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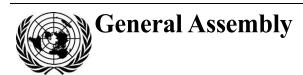
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The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Activities of the United Nations system in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1.   The present report is provided as an update to my previous report on the activities of the United Nations system in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/74/677), which was issued in February 2020 in accordance with General Assembly resolution 72/284. In its decision 74/556, the Assembly postponed to its seventy-fifth session the seventh biennial review of the Strategy because of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The update provides a supplementary account of the progress made in 2020 in implementing the Strategy and should be considered in conjunction with the previous report.

2.   The threat posed by terrorism to international peace and security, sustainable development and human rights has not diminished during the pandemic. Pre-pandemic trends in global terrorism have continued to evolve in different ways in conflict and non-conflict zones. The pandemic has magnified several emerging challenges at a time when many Member States have had to shift resources from counter-terrorism efforts in order to address needs in response to the pandemic, adding to the relevance of the observations and recommendations made in the previous report.

3.   Despite practical difficulties resulting from measures necessary to contain the spread of COVID-19, United Nations entities, through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, continued throughout 2020 to actively support Member States in developing and implementing balanced responses to terrorism that take into consideration all four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

II. Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the evolving global terrorism landscape

4. Terrorism-related attacks and deaths have declined since 2017 in most regions of the world according to the Global Terrorism Index published by the Institute for Economics and Peace,[1] which is a sign of the partial success of international counter-terrorism efforts. Nevertheless, terrorist activity over the past year shows that terrorism remains a major international threat. Several trends have accelerated, and emerging challenges have come further to the fore. The political and socioeconomic fallout of the pandemic could also fuel the threat of terrorism in the mid- to long-term by exacerbating underlying conditions and making more people susceptible to terrorist radicalization and recruitment.

A. Current threat landscape

5. The global threat posed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Qaida and their affiliates has remained throughout the pandemic, reflecting pre-existing trends, despite the rivalry between the groups and the death of several of their senior leaders. Through social media posts and propaganda leaflets, both groups sought to use the virus to support their narratives, describing the pandemic as "divine punishment" and calling for supporters to stage attacks while Governments were "weakened and distracted". They equally sought to gain legitimacy by providing health advice and, in the case of Al-Shabaab, social services. Increased operational activity by ISIL, Al-Qaida and their affiliates translated into significant levels of violence in conflict zones, especially in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia the Syrian Arabic Republic, West Africa and the Sahel, fuelling further suffering, displacement, hardship and grievances.

6. ISIL has not adopted a significant strategic shift since the change of leadership in late 2019 following the death of its former leader. The group continued to consolidate as a covert network and endeavoured to reassert itself in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, where it conducted attacks to maintain relevance and disrupt efforts towards stabilization, reconstruction and recovery. ISIL also continued to provide further autonomy to its regional affiliates, which perpetrated numerous large-scale attacks in 2020, including against civilians and health and educational institutions. Signs of potential expansion of the ISIL threat through local affiliates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique are particularly worrying.

7. Despite the territorial defeat of ISIL in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, thousands of terrorists remain at large and could relocate to other conflict zones and fragile areas, posing a mid- to long-term global threat. Thousands of women and children with links to ISIL remain stranded in camps such as the Hawl camp in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. The pandemic has further delayed the voluntary repatriation of foreigners, which is urgently needed, including to protect the children among them. Departures of Syrians from the camp, halted in early 2020 because of the pandemic, restarted in the fourth quarter. Practical challenges and fear caused by COVID-19 have made the humanitarian, human rights and security situations ever more acute and precarious in camp settings. ISIL launched COVID-19-related social media fundraising campaigns ostensibly to support women and children in the Hawl camp. On 18 October, it once again called for jailbreaks to release detainees and their dependants. According to Member States, a number of ISIL-affiliated female camp residents have already escaped.

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[1] *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, available from www.visionofhumanity.org/resources.

8. Outside conflict zones, low-frequency and low-impact attacks claimed by ISIL and Al-Qaida have continued since the onset of the pandemic. Restrictions on travel and public gatherings have made it harder for terrorists to travel, meet, recruit, locate targets and mount attacks. At the same time, ISIL and Al-Qaida have taken advantage of the pandemic to reinvigorate their online propaganda and incitement efforts, targeting young people in particular.

9. The terrorist attacks in Maldives in April, in France in September and October and in Austria in November 2020 served as stark reminders that the threat of homegrown attacks by lone individuals or small cells inspired by ISIL and Al-Qaida remains potent outside conflict zones. This situation continues to be fuelled by terrorist radicalization in prisons, while challenges also remain to ensure the effective rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorism offenders. Moreover, ISIL has expressed its intention to conduct further international attacks. Regional affiliates could provide new springboards in this respect.

10. The transnational threat from racially, ethnically or ideologically motivated individuals and groups resorting to terrorist tactics, variously described as "white supremacist", "far-right" or "extreme right-wing", has also increased. These groups have sought to capitalize on the COVID-19 crisis in order to increase and diversify their support base, including by accelerating pre-existing trends of social polarization and cultural manipulation. Violence is often perpetrated through low-cost, low-tech, copycat attacks by unaffiliated individuals or small groups, targeting soft and symbolic targets, such as places of worship. Several States in Western Europe, North America and Oceania now consider this to be the fastest growing or even the most prominent domestic security threat that they face, as discussed at an open briefing held in October 2020 by the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism.

11. Such groups are ideologically and organizationally fragmented, frequently informed by racism, neo-Nazism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or anti-Muslim intolerance, racial supremacism, ultranationalism, xenophobia, intolerance related to sexual orientation or gender identity, and misogyny. Not all Member States regarded such groups as a threat to international peace and security in 2020, but increasing evidence of their transnational dimensions has been exposed through investigation, information exchange and cooperation between States. This includes international travel, networking, communication and mutual inspiration through cyberspace. The phenomenon poses frontier challenges, including the use of cryptocurrencies for financing, gamification in recruitment efforts, an ecosystem of social media platforms and websites resilient to take-down operations, and narratives that use ambivalent and coded language to avoid being classified as unlawful speech.

B. Emerging threats and challenges magnified by the COVID-19 crisis

12. I warned in April that the lack of preparedness exposed by the COVID-19 outbreak provided a window into how a bioterrorist attack might unfold. The vulnerability of societies to viral infections and their potential for large-scale disruption, as demonstrated by the pandemic, may serve to inspire the use of biological or other weapons of mass destruction. Terrorist groups such as ISIL and other violent extremists have called for the weaponization of COVID-19, raising the spectre of bioterrorism.

13. The pandemic also reinforced concerns over the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) by terrorists. A significant rise in the online spread of hate speech, conspiracy theories and other harmful content – though not necessarily unlawful – has caused a so-called global infodemic. Within this context, terrorists and

violent extremists across the ideological spectrum have ramped up their use of social media to broaden their appeal and incite to violence susceptible individuals spending more time online. They have stoked the fear, anxieties and grievances caused by the virus and measures taken by Governments during the health emergency.

14.   The growing risk of cyberdisruption of critical infrastructure by criminal actors has also increased as malicious software and the technical skills to use it become more widely available. At the same time, the pandemic has boosted reliance on ICTs across all sectors of life, thus increasing exposure to cyberthreats.

15.   A surge in cybercrime and new patterns in fraud, trafficking and counterfeiting could in turn have an impact on the linkages between terrorism and organized crime, which are multifaceted, opportunistic and context-specific, as I noted in my report on action taken by Member States and United Nations entities to address the issue of linkages between terrorism and organized crime (S/2020/754), which was submitted to the Security Council pursuant to its resolution 2482 (2019).

III.   Countering terrorism during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

A.   Reinvigorating the multilateral response

16.   Countering terrorism during and after the COVID-19 pandemic served as the focus of Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week, convened by the Office of Counter-Terrorism from 6 to 10 July. Discussions during the event and submissions by 50 Member States and 15 international and regional organizations to prepare the present report,[2] as well as feedback from 53 civil society organizations, echo the observations and recommendations made in my previous report. Countering terrorism requires a reinvigorated multilateral response that respects international law and the Charter of the United Nations and is responsive to the realities of contemporary issues and a globalized world. Such an approach needs to be principled, inclusive, comprehensive and forward-looking, as provided by the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Networked international cooperation can leverage the comparative advantages of the United Nations, regional organizations, civil society, academic institutions and the private sector in support of the responsibility of Member States to prevent and counter terrorism. Security responses also need to be complemented by meaningful long-term prevention efforts that address conditions conducive to terrorism. Human rights, gender equality and the rights and needs of victims of terrorism have to underpin all such efforts, not only in law, but also in practice.

17.   Member States have maintained operational readiness and have sought to use virtual means to continue to cooperate with each other, the United Nations and regional organizations in order to strengthen their capacities, including through training and legislative and policy work. The Security Council, in its resolution 2532 (2020), stated that it supported my appeal for an immediate global ceasefire and affirmed that its demand for a general and immediate cessation of hostilities and for a humanitarian pause in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic did not apply to military operations against ISIL and other terrorist groups that it had designated.

18.   However, the COVID-19 pandemic has put acute pressure on national resources, often already severely stretched, especially in countries most affected by or vulnerable to terrorism. Some Member States shifted resources away from counter-

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[2] A list of the entities that submitted information is contained in annex I to the present report. Submissions from Member States and international and regional organizations are available to Member States from the Office of Counter-Terrorism upon request.

terrorism, redeployed security forces to support pandemic relief efforts and scaled back their participation in multinational military counter-terrorism operations. International counter-terrorism cooperation needs to be not only sustained but also reinvigorated through an inclusive approach and a strategic and comprehensive investment in prevention.

B. Breaking the cycle of terrorist violence

19. Terrorism remains a potent and even immediate threat in many regions and countries. Deterring, disrupting and foiling terrorist attacks and bringing suspected terrorism offenders to justice will have to remain a priority during and after the pandemic, in accordance with international law, relevant international legal instruments against terrorism, relevant Security Council resolutions and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Member States could exchange information and experiences regarding practical challenges and emerging issues to be better prepared in the future.

20. The United Nations system will continue to support requesting Member States so that they can meet their obligations under international law and enhance their capacities to counter terrorist groups, including through: strengthening border security and countering terrorist travel; enhancing the use of intelligence, including financial intelligence; suppressing the financing of terrorism and addressing its evolving linkages with organized crime; denying terrorists access to weapons; and investigating and collecting admissible evidence. In keeping with Security Council resolutions, timely information exchange and cooperation among Member States is paramount, using practical mechanisms and tools such as those provided by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

21. Concretizing effective strategies for prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration that are based on human rights and the rule of law and take gender and age into account remains especially urgent. Accountability is essential to break the cycle of terrorist violence and impunity. The pandemic has created practical obstacles in the administration of criminal justice, which some States have sought to overcome through virtual means, such as remote hearings, to prevent delays while ensuring due process. The risk of viral infection has added pressure on detention facilities, often overcrowded and underresourced, that are holding suspected or convicted terrorism offenders. This has raised the prospect of alternative sentences, probation and the early release of terrorist offenders. Challenges also remain in developing and implementing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes to prevent recidivism, while such programmes have been suspended in some countries as a result of the pandemic.

22. The situation is continually worsening in facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic that hold individuals thought to be affiliated with terrorism. Already limited efforts to repatriate foreign terrorist fighters and their dependants from both Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic have been further reduced during the pandemic. With children and women subject to ongoing trauma and violence at the hands of ISIL supporters, the crisis continues to entail possible breaches of international human rights and humanitarian law obligations, thereby challenging the credibility and impact of international counter-terrorism efforts. The United Nations system has continued to help to share the experiences of and to support Member States seeking to repatriate their nationals. A global framework launched in August, co-led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with the participation of 13 other entities, offers Member States coordinated, field-driven support to address the protection needs, human rights, security and accountability imperatives of children and adults affiliated with United Nations-listed terrorist groups who are stranded in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

C. Increasing support for victims of terrorism

23. Upholding the rights and needs of victims of terrorism, including victims of sexual and gender-based violence and children affected by terrorism, is central to accountability, healing and prevention in order for societies to break free from terrorist violence. However, the progress made in recent years risks being eroded owing to challenges related to the pandemic, which has placed additional burdens on victims by triggering or adding to their trauma and isolating them from support networks. Access to vital services, such as criminal justice processes and psychological support, has been interrupted, delayed or suspended. International support for victims of terrorism, including the prominent role played by civil society organizations in this regard, should remain central to the counter-terrorism agenda.

24. Building on the information that I shared in my report on progress made by the United Nations system in supporting Member States in assisting victims of terrorism (A/74/790), in which I recommended the establishment of a voluntarily funded programme to support States in providing durable assistance to such victims, the United Nations has continued to prioritize victims of terrorism. The first United Nations Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism will be held in June 2021, in addition to the annual commemoration of International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism.

D. Building forward better for resilient societies

25. The COVID-19 crisis has laid bare profound inequalities, simmering grievances and fissures in the social compact between people and their Governments in many countries. The difficulties faced by Governments in mustering an effective response to the virus, in some instances accompanied by heavy-handed approaches, missteps and purported corruption, have exacerbated disenchantment and anti-government sentiment. The damage to many economies threatens to result in lasting high levels of unemployment and poverty. The economic downturn and the potential reduction or reallocation of resources may disproportionately affect already underserved areas and marginalized communities. Such circumstances are amenable to terrorist recruitment.

26. The pandemic is a wake-up call for whole-of-society efforts within and between countries to recover better together. This resonates with recommendations that I made in my previous report for a strategic investment in prevention and resilience against terrorism, by building strong institutions and effective governance and integrating efforts to address violent extremism conducive to terrorism with the pursuit of sustainable development, the sustaining peace agenda and human rights.

27. A rise in polarization and mistrust, stoked by terrorists and violent extremists, has to be countered. Immunity to hate speech is built over time through free speech, pluralist debate, dialogue, bridge-building, global citizenship education and media and information literacy. Rejecting the normalization of hate-fuelled ideas and language and strengthening the social fabric is a shared responsibility across all segments of society. An alliance of civilizations is needed more than ever to promote mutual respect and understanding and to unambiguously reject violent extremism conducive to terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, including the growing transnational threat from racially, ethnically and ideologically motivated right-wing or supremacist groups that resort to terrorist tactics.

E. Rising to the challenges and opportunities of new technologies

28.   The rapid adoption of new technologies in the digital era brings a plethora of related security risks. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the dependence of the public, private and civil society sectors on ICTs to substitute in-person interactions, with lasting adjustments to business models, government services and the nature and modalities of work and entertainment. An increase in cyberattacks and cybercrime during the pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities accompanying digital transformation, the potential for large-scale disruption and the rapidly evolving intersection between digital technologies and terrorism. Encryption, mobile payment systems, online crowdfunding and virtual assets can be abused to finance terrorism. Artificial intelligence is enabling audio and video deep fakes that could challenge identity verification and create impersonations to fuel conspiracy theories and hatred. Social media and online gaming are misused to spread hate speech and terrorist content. Cyberattacks by or at the behest of terrorists against critical infrastructure, including against health facilities such as hospitals, could lead to a significant loss of life.

29.   Closing regulatory loopholes and human and technological capability gaps exploited by cybercriminals requires Member States to work together with industry, academic institutions and civil society. It is especially urgent that States develop the legislative and technical tools to access, collect, store, use and exchange electronic evidence, strictly in accordance with international law. At the same time, the potential of digital technologies to prevent and counter crime and terrorism has to be harnessed responsibly, within the frameworks of the rule of law and human rights, in particular the right to privacy.

30.   Similarly, greater international cooperation, partnerships and investment are needed to counter the risk of biological terrorist attacks, including through public health surveillance, health-care capacity and non-proliferation. In this respect, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction will be reviewed in late 2021. Member States have to jointly build capacities to prevent, detect and respond to a wide range of infectious disease risks, whether natural, accidental or deliberate in origin. In August, a working group on biorisks was launched, co-led by the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the World Health Organization, to ensure an "all-of-United Nations" approach among entities working in the field of biosecurity.

F. Embedding human rights and gender equality

31.   In February 2020, in my call to action for human rights, I reaffirmed human rights as central to the work of the entire United Nations. The COVID-19 pandemic – itself a human rights crisis – has seen a rise in hate speech, xenophobia, the targeting of vulnerable groups and heavy-handed security responses. The pandemic has also been used as a pretext for repressive measures, in particular in countries where human rights are not respected.

32.   Counter-terrorism has continued to be invoked and counter-terrorism measures misused by some Governments to repress perceived dissent and human rights defenders, including instances of reprisal for engagement with the United Nations. Serious concerns remain over the lack in some jurisdictions of precise legal definitions of terrorism and violent extremism, and adequate safeguards to ensure that counter-terrorism measures are law-based, necessary, justified, proportionate and non-discriminatory, in compliance with international law. Efforts to combat terrorism must not compromise human rights in any circumstance.

33.   An urgent focus is therefore needed, supported by renewed political commitment and adequate resources, to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law in the implementation of all four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Human rights should inform a nuanced, context-specific analysis of the conditions conducive to terrorism and guide the development, implementation, oversight, monitoring and evaluation of comprehensive policies and measures to prevent and counter terrorism and the underlying spread of violent extremism.

34.   Ensuring gender equality needs to be integral to these efforts. Progress in gender-sensitive analysis of the drivers of terrorism, including to understand the role of misogyny and the roles of women and girls in terrorism and prevention, is positive but insufficient. Counter-terrorism efforts have to uphold women's rights and enable their meaningful participation, while avoiding their instrumentalization. This is all the more urgent as the pandemic has led to increased levels of violence against women.

35.   Similarly, protecting civic space in the context of counter-terrorism is intrinsic to the human rights-based approach provided by the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. It is a prerequisite for civil society actors to be able to make vital contributions to strengthening social cohesion, building resilience and leaving no one behind in addressing the multiple scourges of COVID-19, intolerance and terrorism. In September 2020, the United Nations system adopted a guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space in order to enhance its efforts in this regard.

36.   In response to calls by Member States, the Office of Counter-Terrorism plans to organize, in partnership with Spain, an international high-level conference in 2021 on human rights, civil society and counter-terrorism, which will allow Member States and civil society actors to share practical experiences and good practices on ensuring that counter-terrorism responses fully protect and promote human rights and the rule of law.

G.   Enabling principled humanitarian action

37.   The world is facing the worst humanitarian crisis in many decades as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The poorest and most vulnerable, especially women and children, have been hardest hit. It is vital that counter-terrorism measures do not prevent the effective delivery of principled humanitarian aid to such populations, in full respect of international law.

38.   The Security Council, in its resolution 2462 (2019), urged Member States to take into account the potential effect of counter-terrorism measures on exclusively humanitarian activities carried out by impartial humanitarian actors in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law when designing and applying such measures. National derogation, authorization or licensing systems should comply with international humanitarian law. At the same time, upholding the impartiality of humanitarian actors and refraining from any politicization of humanitarian assistance are critical, given that humanitarian actors are increasingly operating in settings with an active terrorist threat and being targeted by terrorists.

IV.   Progress made by United Nations entities in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

39.   Despite the practical challenges caused by the measures necessary to contain COVID-19, United Nations entities, through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, continued to actively support Member States throughout 2020 in developing and implementing balanced responses to terrorism that

take into consideration all four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. I reported to the Security Council on progress during the first half of 2020 to support Member States in countering the threat posed by ISIL to international peace and security (see S/2020/774), and the Office of Counter-Terrorism organized virtual briefings for Member States in May and November.

A. Business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic

40. Mandate delivery, coordination and programme implementation continued apace from January to March. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, United Nations entities adjusted to restrictions on travel and in-person meetings to ensure business continuity through virtual means. The heads of the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continued uninterrupted their engagement with representatives of Member States, regional organizations, special representatives of the Secretary-General and United Nations resident coordinators.

41. The Office of Counter-Terrorism convened a scaled-down Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week from 6 to 10 July and organized a regional high-level conference in February, jointly with Switzerland and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, focused on current challenges related to foreign terrorist fighters.

42. In March 2020, the Office of Counter-Terrorism finalized and started to roll out a strategy for systematic and meaningful engagement with a variety of civil society organizations at the global, regional and national levels, including by exploring partnerships, structured consultations and mutual sharing of best practices with civil society on all four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Two outreach round-table meetings were held to consult civil society organizations, following up on dedicated civil society workshops preceding the regional high-level conferences organized by the Office in Abu Dhabi in December 2019 and in Vienna in February 2020. A survey was also conducted in early 2021 to establish a baseline against which to measure progress in the implementation of the Office's civil society engagement strategy. These efforts are supported by civil society focal points in the Office.

43. The inter-agency process under the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact held over 60 virtual meetings with the support of a dedicated secretariat capacity within the Office of Counter-Terrorism, including increased engagement with field staff and in-depth thematic discussions. Through the Compact, the United Nations system further strengthened its engagement with the Global Counterterrorism Forum, notably with the launch of joint initiatives to develop technical guidance tools.

44. In March, the Office of Counter-Terrorism launched the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Platform, an online password-protected portal that facilitates coordination, collaboration and easy sharing of and access to information among entities of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact and interested Member States. Focal points nominated by 126 Member States have already been granted access. The Platform makes the technical assistance recommendations of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate accessible to United Nations entities for the first time , in line with Security Council resolution 2395 (2017).

45. United Nations entities incorporated flexible approaches to providing capacity-building, using webinars, online training workshops and electronic learning solutions such as the Counter-terrorism Learning Platform of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-

Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate developed remote needs assessment methodologies in support of joint efforts such as the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme.

46. The Office of Counter-Terrorism concluded agreements with the Governments of Morocco, Qatar and Spain to open programme offices in those countries in support of its capacity-building work. In Doha, in partnership with Qatar, the Office launched an international hub on behavioural insights to counter terrorism. It also deployed programme coordination staff to Kyrgyzstan and the Sudan.

47. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, in particular through the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, is currently implementing 56 capacity-building programmes benefiting over 170 Member States. In 2020, it trained more than 3,200 people. During the same period, it conducted 73 expert meetings, 17 scoping and deep-dive missions and exercises, and 86 outreach events.[3]

48. The capacity-building work of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre was showcased through a "virtual expo" launched during Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week in July. An independent evaluation of the Centre was conducted from January to May 2020 and a final report was submitted in October with 16 recommendations in the areas of programme management and governance, monitoring and evaluation and the development of a results culture. The recommendations will inform the development of a strategic programmatic framework to guide the work of the Centre following the seventh biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

49. Examples of the work conducted by United Nations entities under each pillar of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy over the past year are presented below.

B. Pillar I: measures to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism

50. United Nations entities continued to actively encourage and support Member States in identifying and comprehensively addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism, taking into account the seven priority areas put forward in my Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/70/674). These efforts build on the transformative and often vital support provided to Member States across the Organization's three pillars of work.

51. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) trained teachers on transformative pedagogy for resilience to violent extremism in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad and the Niger. In June, UNESCO and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre organized a webinar on the theme "Youth and digital spaces: addressing and countering the exploitation of the COVID-19 pandemic using media and ICTs". In July, UNODC published a technical guide entitled *Preventing Violent Extremism through Sport*. In September, the Office of Counter-Terrorism organized a high-level event followed by a technical meeting on promoting sport and its values as a tool to prevent violent extremism.

52. Through a new youth engagement and empowerment programme against violent extremism conducive to terrorism launched in January, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre developed 10 online training modules for peer-to-peer youth

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[3] Annex II provides a complete list of the Member States and Permanent Observers that contribute to the trust fund for counter-terrorism in support of the Office of Counter-Terrorism.

engagement and delivered 25 training events to over 600 participants from 25 Member States. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) initiated a project to increase youth resilience to violent extremism in Tajikistan. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute continued to develop tailored training and empowerment activities for young leaders in Mali, and in October it published a report on the impact of terrorism on young Malians.

53. UNDP, UNICEF, UNODC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) initiated a project to support the sustainable reintegration of ISIL-affiliated families in nine pilot areas in Iraq, which facilitated the return of 2,731 families. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the International Organization for Migration continued to support, in partnership with national authorities and women-led civil society organizations, the provision of rehabilitation and reintegration services for women formerly associated with Al-Shabaab. Community-based activities were complemented by the construction of two rehabilitation centres for women.

54. My Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide continued to coordinate system-wide implementation of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, including support for United Nations entities in the field. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre developed a COVID-19 crisis communications toolkit and delivered remote technical assistance on strategic communications to 199 participants from over 55 Member States, including on addressing hate speech used by terrorists. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute conducted research and published a report on the malicious use of social media by terrorist, violent extremist and organized criminal groups during the pandemic. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate issued two trend alerts highlighting Member States' concern over the growing and increasingly transnational threat posed by extreme right-wing terrorism.

55. UNDP continued to support Member States in Africa and Asia in developing and implementing national plans of action to prevent violent extremism. It also published new research and policy briefs to strengthen the evidence base, exploring issues such as the impact of climate change and a study on entry and exit points for violent extremism in South-east Asia. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs continued to support efforts to prevent violent extremism in a number of contexts in which it is engaged, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Central Asia, West Africa and the Sahel and the Central African region. The Department of Peace Operations continued to support Burkina Faso and Mali in mainstreaming such efforts into their national security policy and security sector reform processes.

C. Pillar II: measures to prevent and combat terrorism

56. The implementation of the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism continued in support of 38 confirmed beneficiary States. The programme developed materials to train passenger information unit personnel and included a maritime component in its scope. Since December 2019, seven deep-dive assessment missions led by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and five legislative reviews led by UNODC have been completed. An online training course on using travel information to detect terrorist travel was finalized and piloted for Botswana in October.

57. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre developed a dedicated website to promote the *United Nations Compendium of recommended practices for the responsible use and sharing of biometrics in counter-terrorism* and initiated with the

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate a joint initiative on terrorist threats in the maritime domain. The International Maritime Organization strengthened its support in West and Central Africa, the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden within regional initiatives to counter illicit acts at sea, including maritime terrorism and criminal acts that fund terrorism. The International Civil Aviation Organization continued to support States in preventing acts of unlawful interference and enhancing global civil aviation security. In September, it published an updated overview of threats and risks to civil aviation, which included an updated assessment of risks to aviation from terrorism and advice on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on aviation security.

58. In response to Security Council resolution 2462 (2019), the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre continued to implement, in consultation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, UNODC, INTERPOL and the Office of Information and Communications Technology, a global coordinated capacity-building programme on detecting, preventing and countering the financing of terrorism, including the development of new software, goFintel, to assist States in collecting, analysing and disseminating financial intelligence. UNODC provided targeted assistance to over 15 Member States on countering the financing of terrorism and developed an electronic learning module on financial disruption for counter-terrorism.

59. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, in partnership with UNODC, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office for Disarmament Affairs, launched a project on addressing the terrorism-arms-crime nexus in Central Asia to support the implementation of Security Council resolution 2370 (2017). In June, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research launched a maturity model and self-assessment tool to assist Member States and the United Nations system in countering the threat from improvised explosive devices.

60. The Office of Counter-Terrorism launched: in January, a programme to assist Member States in Africa in establishing counter-terrorism fusion cells to better share and use information; in February, a global programme on the security of major sporting events; and, in April, a global programme on countering terrorist threats against vulnerable targets.

61. UNODC and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate launched a global initiative with regional organizations on strengthening States' capacities to obtain digital evidence from private communications service providers in cross-border investigations. Following an expert meeting in April, UNODC began to develop a training module on digital evidence. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre organized a workshop for 15 Member States in Africa on critical infrastructure protection from terrorist cyberattacks and training for law enforcement officials in Malaysia and Central Asia on investigating terrorist activities online. These efforts were consolidated through an expanded global counter-terrorism programme on cybersecurity and new technologies. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute held several expert-level workshops on technology solutions to combat the malicious use of social media by non-State actors during the pandemic and a joint webinar with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre on the theme "COVID-19 and future pandemics: the spectre of bioterrorism".

62. The Office for Disarmament Affairs continued to build capacity to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to non-State actors, including for terrorist purposes. Notably, it organized a national workshop on biosecurity and biosafety in the Dominican Republic and an online regional seminar to support the implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) in South Asia. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons organized 22 online capacity-building and international cooperation events to promote the implementation of the

Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, which benefitted over 650 participants from States in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America.

63. UNODC launched a webinar series on investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating cases of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear terrorism. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre continued to support Member States in preventing and responding to weapons of mass destruction and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear terrorism through six pilot projects, a global portfolio of 20 training courses and a global study by the Centre and INTERPOL on the threat of weapons of mass destruction and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear terrorism. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute organized a series of virtual capacity-building training sessions for law enforcement in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon aimed at preventing the trafficking of radiological and nuclear materials, and partnered with the Centre in a project to enhance knowledge about advances in science and technology to combat terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction.

D. Pillar III: measures to build States' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and strengthen the role of the United Nations system in this regard

64. The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team continued to provide regular threat assessments, including to assist other United Nations entities. INTERPOL continued to facilitate analytical support and information exchange, including on foreign terrorist fighters, with 91 countries that had signed up to its counter-terrorism crime analysis file. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) continued to strengthen the capacities of States in Africa for conflict and threat analysis, and UNDP supported the African Union in integrating the monitoring of violent extremism into its Continental Early Warning System.

65. UNODC delivered several training sessions on its Counter-terrorism Learning Platform, benefiting over 1,000 criminal justice and law enforcement officials since the start of the pandemic. It implemented a range of activities focused, for instance, on addressing foreign terrorist fighters and the linkages between terrorism and organized crime. It also increased targeted capacity-building support for Member States, including in the Sahel and Mozambique.

66. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia continued to implement the third phase of the joint plan of action project to promote the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia, while the Centre continued to support the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior in developing an Arab security vision based on the Strategy. The Centre worked on the development of a virtual expert network and a handbook to promote South-South cooperation in preventing and countering terrorism. UNDP, UNODC and the Centre continued to jointly implement two projects with the European Union, one on strengthening resilience to violent extremism in Asia and one on preventing violent extremism by promoting tolerance and respect for diversity in South-east Asia. The Office of Counter-Terrorism launched a counter-terrorism partnership project between the United Nations and the European Union to support the Sudan and led the development of an "all-of-United Nations" counter-terrorism assistance package for consideration by Mozambique.

67. In September, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre launched a global programme on prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration, in cooperation with the

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and other United Nations entities. The programme provides a strategic framework for coordinated and coherent support for States in developing human rights-based, age- and gender-sensitive prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration approaches that are comprehensive and tailored to the situations of individuals suspected of affiliation with terrorism, including suspected foreign terrorist fighters and their dependants. The Centre, UNODC and the Executive Directorate also continued to implement a project to support the management of violent extremist prisoners and prevent terrorist radicalization in prisons in Kazakhstan, Tunisia and Uganda.

E. Pillar IV: measures to ensure the protection of human rights and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism

68.   The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism submitted thematic reports on the interface between international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the context of counter-terrorism (A/75/337) and on the human rights impact of policies and practices aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (A/HRC/43/46). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) submitted a report with recommendations on ensuring accountability in the context of terrorism and counter-terrorism and upholding the rights of victims in accordance with international human rights law (A/HRC/45/27).

69.   In October, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and OHCHR conducted a week-long workshop for Cameroon leading to the adoption of standardized training modules and a national action plan on the teaching of human rights in the counter-terrorism context. In the same month, UNODC resumed specialized training for Iraqi officials on human rights-compliant and gender-inclusive investigation, prosecution and adjudication of terrorism-related cases. UNITAR partnered with the Centre, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and OHCHR to develop an electronic learning course on human rights in the context of counter-terrorism in Central Asia.

70.   From 25 May to 5 July, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact working group on adopting a gender-sensitive approach to counter-terrorism conducted global digital consultations with more than 140 civil society representatives on the gender-related dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism responses. Led by UN-Women and funded by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the consultations resulted in a public statement by civil society organizations and a series of technical publications shared with Member States and the United Nations system.

71.   The Office of Counter-Terrorism, UNODC and the Inter-Parliamentary Union began to develop model legislative provisions on victims of terrorism, which will be launched at the first United Nations Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism, in June 2021. Following the third commemoration of International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre supported the organization, in September, of the second ministerial meeting of the Group of Friends of Victims of Terrorism. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict continued to promote respect for the rights of victims of sexual violence committed by terrorist groups and ensuring rule of law responses to such crimes. UNODC issued a publication entitled *From Victims of Terrorism to Messengers for Peace: a Strategic Approach*, in order to promote increased support for victims. It also developed a series of electronic learning

modules for remote assistance for States on the issue of children affected by terrorism and provided related support to Indonesia, Nigeria and States in Central Asia.

V. Concluding observations and recommendations

72.   As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, the international community has to remain mobilized and united in order to prevent terrorists from further exploiting the spread of the virus and its political and socioeconomic fallout, including by a rededication to the multilateral approach and principles laid down in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The seventh biennial review of the Strategy will be conducted at the end of June, during the second Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations, and will mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Strategy. September will mark the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and the establishment of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism. Also in September, the Office of Counter-Terrorism will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre. This landmark year provides the international community with a special opportunity to build on the existing multilateral, results-oriented and balanced counter-terrorism efforts under the auspices of the United Nations.

73.   The evolution of the terrorist threat and challenges faced by Member States in countering it during the pandemic reinforce the observations and recommendations made in my previous report on the review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Strengthening States' capacities to counter a persistent and often immediate threat remains a priority to deny terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters, the ability to radicalize, recruit, communicate, plan, acquire funds and weapons, travel and execute attacks. Member States may wish to emphasize the need for effective prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies to ensure accountability and prevent recidivism, including timely information-sharing and the use of electronic and battlefield evidence.

74.   Efforts to repatriate individuals with family links to terrorist groups from conflict zones have been further delayed by the pandemic, raising both humanitarian and security concerns. Addressing this protracted humanitarian and human rights crisis through voluntary repatriations, especially of children, and ensuring accountability for terrorist crimes, is an urgent and strategic counter-terrorism imperative. Member States may wish to request the United Nations system to provide coordinated assistance for repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration and to encourage concerned States to avail themselves of such support to ensure human rights-based, age- and gender-sensitive approaches.

75.   The pandemic has underscored the need to address more strategically the implications of technological innovation and digital transformation, to prevent terrorist exploitation and ensure that the potential of technology to assist counter-terrorism efforts is fully realized, in line with international law. This includes urgent action to tackle the spread of terrorist content in cyberspace and ensure preparedness in the event of cyberattacks and biological attacks by terrorists. Member States may wish to reinforce the role of the United Nations system in supporting international cooperation and partnerships with industry and civil society to ensure effective measures that thwart terrorists, encourage innovation and uphold human rights and the rule of law.

76.   Recovering and building forward from the pandemic presents an opportunity to buttress counter-terrorism efforts through a strategic investment in prevention that addresses conditions conducive to terrorism and builds institutional and social

resilience by sustaining peace and realizing the Sustainable Development Goals. Supporting conflict resolution, addressing the plight of victims of terrorism, respecting freedom of belief, religion and expression and firmly embedding counter-terrorism policies in human rights, gender equality and the rule of law needs to be integral to this approach, in line with international law. Member States may wish to call for increased attention and action at the national and international levels to ensure the full compliance of all counter-terrorism measures with international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, including through further support by the United Nations system, and to this end also ensure the allocation of adequate resources.

77. The COVID-19 crisis has fuelled hate, xenophobia and polarization, which could increase the appeal of terrorism across the ideological spectrum. Member States have pledged to address terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, irrespective of motivations, and the United Nations system has pledged to support them in fulfilling all their related international obligations. A comprehensive and whole-of-society approach, rooted in human rights and the rule of law, that addresses underlying drivers and leverages education, dialogue and strategic communications to counter narratives is critical to effectively counter terrorism. In the face of a growing threat from racially, ethnically and ideologically motivated right-wing and supremacist groups that resort to terrorist tactics, it is critical that Member States continue to strongly condemn acts of terrorism targeting individuals on the basis of or in the name of race, ethnicity, religion or belief. In this context, Member States may wish to confirm the role of the United Nations system to support requesting Member States and to facilitate cooperation to address the transnational dimensions of this phenomenon, in accordance with existing mandates.

78. During the opening of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, almost 100 Member States emphasized counter-terrorism as a matter of priority. Multilateralism and international solidarity are essential to fighting terrorism. I urge Member States to maintain consensus and pursue practical dialogue and cooperation against terrorism. The United Nations system stands ready to continue to support them, during and after the pandemic, and will sustain the adjustments made in 2020 to ensure business continuity as part of an expanded toolbox. To help to consolidate the United Nations counter-terrorism architecture and position it to better help Member States to address existing and emerging threats over the coming period, Member States may wish to consider providing adequate, predictable and sustainable technical and financial resources to keep United Nations counter-terrorism efforts on a solid footing, and to confer upon the Office of Counter-Terrorism the same mandate that other United Nations entities have to provide grants in support of projects related to preventing and countering terrorism.

Annex I

List of Member States, United Nations entities and international and regional organizations that provided information on their implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

1. The Secretariat received new or updated submissions from 50 Member States: Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kiribati, Latvia, Madagascar, Morocco, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Poland, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Uruguay.

2. The Secretariat received new or updated submissions from 15 international, regional and other organizations: the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, Hedayah, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

3. The Secretariat received new or updated submissions from 22 entities of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact: the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the Department of Global Communications, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Criminal Police Organization, the International Maritime Organization, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Annex II

List of Member States and Permanent Observers contributing to the trust fund for counter-terrorism[1]

1. Saudi Arabia

2. Qatar

3. Netherlands*

4. European Union

5. China

6. United States of America

7. Japan

8. Norway

9. Russian Federation

10. Spain

11. Canada

12. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

13. Republic of Korea

14. Germany

15. Morocco

16. Australia

17. Denmark

18. Sweden

19. India

20. Switzerland

21. United Arab Emirates

22. Kazakhstan

23. Belgium

24. Portugal

25. Italy

26. Colombia

27. Finland

28. Turkey

29. Liechtenstein

30. Algeria

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[1] The Member States and Permanent Observers are listed in descending order representing the size of their respective contributions as at December 2020.

* This ranking reflects an in-kind contribution of the Netherlands provided to the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme, valued at $11.5 million in 2018.

31. Nigeria

32. Kenya

33. Hungary

34. United Nations Development Programme**

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** This contribution was channelled from the United Nations Development Programme to the Office of Counter-Terrorism a part of a joint programme funded by the European Union.