

United Nations

Office on Drugs and Crime

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Mr. Sobotka, President of the National Council of Austria,
Mr. Pacheco, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,
Distinguished Speakers and Members of Parliament,
Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to address you today at this first-ever Global Parliamentary Summit on Counter-terrorism.

This summit addresses the right question: what can we do to tackle the causes and enabling factors of terrorism and violent extremism? By answering this question, we can target systemic problems and long-term solutions.

As the elected representatives of your people, it is a question that you have the responsibility and the power to address.

Parliaments lay the foundation for countering terrorism – namely, the law.

You draft the legislation that is used to deter and prosecute terrorist acts, and you oversee the national institutions that implement them. You ratify international agreements that bring the world together against terrorism, and you ensure that national laws enable international cooperation.

Your role as parliamentarians is becoming more and more vital, as the world faces dangerous trends.

Dae'sh and Al-Qaeda threaten to re-emerge in former strongholds, just as they expand their reach in other countries and regions, most notably Africa.

In other parts of the world, a surge in hateful ideology fuels racially and ethnically-motivated terrorism.

Meanwhile, terrorist groups are exploiting legal and operational gaps, and the lines between different threats to the rule of law are becoming blurred.

Terrorist groups continue to rely on organized crime as a source of financing, often forming alliances with criminal groups.

Trafficking in persons, arms, drugs, and cultural property are just some of the crimes used to fund terrorism. Illegal proceeds and revenues find their way

into the hands of terrorists through money-laundering and illicit financial flows.

Terrorists are also using new technologies. The rapid growth of internet users around the world, and the rapid growth of criminal activity online, are being exploited by terrorist groups: with a smartphone and an internet connection, terrorist acts can be planned, organized, incited, financed, and celebrated. Authorities often struggle to collect and use electronic evidence effectively, in many cases because they lack the necessary laws and capacities.

While the threat evolves, the root causes persist.

The same poverty, inequality, and injustice that fuel crime and corruption also fan the flames of terrorism and the hateful ideologies behind it.

In turn, lawlessness and violence only aggravate difficult social and economic conditions, feeding into a vicious cycle of victimization and aggression. The COVID-19 pandemic has only added to the struggles and desperation that drive this cycle.

Terrorism is more than a threat to security; it is a complex challenge to our societies and criminal justice systems that requires comprehensive, integrated responses.

The legal frameworks that defend societies from terrorism must account for its perpetrators, collaborators and financiers, and support its victims. They must also target the expansion of terrorism across jurisdictions and into cyberspace, and aim to prevent the conditions conducive to terrorism.

Through multilateral engagement, parliaments can develop such frameworks together.

Your partnership with the United Nations will be essential.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime is home to vital expertise on combating crime, drugs, corruption, and terrorism. We have a field presence in 87 countries, and we provide support to 156 countries.

Through the IPU-UN Joint Programme on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism, we have already established a solid foundation of joint work.

Now, thanks to the momentum you are building, we have an opportunity to be more ambitious.

It is an opportunity that we must take.

The first area of priority that we should turn to is the adoption and implementation of the international legal framework.

UNODC has been assisting countries in becoming party to the 19 conventions against terrorism.

Some of those conventions have achieved near-universal ratification, including the convention on suppressing terrorism financing.

Others are gaining states parties every year; the convention on acts of nuclear terrorism, for example, has 118 States Parties as of this year.

Equally important are the two UN conventions on organized crime and corruption, which can establish criminal accountability for terrorists, and for the other criminals that support them.

UNODC acts as guardian to those conventions; both are almost universally ratified.

Using the reach and convening power of the IPU, and the expertise of UNODC and our partners, we can aim higher, striving for universal ratification, as well as full, effective application of these important international tools.

The second priority we must work on is ensuring that the right national legislation is in place in different countries.

Working with IPU and UNOCT, our Office has provided assistance on drafting and reviewing counter-terrorism legislation in countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Thanks to an application developed with IPU and being launched at this Summit, UNODC's SHERLOC portal, with thousands of pieces of legislation relevant to terrorism, will be directly available to parliamentarians around the world.

Going forward, we can expand our support in scope and reach, to target important gaps in counter-terrorism legislation across jurisdictions, and to help make international cooperation simpler.

Legislation in all countries should strongly and explicitly criminalize all acts of terrorism, including acts of preparation, collaboration, and support.

Authorities should be empowered to investigate and prosecute terrorism financing, seize and freeze related assets, and regulate electronic transactions, in cooperation with the private sector, and in line with UN resolutions and mechanisms.

Criminal legal provisions should also specifically tackle the link between organized crime and terrorism, allowing for effective prosecution and international cooperation.

To cope with emerging threats, laws should facilitate requesting, collecting, and using electronic evidence across borders, and employing investigative techniques that harness new technologies.

Of course, there can be no justice without support to victims.

UNODC is proud of our ongoing work with IPU and UNOCT to draft model legislative provisions on victims of terrorism, in consultation with parliamentarians and other stakeholders from some 80 countries.

The model provisions, soon to be finalized, can be used to help countries adopt victim-centered legislation based on international norms.

The third and final issue of priority that we should tackle together is the adoption of a more holistic approach to preventing terrorism, by focusing on building robust institutions and resilient societies, working with religious and community leaders and academic institutions and think tanks.

As parliamentarians, you are protectors of strong and fair institutions and people-centered policies. You are also community leaders and advocates.

You help prevent terrorism and radicalization when you safeguard human rights and equal access to justice; when you promote integrity and root out corruption; when you engage with women and youth, create opportunities for your constituents, and leave no one behind.

The recent review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy emphasized the need to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism.

This year, UNODC launched a new corporate strategy that embraces comprehensive and integrated responses to drugs, crime, corruption, and terrorism.

We have also launched the Strategic Vision for Africa 2030, which constitutes a promise and an intent to engage more closely with people and their needs, in order to promote the rule of law in Africa, from the ground up.

These frameworks can form a powerful basis for us to work closer together in fostering a whole-of-society approach to counter-terrorism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Twenty years ago, almost to the day, terrorists murdered almost 3,000 innocent people going about their daily lives in New York City, in the largest attack in recent history.

Less than two weeks ago, terrorists murdered more than 100 people near Kabul International Airport, targeting the desperate and the vulnerable.

Just yesterday, France opened the biggest trial in the country's modern history over the 2015 terror attacks in Paris.

And in my own country, in Egypt, too many have lost their lives to terrorism. No country is safe.

Terrorism has persisted.

It is time to evaluate our responses and expand our thinking about how murderous hate on such a massive scale can endure and perpetuate, despite our best efforts.

It is time for you, parliamentarians, to lead the way towards laws, institutions, and societies that give terrorism no lifeline.

This summit is an important initiative; it is also a first step towards doing more.

I wish to thank the IPU and the UN Office on Counter-terrorism for taking this step with us, and for their commitment to protecting people from terrorism and violent extremism.

I also wish to thank our host country Austria for its unwavering stance against terrorism, and our wonderful home city of Vienna, which was targeted by terrorism last year, but stands proud and beautiful as ever.

Looking forward, we should strive to make the next phase of our joint work even more practical and operational.

At UNODC, we are ready to work with you to establish a more ambitious, unified framework for legislative and technical assistance to parliaments on counter-terrorism.

We also stand ready to support the IPU's ongoing efforts to build parliamentary networks, as we have done with law enforcement and prosecution networks in the past.

As legislators, you have the power to fortify the law within and among countries, to protect the people you represent from hate and the terror it breeds.

Justice is about holding the perpetrators accountable, and it is about preventing more people from falling victim.

UNODC is proud to be your partner in fulfilling this duty.

Thank you, and I wish you fruitful deliberations during the sessions ahead.