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Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

**(m) IPU-UN Regional Conference for the Middle East and North Africa:
*The role of parliamentarians in addressing the threat of
foreign terrorist fighters and associated challenges***

Luxor, Egypt – 26 to 28 February 2019

The United Nations estimated in 2017 that around 40,000 foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from 110 countries had travelled to join the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The issue of FTFs has been emphasized as a serious threat associated with the ongoing conflicts in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Those fighters became key players in the conflicts as they gained significant experience in hard battles and remained in conflict zones. The Regional Conference highlighted the need to counter terrorism holistically, while including a conflict perspective in legislation.

The timing of the conference was extremely important in light of the recent defeat of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in many territories and the urgent question of reintegrating FTFs, as many of them attempt to return to their countries of origin or to relocate elsewhere. In this regard, some European countries have taken decisions contrary to international law by removing the nationality of returnees, thus leaving them stateless. The participants of the Regional Conference concurred that statelessness was not a viable solution and that, on the contrary, it could lead to re-radicalization.

The Regional Conference was even more relevant and necessary in that not a single country in the region had any legislation to counter and/or criminalize the phenomenon of FTFs. Although one of the main UN resolutions on the subject dates back to 2014 (S/RES/2178), the participating countries had yet to implement national legislation on FTFs. This brings to light the implementation gap between international resolutions and national legislation and reinforces the need for the IPU-UN Joint Programme on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.

In this regard, the IPU-UN Regional Conference was held in Luxor, Egypt from 26 to 28 February 2019. The event was attended by about 60 parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from 17 different countries from the region. The primary aim of the Regional Conference was to generate discussions and exchanges on ways to address the challenges parliaments face in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism, with a particular focus on the threat posed by FTFs. The Regional Conference included contributions from participants as well as presentations by eminent experts in the field from the United Nations, the IPU, the House of Representatives of Egypt, Euromed Justice IV, International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, and Open Source Intelligence. They provided participants with in-depth information about the current realities of FTFs and the relevant UN resolutions.

#IPU140

The conference enhanced regional parliamentary cooperation and fostered an exchange of experiences and good practices in specialized areas pertaining to countering and preventing terrorism, including the regional mobilization of FTFs. The exchanges also helped establish coordination between the countries of the region. Furthermore, it was an opportunity for United Nations agencies to gather recommendations and suggestions from parliamentarians regarding the challenges they face and the needs they have in turning United Nations resolutions into legislation, as well as to increase awareness of parliamentarians on recent developments pertaining to FTFs. Lastly, the Regional Conference contributed to the preliminary establishment of the Global Parliamentary Network on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.

The root causes of radicalization were a central topic during the conference. Participants agreed that it was crucial to dismantle extremist ideology leading to terrorism so as to strengthen inter-faith dialogue, tolerance and respect of others. They further added that prevention should start at a young age including at home and in schools. The long-term immunization of societies against terrorism and extremism required religious, educational, intellectual and cultural efforts, as well as strategic plans and legislative systems that promoted tolerance, coexistence, openness and acceptance, and rejected incitement of hatred and violence.

This Regional Conference was the first in a series of activities approved by the IPU High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism and endorsed by the governing bodies. It will serve as a basis on which the IPU and the United Nations can build and organize other workshops to follow-up on the phenomenon of FTFs. In light of the foregoing, the next event will follow the movement of FTFs and take place in Niger, in order to focus on the Sahel countries.

Through its unique convening power, this conference highlighted the importance that parliaments in the region place on global efforts to counter terrorism. Despite being in a region infested with conflicts, countries came together and adopted an outcome document with a set of follow-up actions and recommendations.



IPU-UN Regional Conference for the Middle East and North Africa

The role of parliamentarians in addressing the threat of foreign terrorist fighters and associated challenges

Luxor, Egypt – 26 to 28 February 2019

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

We, Members of Parliament from the Middle East and North Africa Region¹ gathered in Luxor, Egypt, from 26 to 28 February 2019 for the IPU-UN Regional Conference on “The role of parliamentarians in addressing the threat of foreign terrorist fighters and associated challenges.” This conference was jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), under the framework of the Global Project on Strengthening the Legal Regime against Foreign Terrorist Fighters. It was generously funded by the European Union and hosted by the House of Representatives of Egypt. The Conference also complemented the activities of the IPU-UNODC-UNOCT Joint Programme on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which is being implemented with the support of the IPU High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.

Over the course of three days, we engaged in comprehensive discussions on the role of parliamentarians in countering terrorism, with a special focus on addressing the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs).

We welcomed the active engagement of all the participants as they shared their experiences and described the challenges of closing the implementation gap between international resolutions and national legislation. Overall, the Regional Conference served as a forum for exchanging good practices and building inter-parliamentary cooperation in counter-terrorism and extremism leading to terrorism. We also benefited from the rich contributions of all the participants, including experts from the IPU, the United Nations and other organizations.

Our debates focused on four main themes: (1) the security threat posed by FTFs and preventing and suppressing, through the establishment of serious criminal offences, the recruitment, organization, transportation, financing or equipping of individuals who travel to a State, other than their State of residency or nationality, for the purpose of perpetrating, planning or preparing terrorist acts, or for providing or receiving terrorist training; (2) the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2178 (2014) and resolution 2396 (2017), including through following the Madrid Guiding Principles adopted on 28 July 2015 by the UN Security Council (S/2015/939) and the Addendum to the Principles, which are a practical tool for supporting UN Member States in their efforts to combat terrorism and the phenomenon of FTFs in accordance with the aforementioned resolutions; (3) analysis of legal gaps and scope of terrorist offences and the criminalization of acts aimed at stemming the flow of FTFs; and (4) the crucial role of parliaments in the prevention of terrorism by identifying and countering conditions that lead to acts of terror, and the ability of legislatures to involve communities in preventing and detecting radicalization by terrorist groups.

¹ Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh (member of the IPU High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism), European Parliament, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

While recognizing the military advancements against terrorist groups that were controlling territories in the region, we acknowledge that such groups continue to represent a serious threat to peace and security in the region and beyond.

We reaffirmed that terrorism should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group and proactively engaged in discussions on the four main themes of the Regional Conference, leading to the following concluding remarks:

1. Parliamentarians call upon governments and the international community to prevent and solve conflicts in the region, as they are intrinsically linked to terrorism.
2. Regional cooperation should be central to addressing the phenomenon of FTFs in order for countries to exchange information and stop the financing and movement of FTFs.
3. When drafting laws, parliaments are advised to carefully examine and reflect the vital yet challenging balance between the protection of national security and public order, and respect for individual human rights. In addition to the fundamental principles of human rights, relevant FTF laws should include the principles of necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination. Parliaments are further encouraged to adopt appropriate and precise laws and policies in order to avoid the arbitrary interpretation, enforcement and application of laws.
4. Addressing the threat of FTFs requires open and ongoing consultations between the executive and the legislative bodies of each country in order to develop and enforce effective measures that combine the countering role of governments with the preventive role of parliaments.
5. Terrorist conduct should be properly criminalized in national legislation, and appropriate administrative measures should also be enacted for the effective prevention and disruption of terrorist activities.
6. In the framework of the IPU-UN Joint Programme, parliaments are invited to enter into open consultations with UNOCT and UNODC in order to facilitate the implementation of Advanced Passenger Information / Passenger Name Record (API / PNR) data collection and processing measures, which include assessments and awareness-raising, provision of legislative assistance, institutional set-up and capacity-building, provision of information and communications technology (ICT) and expertise. Parliaments are particularly encouraged to request the IPU and the United Nations to hold national or regional events to support the development or review of required legislation in order to adequately implement API / PNR systems.
7. As terrorist groups have been using the Internet to recruit and to commit crimes, parliaments are invited to focus on adopting laws and policies that address countering terrorism and prevent FTF radicalization through the Internet, with a specific emphasis on social media and new technologies.
8. Terrorism aims to destroy homelands and the values of humanity, civilization and faith. Therefore, parliaments are strongly encouraged to adopt preventive, legislative, educational and other measures to protect countries from the scourge of terrorism by reaffirming these fundamental values.
9. Parliaments are advised to adopt measures and policies that promote interfaith dialogue based on tolerance, equality and mutual respect, as inspired by the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together (2019), the Marrakesh Declaration (2016), the Center for Dialogue (2012), A Common Word (2006), the Amman Message (2003) and the time-honoured initiatives of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, such as the Dar al-Taqrīb Bayn al-Mathāhib (1947), which paved the way for the aforementioned initiatives.
10. Parliaments are encouraged to adopt measures and policies to prevent prisons from becoming breeding grounds for terrorist recruitment, including FTFs.

11. Addressing the root causes of radicalization should start in the education system, and parliaments are encouraged to adopt legislations and policies to ensure that important values, such as tolerance, are taught from a young age.
12. Parliamentarians, as the representatives of the people, are at the forefront of the prevention of extremism leading to terrorism. They are encouraged to adopt laws and policies that accurately reflect realities on the ground by engaging with their communities and hearing directly from the people they represent, especially from youth, women, remote communities and other vulnerable groups. They can bring efforts to prevent terrorism to the grassroots level, especially within communities at risk.
13. Parliaments are advised to adopt and implement a holistic approach to prevent, prosecute and reintegrate FTFs. In this regard, MPs are invited to support legislations designed to fully achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is because development issues, including *inter alia*, employment, poverty, youth and gender, can be both a root cause of the problem and a solution to prevent the threat of FTFs and extremism leading to terrorism. The respect and promotion of socioeconomic rights have been proven to be an effective preventive measure against extremism leading to terrorism.
14. Parliaments are invited to adopt measures to protect their countries' critical infrastructure, including sports and tourism facilities, from terrorist attacks. Sports and tourism can also play a critical role in promoting tolerance, inter-faith dialogue and understanding among civilizations and are very effective tools in the prevention of radicalization, especially with the youth.
15. Parliaments are advised to include a gender approach to terrorism in order to strengthen the role of women in countering terrorism and extremism leading to terrorism. Indeed, as mothers, wives and community leaders, women play a central role in preventing radicalization to terrorism.

In conclusion, we very much welcome the IPU-UN Joint Programme on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which *inter alia*, aims to reduce the implementation gap between international resolutions and national legislations, and we recognize this Programme as a basis from which we can effectively put these concluding remarks into action.

Lastly, we ask that the IPU bring our Outcome Document to the attention of the global parliamentary community at the 140th IPU Assembly, to be held in Doha from 6 to 10 April 2019, in order to promote parliamentary engagement with the United Nations. On the other hand, we also call upon the United Nations to share the aforementioned document in appropriate forums to support the effective application of the concluding remarks therein.