



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

VIRTUAL COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK 2020

Webinar IV: Protecting and Promoting Human Rights as a Cornerstone for Building Resilience against Terrorism

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1 Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

2 As he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, Elie Wiesel said: “When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant.”

3 Terrorism like COVID-19 knows no borders and is indifferent toward human lives. It kills recklessly across borders and does not make a difference with regard to race, religion or political views. However, COVID-19 and terrorism grow more easily and strike more often in places, where societies are weak, where preventive measures are not in place due to failed or bad governance and where certain groups are privileged to the detriment of others.

4 We are living in special times, where the world has to join forces to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. As the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in April this year, “*We are all in this Together*”. The pandemic poses a broad range of challenges to all actors: governments, international organizations, as well as the civil society. We do not know yet the impact of Covid-19 on the phenomenon of terrorism. It might well be context specific. In any case, with more socio-economic stress, the drivers of violent extremism that lead to terrorism could flourish and terrorist groups will try to exploit such situations.

5 While fighting COVID-19, we call on all States to be mindful that human rights violations, bad governance and in particular, bad policing can be important drivers and triggers of terrorism. Taking repressive action and restricting human rights in an excessive, disproportionate and misused way would not only be a bad recipe against the disease, but could also contribute to a fertile ground for violent extremism and terrorism.

- **[Respect for human rights in the broader context of prevention and sustaining peace agenda]**

6 If we want peace instead of conflict and violence, the obvious question we should ask is “Why do people fight or use violence?”. The often cited Worldbank and UN report “Pathways for peace” gives us some answers: Because of inequality, exclusion and injustice. The denial and the violation of basic human rights rank high as root causes of violence and conflict. Reversely, the protection and the strengthening of human rights are potent remedies to avoid conflict and violence.

7 In this sense, the creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the respect for human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to the recruitment strategies of violent extremists, and the most promising strategy for rendering their efforts ineffective.

8 Preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism is rooted in the renewed focus of the UN on prevention and on sustaining peace. Sustaining Peace as defined in the 2016 twin resolutions is a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, which ensures that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account. It encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to a conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development.

9 In order to build resilient and confident societies, we need to further embed human rights into the security framework. This demand is not new. In 2016, – together with 70 other states – Switzerland launched the Appeal of June 13 in Geneva with the objective of putting human rights at the heart of conflict prevention. The Appeal calls for using the full potential of human rights mechanisms for conflict prevention in order to make true progress in our shared responsibility to prevent war and human suffering.

10 In 2017, together with Germany and 14 other Member States, we created two cross-regional lobby groups – one in New York, one in Geneva – to work towards the implementation of the Appeal of June 13. These so-called Human Rights / Conflict Prevention Caucuses promote a closer collaboration between the human rights and the peace and security communities.

11 These initiatives have contributed to the fact that the maintenance of sustainable peace, by putting human rights at the heart of our activities, is today recognized as a system-wide responsibility that requires synergies between the three UN pillars. There is still room for improvements. How can we better use the reports prepared for by the Human Rights Council

in Geneva? How can we more often listen to the Human Rights Council's special rapporteurs and commissions of inquiry here in New York? For Switzerland, improving the flow of information between Geneva and New York remains a high priority.

- **[Switzerland's humanitarian engagement in a counterterrorism context]**

12 Switzerland has long been engaged on the tensions existing between counterterrorism measures and humanitarian engagements as foreseen by international humanitarian law (IHL). In our view, it is today no longer a question of whether there is a negative impact of CT measures on humanitarian engagements. It clearly is. It is now time to discuss the scale of the challenge and concrete solutions.

13 CT measures, IHL and humanitarian activities do not share the same goals, except for the protection of the civilian population. The amalgam of the fight against terrorism with humanitarian engagements however leads to criminalization of activities as foreseen by IHL and leads to entire populations, who have to live in areas controlled by listed armed groups, left without assistance and protection.

14 The solution most often mentioned to solve this dilemma are humanitarian exemptions in sanctions regimes and CT frameworks. We need open discussions about what such exemptions could look like and even more importantly on how to implement these exemptions at a national level. Security Council Resolution 2462 is an excellent example: it contains safeguards for humanitarian activities as foreseen by IHL. But what will make the difference on the ground is the way Member States implement this requirement. It is absolutely key that the political and military agenda of fighting terrorism is brought in line with IHL. The law of war is not about how you treat your friends, but how you treat your enemies.

15 In regard to derisking and debanking, Switzerland recently supported a new risk-management toolkit for humanitarian organizations elaborated by the Norwegian Refugee Council. Due diligence measures of humanitarian organizations to reduce risks have only grown over the past years. One of the conclusions we have drawn is that: there is no zero risk approach possible, if we do not want to leave entire populations at the mercy of listed groups.

- **[Respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in the UN's strategic counterterrorism framework]**

- 16 Since the adoption of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (the GCTS) in 2006, Switzerland has supported a balanced implementation of its four pillars. Switzerland is willing to continue its engagement at the occasion of the seventh review of the GCTS next year. We will particularly focus on reinforcing the prevention aspects of Pillar 1 and the respect for human rights and IHL as stated in Pillar 4. This Pillar continues to be the weakest and least well-funded pillar in the UN's counterterrorism architecture. Therefore, strengthening the rule of law and the respect of international law is at the core of our priorities.

17 Switzerland is convinced that a full integration of all civil society organizations (CSO) and Member States is crucial to ensure the respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in the application of CT measures. In that regard, I would like to underline the work done by UNOCT (with Switzerland's support) on the elaboration of a Civil Society Engagement Strategy focusing on "human rights, gender and youth". Switzerland is encouraging the UN to devote enough capacity for the implementation of this Strategy and to fulfill its objective of creating a bridge between CSO, Member States and UN entities. This is not only relevant in Headquarters in New York, but even more so in the field. Switzerland believes that the mainstreaming of the UN engagement with CSO in a counterterrorism context can be best achieved by creating a dedicated CSO unit within the UN's counterterrorism architecture. We would expect such entity to support efforts that protect civil society space in the counterterrorism and prevention of violent extremism (PVE) context.

- **[Conclusion]**

18 To conclude, please allow me to quote once more the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres: *"By respecting human rights in this time of crisis, we will build more effective and inclusive solutions for the emergency of today and the recovery for tomorrow."*