in West Africa and the Sahel. Terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and Da'esh, as well as their affiliates, have intensified their attacks in parts of Africa, expanding from the Sahel to the Gulf of Guinea and the Lake Chad Basin.

These groups continue to promote chaos, kill and wound innocent civilians, exacerbate inter-communal tensions, contribute to humanitarian catastrophes, undermine state authority and upend development. They also continue to recruit and radicalize – exploiting grievances and resentment in marginalized groups.

Da'esh or ISIS remains active in Iraq and Syria, having launched last April a global campaign of enhanced operational activity to avenge the killings of senior leaders in counter-terrorism operations. And it has significantly increased the use of unmanned aerial systems in Iraq during the past year.

In Afghanistan, Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups continue to operate and have enjoyed greater freedom since the Taliban took over in August 2021. The brunt of the Taliban's rule has been borne by Afghan women and girls, whose most basic rights have since been severely restricted.

While groups like Al-Qaida and Da'esh remain the most significant terrorist threats globally, Member States are also concerned about terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief. Individuals and groups resorting to such tactics are increasingly making transnational connections, exploiting the online space to attract new recruits, share tactics and fundraise.

And, as we will hear in this symposium, terrorists are embracing new technologies, such as autonomous and remotely operated vehicles, such as unmanned aerial systems, which, when coupled with artificial intelligence, not only gives terrorists access to the third dimension of war, but presents them with opportunities to create so-called killer robots.

To counter terrorism and address its complexities, a functioning multilateral system is required to foster coordination and coherence, as well as human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive responses. The United Nations serves as the central platform in that system, led by its Office of Counter-Terrorism.

Established by the General Assembly in 2017, UNOCT has five main functions.

First, to provide leadership across the United Nations system on General Assembly counter-terrorism mandates.

Second, to enhance coordination and coherence to ensure the balanced implementation of the four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Third, to strengthen the delivery of United Nations counter-terrorism capacity-building assistance to Member States.

Fourth, to improve visibility, advocacy and resource mobilization for United Nations counter-terrorism efforts.

And fifth, to ensure that due priority is given to counter-terrorism across the United Nations system and that the important work on preventing violent extremism is firmly rooted in the Strategy.

This is an extensive and comprehensive mandate, with multiple stakeholders. To ensure coordination across the United Nations system, the Secretary-General established the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, with the support of a dedicated secretariat capacity within the Office of Counter-Terrorism something that the Republic of Korea supported since its inception.

Today, the Global Compact forms the largest coordination framework in the United Nations system, with 45 entities engaged. It has been instrumental in leveraging the different areas of expertise within the system and building synergies with our partners.

Another important part of our institutional infrastructure is our increasing field presence, which responds to requests from Member States to deliver capacity-building activities and technical assistance closer to our beneficiaries. We currently have Programme Offices in Budapest, Doha, Madrid, Nairobi and Rabat.

In addition, we have presences for coordination and liaison purposes in Ashgabat, Baghdad, Bangkok, Brussels and Ouagadougou.

We have also taken multiple steps to strengthen our collaboration with the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate with a view to aligning our capacity-building programmes with the analyses and needs identified through assessment visits by CTED.

Among our programmes, allow me to briefly mention those focusing on border security and management, as well as on cyber. Which as you may know, both have benefited from the generous contributions made by the Republic of Korea.

A few days ago, in Dushanbe, we held our first conference on border security and management against the backdrop of the situation in Afghanistan. This and other conferences organized by UNOCT serve not only to strengthen regional cooperation, but also to develop a common understanding and analysis of major issues in counter-terrorism.

UNOCT is also supporting Member States on countering the terrorist use of new and emerging technologies through our new CT Tech Initiative. Together with the United Nations International Crime and Justice Research Institute, we have also convened an expert group to identify good practices in using artificial intelligence to pool, map and analyse the social networks of terrorist groups and individuals.

To comply with UN Security Council resolution 2396 (2017), additional Member States are signing up for our Countering Terrorist Travel programme, which helps countries develop the legislative, regulatory, analytical, and software systems needed to harness the power of advance passenger information and passenger name record data, combined with biometrics and watch lists, to detect and intercept the movement of known and suspected terrorists and other serious criminals. The programme provides beneficiaries with the goTravel software, which recently went live in Norway, with 53 other countries in the pipeline.

We are also pushing ahead with the development of a cutting-edge software to counter terrorist financing and money-laundering, called goFintel, harnessing the power of artificial intelligence, benefitting from our partnership with Pusan University. This software will be developed in collaboration with United Nations Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT) in full compliance with international standards on human rights and due diligence process

Informing and framing the work of UNOCT in all its areas of work, there is the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which I mentioned already.

The Strategy, which the General Assembly adopted by consensus in 2006, is the cornerstone of international counter-terrorism cooperation. Member States take stock of its implementation and update it every second year. The next review, to take place in 2023, will represent an important opportunity for renewing international attention on counter-terrorism efforts.

The UNOCT-led Counter-Terrorism Week will be held around the time of the adoption of the resolution on the Strategy review.

One of the pillars of the Strategy includes measures to ensure the respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.

Vague or overly broad definitions of terrorism acts in domestic legislation, as well as disproportionate or indiscriminate responses to terrorism, not only have an adverse impact on human rights and the rule law, but also may be counter productive as they can contribute to further radicalization.

Promoting human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive responses, and building capacities to that effect, are therefore a critical element of the work of UNOCT, and are built-in to programmes like CT Travel.

As we move forward into 2023, UNOCT will also contribute to the preparation of the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace. We intend to ensure this important document adequately reflects the complexity around terrorism in the global peace and security landscape, as well as steps that could be undertaken to ensure the effectiveness of "all-of-UN" efforts to counter and prevent terrorism and violent extremism.

In addition, in October 2023, UNOCT is organizing with the Government of Nigeria and other partners a high-level counter-terrorism summit in Abuja, on the theme "Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Institutional Building to Address the Evolving Threat of Terrorism in Africa".

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We seek to strengthen our cooperation with the Republic of Korea, which is an important contributor of funds, knowledge, and even staff to UNOCT. Korean funds have made possible our Connect & Learn platform, contributed to sports security initiatives, helped us develop next-generation tools for countering the financing of terrorism, and shared COVID-19 related border management good practices with the rest of the world.



UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

We share a collective pursuit of safety and security, of human rights for all and sustainable development, and a world free from terrorism. And if your bid to join the Security Council in 2024 is successful, I know we will be able to do much more together.

Thank you.