New Counter-Terrorism Office Will Be Vital to Global Security, Preventing Violent Extremism, Under-Secretary-General Tells Security Council

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Strengthening coordination and coherence would be the top priority for the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the new entity’s chief said today as the Security Council took up threats to international peace and security caused by terrorism.

Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov said the Office intended to make a qualitative difference in its support to Member States by bringing leadership, mobilizing resources and developing a coherent and well-coordinated “One United Nations” framework to counter-terrorism and prevent violent extremism.

Support and assistance for Member States would be critical, he said, adding that he planned to work closely with all Member States, the Security Council and all other relevant organs and bodies of the United Nations.  “Listening and acting on your priorities will be my priority,” he stressed.

The 12 Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force inter-agency working groups represented a good example of counter-terrorism coordination in action, which included the exchange of information, identification of threats and challenges and development of “all-of-UN” projects, he continued.

Since its inception, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate had worked to provide the Counter-Terrorism Committee with independent assessments of Member States’ implementation of Council resolutions on terrorism, said David Scharia, the Directorate’s Officer-in-Charge.

Among the principal tools used in that process, he continued, was the country visit — a collaborative process that involved experts from many partner organizations.  In all, the Executive Directorate had conducted 133 visits to 96 Member States, including 45 since its previous review.  Much had been accomplished through that process including new national and regional laws enacted, new institutions established and capacities strengthened.

Through those visits, the Executive Directorate had learned that many States still did not have all counter-terrorism measures in place, he noted.  The Committee’s recommendations must be acted upon more rapidly and more widely, he underscored, emphasizing the need to avoid any perception that technical assistance was a precondition for implementing binding Council resolutions.

Country visits were also an important tool for the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter‑terrorism, said Amr Abdellatif Aboulatta (Egypt), Chair of that Committee.  The rapidly evolving terrorist threat and operational landscape meant that such visits had become more demanding and complex, he highlighted, noting that, within a short period, the Council had adopted six new resolutions on counter-terrorism.

Some States did not yet have all the necessary counter-terrorism measures in place, while others faced challenges in ensuring that measures currently in place were consistently reviewed and amended as terrorists developed new operational methods and techniques, he continued.  “Our assessments and analysis show that many States lack the necessary capacity and resources to comply effectively with the Council’s resolutions,” he said, pointing out that follow-up assessments showed uneven progress in implementing recommendations.

The representative of the United States said that her country and its partners were making progress against terrorism, while the United Nations had remained mostly on the side lines.  She went on to point out that the Council had passed important resolutions to criminalize acts of terror and end the flows of foreign terrorist fights.  “Yet, these resolutions will only be words on paper if they are not implemented,” she continued, emphasizing the United Nations role in helping States in the implementation stages.  The Organization’s counter-terrorism bodies must work together, she said, adding that the United Nations must get out of New York and engage different players in the field.

Throughout the meeting, many Member States commended the work carried out by the various counter-terrorism bodies, with the representative of Uruguay highlighting that the role of the Committee and the Executive Directorate was critical in assessing States’ implementation of resolution 1373 (2001) and facilitating technical assistance.  In that context, Uruguay was reviewing the recommendations stemming from Directorate’s visit to the country earlier in 2017, noting that two laws, based on those recommendations, were being considered.

The representative of France echoed that statement, highlighting that his country had drawn significantly important lessons from the Executive Directorate’s visit to France and had drawn up various initiatives from its recommendations.

Also speaking today were the representatives of the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, United Kingdom, Japan, Sweden, Senegal, Bolivia, China, Italy, Ukraine and Ethiopia.

The meeting began at 10:09 a.m. and ended at 12:13 p.m.

Briefings

VLADIMIR VORONKOV, Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Office of Counter‑Terrorism, said that the newly established Office intended to make a qualitative difference in its support to Member States by bringing leadership, mobilizing resources and developing a coherent and well-coordinated “One United Nations” framework to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism.  Support and assistance for the Member States would be the key words, in that regard.  To meet that goal, he intended to work closely with all Member States, the Security Council and all other relevant organs and bodies of the United Nations.  “Listening and acting on your priorities will be my priority,” he stressed.

More than 50 high-level meetings with Member States and international and regional organizations had taken place during the General Assembly, he noted.  From those consultations and statements, six key areas, fully aligned with the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, as well as the Council’s priorities had been identified, including:  strengthening international counter-terrorism cooperation; preventing violent extremism; addressing the use of the Internet by terrorists; enhancing intercultural dialogue; addressing the threat of foreign terrorists fighters; and increasing the exchange of information and good counter-terrorism practices.

Since 2001, he recalled, the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate had resolutely contributed to supporting Member States in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001).  The 12 Counter‑Terrorism Implementation Task Force inter-agency working groups represented a good example of counter-terrorism coordination in action, which included the exchange of information, identification of threats and challenges and development of “all-of-UN” projects.  His new office intended to further mainstream that approach in all its efforts, he said, adding:  “This strengthening of coordination and coherence will be the highest priority.”  Through the Task Force’s Working Group on Foreign Terrorist Fighters, a capacity-building plan had been developed, which included more than 50 projects from 13 United Nations entities.  Further, a counter-terrorism assistance initiative in the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel), as well as in Nigeria and Mali had been launched.  The integration of gender as a cross-cutting issue was another important endeavour.

He went on to cite the important spheres of United Nations activity that must be aligned to effectively develop a coherent and well-coordinated “all-of-UN” counter-terrorism framework.  That included the Security Council, General Assembly, the Secretary-General and United Nations Secretariat, as well as the Organization’s 38 agencies, funds and programmes that directly or indirectly contributed to counter-terrorism efforts and to the prevention of violent extremism initiatives.  Member States, for their part, must also mobilize the necessary political will and resources to support those efforts, he added.

DAVID SCHARIA, Officer-in-Charge, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, said that its task since inception had been to provide the Committee with independent assessments of Member States’ implementation of Council resolutions on terrorism.  Among the principal tools used in that process was the country visit — a collaborative process that involved experts from many partner organizations.  Since January, the Executive Directorate had visited some 16 countries and seven more visits were scheduled for the remainder of 2017.  In all, the Executive Directorate had conducted 133 visits to 96 Member States, including 45 since its previous review.  Much had been accomplished through that process including new national and regional laws enacted, new institutions established and capacities strengthened.

That reflected not only the impact of resolution 1373 (2001), but also the determined efforts of Member States to comply with international obligations, he continued.  However, many States still did not have all counter-terrorism measures in place.  The Committee’s recommendations must be acted upon more rapidly and more widely, he added, emphasizing the need to avoid any perception that technical assistance was a precondition for implementing binding Council resolutions.  He pledged to continue working with partners — including the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) — on the promotion of relevant United Nations resolutions.

New resolutions required that the Executive Directorate prepare in-depth reports on a variety of thematic areas, including the use of digital evidence and new border-control measures, he said.  Since its last review, it was also mandated to identify emerging issues to advise the Counter-Terrorism Committee on practical ways for Member States to implement the resolutions.  Cooperation with other partners and enhanced research capacity had been critical in providing advice on a range of issues, including prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees.  It was important to ensure that the entire United Nations system benefited from the Executive Directorate’s analysis, he continued.  The Executive Directorate remained committed to working with its partners to facilitate technical assistance delivery, identify trends and support the policy of Committee decisions and Council resolutions.

AMR ABDELLATIF ABOULATTA (Egypt), Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism, noted that, since 2005, the Committee had been supported by its Executive Directorate.  That office worked to implement the Committee’s policy decisions, coordinate the monitoring of the implementation of resolution 1373 (2001) and assess Member States’ implementation efforts.  Assessment visits enabled the Committee and its Executive Directorate to engage in constructive dialogue with States, gather an accurate picture of its overall counter-terrorism capacity and identify gaps, challenges, trends, good practices and technical assistance needs.  The assessment process identified priority areas for further action, as well as urgent technical assistance requirements.  The information gathered was also used to produce global implementation surveys on Member States’ efforts to implement not only resolution 1373 (2001), but also resolution 1624 (2005) on preventing incitement to commit terrorist acts.  The surveys identified remaining gaps where the international community should focus its efforts and where progress had been made.

Although Member States had made significant progress in many areas, they continued to face significant challenges, he continued.  Some States did not yet have all the necessary counter-terrorism measures in place, while others faced challenges in ensuring that measures currently in place were consistently reviewed and amended as terrorists developed new operational methods and techniques.  “Our assessments and analysis show that many States lack the necessary capacity and resources to comply effectively with the Council’s resolutions,” he said, adding that follow-up assessments showed uneven progress in implementing recommendations.  Strong support from implementing partners, including the Office of Counter-Terrorism, was required, while at the political level, successful follow-up depended on the Council’s consideration of States’ non-compliance with its counter-terrorism resolutions.  Member States should be reminded of their responsibility to meet international counter-terrorism obligations, he emphasized, highlighting that it was in their primary interest to protect their citizens, borders and institutions.

The rapidly evolving terrorist threat and operational landscape meant that the Committee’s country visits had become considerably more demanding and complex, he underscored.  Within a short period, the Council had adopted six new resolutions on counter-terrorism, addressing issues as diverse as strengthening international judicial and law enforcement cooperation, countering terrorist narratives, protecting critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks, preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons and more.  All those resolutions required the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate to assist in the resolutions’ implementation and promotion, including through special meetings on themes such as international cooperation and civil aviation security.  The role of the Committee, therefore, continued to expand thematically, leading to the body’s horizontal and conceptual expansion.

Statements

VASSILY A. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation) said that, as terrorist threats continued to evolve, success of regional and international counter-terrorism efforts hinged largely on how States implement similar measures.  “Terrorists thrive on such gaps,” he added.  National counter-terrorism legislative often remained at a nascent stage in many countries.  Legislation lacked in areas of prosecuting foreign terrorist fighters, as well as immigration and visa control.  There were also blatant gaps in the suppression of terrorism financing.  These days, one could do a lot of damage with just a truck, he said.  It was not possible to control such weapons of death, he continued, emphasizing the need to therefore enhance preventive measures.

He warned against justifying and even glorifying terrorist acts, adding that a lack of criminalization of such acts in some States, as well as insufficient prosecution measures, were extremely concerning.  Coordinated measures must be aimed at detecting and eradicating terrorist content on the Internet, through which terrorists were actively recruited and where propaganda flowed.  Recalling that some Member States had not wanted to work on the implementation of a Russian‑backed Council resolution on combating terrorist ideology, he underscored that Member States had agreed to comply with resolutions and had an obligation to strictly adhere to them.  Emphasizing the need for enhanced cooperation with the Executive Directorate, he underscored the need to exchange information between it and the new Office of Counter-Terrorism without bureaucratic impediments.  Streamlining procedures — even at the stage of preparation for country visits — was essential.

NIKKI HALEY (United States) said that, more than 16 years since the 11 September, terrorists continued to find new ways to carry out their attacks including using trucks as weapons and home-brewed explosive devices.  The United States and its partners were making progress against terrorism while the United Nations had remained mostly on the side lines.  The Council had passed important resolutions to criminalize acts of terror and end the flows of foreign terrorist fights.  “Yet, these resolutions will only be words on paper if they are not implemented,” she continued, emphasizing the role of the United Nations in helping States in the implementation stages.

The United States wanted to see a strong Executive Directorate that would help Member States understand their gaps in counter-terrorism measures, she continued.  The United Nations must help Member States stop the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and focus its work on preventing violent extremism from taking hold.  The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Directorate must work together, she said, adding that the United Nations must get out of New York and engage different players in the field.  Counter-terrorism must never be an excuse to ignore human rights, she continued, adding that abusing such rights increased local support for terrorism.

BARLYBAY SADYKOV (Kazakhstan) stressed that the international community faced a multitude of challenges from terrorist organizations, which continued to adapt to global counter-terrorism efforts.  Speaking on the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and the 1267 Committee, he said that both continued to administer asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo measures against designated individuals and groups associated with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban.  For the effective operation of the sanctions regime, it was critical that the work of those Committees be in lockstep with the evolving global threat posed by terrorist groups.  He called upon all Member States to continue their engagement with those Committees and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, and urged States that had not already done so to submit their implementation reports mandated under the relevant resolutions.

JONATHAN GUY ALLEN (United Kingdom) said that international terrorist groups sought to divide communities and tear apart countries by attacking values and institutions.  The Council was united in its desire to protect people across the world and defeat terrorism.  The multilateral counter-terrorism system was needed now more than ever, he emphasized.  The Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism marshalled the resources of the United Nations to tackle terrorism and violent extremism.  Moving forward, every effort must be made to maximize the impact and effectiveness of the Executive Directorate.  Its upcoming mandate renewal would provide a chance to enhance its impact, including by learning lessons on how to improve country assessments and ensuring technical expertise was fully used.  The second priority moving forward must be prevention, including by addressing the root causes of violent extremism that spawned terrorism.  Preventing violent extremism was a vital investment for peace and security.

KORO BESSHO (Japan) said that his country was alarmed by terrorists’ evolving tactics, which included diversifying financial sources, disseminating propaganda through social media, exploiting encrypted applications and using broken travel.  To respond to those evolving tactics, the international community must enhance its capacities and vigorously implement counter-terrorism resolutions.  The adoption of those resolutions was important, although their full implementation was equally vital.  Japan had implemented the counter-terrorism resolutions and developed new measures in response to terrorists’ evolving tactics.  The international community must extend assistance to those in need as part of a collective response, he urged, highlighting that the Office of Counter‑Terrorism was expected to greatly enhance coordination and in all Member States.

LUIS BERMÚDEZ (Uruguay) said terrorist attacks were occurring at an intolerable frequency, urging the international community to take joint action.  Terrorists must be stopped from taking innocent lives.  Welcoming the work of the United Nations, he said that under the leadership of the new Office of Counter‑Terrorism and its new impetus, the fight against the scourge would benefit.  The role of the Office and the Executive Directorate was critical in assessing States’ implementation of resolution 1373 (2001) and facilitating technical assistance.  He said he would take into consideration the recommendations stemming from the Executive Directorate’s visit to Uruguay earlier in 2017.  Two laws, based on those recommendations, were being considered.  He also added that the fight against terrorism must be waged in line with the principles of the United Nations Charter and international humanitarian law.

FRANÇOIS DELATTRE (France) said the struggle against terrorism was at the heart of Security Council tasks and required a firm, united and organized response. It was incumbent upon all States to adopt all measures to combat terrorism.  The United Nations also had a growing role to play in the global response.  “We do not have a blank slate,” he continued, adding that there were already many Security Council resolutions adopted on terrorism.  They covered numerous aspects on fighting the phenomenon including blocking financing and fighting propaganda.  The United Nations had amassed a great deal of expertise in the use of sanctions and the exchange of best practices.  However, the threat continued to evolve, particularly with the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters and the use of the Internet for recruitment and financing.  The United Nations shouldered the duty and responsibility to shore up coherence of action.  He commended the work carried out by the Executive Directorate which fully aligned with France’s priorities.  In 2018, his country would host an international conference on terrorism financing, he added.  France drew important lessons from the Executive Directorate’s visit and had drawn up initiatives from its recommendations.

IRINA SCHOULGIN-NYONI (Sweden), highlighting key efforts guided by the Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, emphasized that special attention must focus on women’s roles, including as perpetrator, supporter, facilitator, victim and preventer.  The Executive Directorate’s development of gender-related thematic work must be mainstreamed into the Office of Counter‑Terrorism’s activities.  Furthermore, efforts must continue to prevent radicalization, in line with the common United Nations counter-terrorism strategy and the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.  Having supported the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in that regard, including with its new “Journey to Extremism” report, Sweden stood by the belief that inclusive societies, education, growth and globalization were central to prevention efforts and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development could deliver that inclusivity.

GORGUI CISS (Senegal) said the multiplication and sophistication of terrorist attacks were daily reminders of the pernicious threat terrorism posed to international peace and security.  When the Council adopted resolution 1373 (2001), it could not have imagined that, some 16 years later, international terrorism would have taken such a frightening turn.  Senegal was pleased to see the establishment of the Office of Counter-Terrorism and encouraged it to better coordinate its activities with the various organs, agencies and programmes that dealt with combating terrorism.  Terrorists increasingly used the Internet and social media to incite violence, recruit foreign fighters and finance and plan attacks.  Those movements took advantage of the flows within the financial system to raise funds, including through the trafficking and sale of oil, kidnapping for ransom and the trafficking of illicit weapons and cultural heritage goods.  To end such criminal activities, Member States must implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, step up their cooperation and make sure that intelligence was shared.  The growth in the number of resolutions adopted by the Council and the changing terrorist landscape broadened the work of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Executive Directorate, which highlighted the need for sustained financial support for those bodies.

PEDRO LUIS INCHAUSTE JORDÁN (Bolivia) said that terrorism was among the biggest challenges facing the international community, and in that context, he called on the Council to redouble its efforts to combat that phenomenon.  Terrorism should not be associated with any religion, nationality or cultural group, he emphasized.  Bolivia abided by its international counter-terrorism commitments and defined terrorism and financing of it as serious crimes.  His country had set up a domestic agency to avert terrorist acts and was engaged in sharing financial intelligence with other States to allow for investigations into funding flows that could be used for such activities.  Bolivia had a legal architecture in place that regulated the use and bearing of firearms and other explosive material.  Technical and financial cooperation would be important to ensure that countries could build capacity to better fight terrorism.  It was important to look into the root causes of terrorism, as well as enabling structures.  Sexual violence was becoming an engrained part of terrorist ideology, he lamented, adding that, regrettably, women and girls were looked upon as resources within the terrorist machinery.

WU HAITAO (China) said that terrorism was the common enemy of all humankind and the international community must fight that phenomenon aggressively in all its forms.  In that context, the leadership role of the Organization and the Council, as well as the principles of the United Nations Charter must be respected and upheld.  Countries must enhance border control and law enforcement cooperation.  More robust efforts must be made to combat terrorist financing and the use of the Internet for the spread of terrorist propaganda and recruiting activities.  The Executive Directorate was critical in providing technical assistance to Member States and strengthening their role in fighting terrorism.  Along with the broader support of the international community, China would continue to promote and implement counter-terrorism measures.

SEBASTIANO CARDI (Italy) said resolution 1373 (2001) still represented a milestone in the commitment of Member States in tackling terrorism.  Sixteen years since its adoption, the text could not be more relevant and timely.  Italy was involved in the fight against ISIL particularly through training of law enforcement and enhancing border control.  In that context, the Executive Directorate was vital in identifying gaps, challenges and good practices.  That knowledge must be made available to relevant United Nations bodies and used to prioritize technical assistance.  Further acknowledging the vital role played by the Executive Directorate, he said it must be provided with the resources to continue its work.  Italy was playing a leading role in the fight against terrorism by focusing on countering its financing and combating human trafficking and the illegal flow of money, he added, emphasizing the phenomenon could not be defeated by military means alone.

VOLODYMYR YELCHENKO (Ukraine), noting his country was facing threats fuelled by external support for terrorist groups in its eastern region, pointed out the ongoing challenge of the United Nations of ensuring mutually re-enforcing cooperation and avoiding duplication in various counter-terrorism initiatives.  Within the United Nations system, coherence and leadership must be enhanced and the counter-terrorism architecture reformed.  Calling the Office of Counter‑Terrorism a step in the right direction, he said it should show strategic leadership, ensure the provision of appropriate resources and expertise and strengthen policy and programme guidance to Member States.  Commending the work of the Executive Directorate, he expected it to conduct a follow-up mission to Ukraine in November.  To ensure a timely discharge of that office’s functions, adequate resources must be provided.

TEKEDA ALEMU (Ethiopia) recalled that terrorism had been a major threat for decades.  His delegation recognized and commended the indispensable role of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and appreciated the work of its Executive Directorate.  He noted the increase in the number of country assessments and their follow-up in facilitating technical assistance.  The Committee and Executive Directorate had contributed to enhancing the capacity of Member States to prevent terrorist activities.  The Implementation Task Force had also played a vital role in implementing the United Nations counter-terrorism strategy.  Although significant progress had been made in implementing resolution 1373 (2001), those efforts remained insufficient and terrorism continued to pose a formidable threat to international peace and security.  Efficiently and effectively addressing compliance issues could be supported by establishing more monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

Mr. VORONKOV noted that of all the counter-terrorism priorities expressed by Member States during the recent General Assembly session, preventing violent extremism and identifying the root causes of terrorism was the second most commonly articulated priority.  He highlighted that the Secretary-General had established an “all-of-UN” framework to assist Member States in preventing violent extremism.