

HANDLING TERRORISM GLOBALLY

Terrorism is a global threat. It can affect anyone, anywhere, at any time. Countering terrorism requires global coordination and global solutions. It is for this reason that Member States brought terrorism to the agenda of the United Nations more than three decades ago.¹ The terrorist attacks of September 11th brought a new sense of urgency to the work already underway. Within weeks, the Security Council adopted a comprehensive resolution, which outlined a wide-range of counter-terrorism measures to be taken by all Member States.



These were legally binding for all states under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. The United Nations system in turn, augmented its operational support to Member States in order to assist them in meeting these new commitments.

In September 2006, the United Nations reached an important milestone in its efforts to address terrorism with the General Assembly's unanimous endorsement of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy ("the Strategy"). The Strategy's adoption signaled that Member States were willing to move beyond the political debates that had stymied operational cooperation in the past and commit themselves and the United Nations system to a comprehensive and holistic global framework and action plan for countering terrorism. It was also an important institutional achievement in that it demonstrated that the General Assembly had a vital role to play in mobilizing action on key issues related to peace and security.

In September 2008, Member States reviewed the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and renewed their unwavering commitment to strengthening international cooperation to prevent and combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. They unequivocally asserted their commitment to implementing the Strategy, and demonstrated concrete progress in this regard.

The Strategy identifies four pillars of action: measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; measures to prevent and combat terrorism; measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; and measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.

The Strategy acknowledges that Member States have the most important role to play in implementation. It spells out concrete measures that states need to take individually as well as collectively at regional and global levels. The Strategy also highlights the supporting role that the United Nations system should play in assisting Member States in their implementation activities, particularly through the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF).

The Secretary-General established the CTITF in June 2005 in response to requests made by Member States at the 2005 World Summit who urged the Secretary-General to strengthen the capacity and enhance the coordination of the United Nations system to assist States in combating terrorism. Initially, the CTITF functioned as a forum for discussing strategic issues and ensuring coherent counter-terrorism action. Over time, the Task Force, composed of 23 United Nations Systems entities plus Interpol, has embarked on joint programs of work.

Members of the Task Force contribute to the United Nations counter-terrorism effort according to their specific organizational mandates. In addition, the Task Force has identified some cross-cutting areas of work where the implementation of the Strategy requires cooperation across several system entities, where the United Nations can provide added value, and where there is a geographically broad-based demand for assistance from Member States. The work in these cross-cutting areas is organized and managed by Task Force Working Groups. At present, there are eight Working Groups.²

For example, the Working Group on Supporting and Highlighting Victims of Terrorism organized a Secretary-General's Symposium on Supporting Victims of Terrorism on the 9th of September 2008. The Symposium helped put a human face to terrorism by giving a voice to victims. It also provided a forum to discuss concrete steps to assist victims. Participants called on the United Nations to provide leadership in building international solidarity with victims. The event was well attended by Member States and civil society and received widespread positive media coverage around the world. One victim participant wrote to me after the symposium: "we all felt privileged to be offered such a dignified platform to share our tragic experiences as well as recommendations."

Some other initiatives that the Task Force is actively pursuing include fostering private-public partnerships for the protection of vulnerable targets against terrorist attacks, countering the use of internet for terrorist purposes, protecting human rights while countering terrorism, and tackling the financing of terrorism.

To date, the Task Force Working Groups have focused on gathering lessons learned, through questionnaires sent to Member States, literature reviews, and stakeholder workshops. They have also begun to identify some best practices that can be useful for Member States. A few have taken steps to develop tools that can assist Member States in their counter-terrorism implementation efforts. Thus, for example, in February 2007, the Task Force set up a Counter-Terrorism Online Handbook to centralize and disseminate information on UN system counter-terrorism related activities and resources (available at www.un.org/terrorism).

Looking forward, a key priority for the Task Force in 2009 and beyond is to facilitate integrated implementation of the Strategy. This initiative aims to enhance the capacity within the UN to help interested Member States, upon their request, to implement the Strategy across the four pillars of action. So far, two countries—Madagascar and Nigeria—have made requests to be beneficiaries of integrated technical assistance coordinated by the Task Force. A number of other states have given a preliminary indication that they may be interested in exploring this type of assistance in the near future.

From my vantage point as Chairman of the Task Force, I have had the opportunity to witness the emergence of effective system-wide cooperation and coherence in counter-terrorism work. Over time, I have seen participating entities increasingly share information, harness synergies and maximize existing comparative advantages.

This positive dynamic has been central to advancing the counter-terrorism agenda within the United Nations system. As I look to the future, I anticipate a continued deepening of the partnerships we have formed within the United Nations system. I further see us increasing efforts to expand and strengthen partnerships between Member States, the United Nations system, regional and other organizations and civil society. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently said to an audience at Harvard University, "terrorism is deeply personal. It kills our sons, daughters and mothers, our fathers, sisters and brothers." While, the United Nations has come a long way in advancing multilateral counter-terrorism cooperation, we still have much work to do if we are to rid the world of the scourge of terrorism.

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1 The General Assembly first addressed terrorism as an international concern in 1972 (Resolution 3034 XXVII). Member States revisited the issue throughout the 1970s and 1980s and then in 1994 adopted the Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism which provides the basic normative framework informing Member State engagement today (A/RES/49/60).

2 The eight working groups are: 1) Preventing and resolving conflicts; 2) Supporting and highlighting victims of terrorism; 3) Preventing and responding to WMD attacks; 4) Tackling the financing of terrorism; 5) Countering the use off the internet for terrorist purposes; 6) Facilitating the integrated implementation of the United Nations global counter-terrorism strategy; 7) Strengthening the protection of vulnerable targets; and 8) Protecting human rights while countering terrorism.