

# 'We must fight terrorism together' without sacrificing legal and human rights, declares UN chief

With new solutions proposed, and new partnerships established, the United Nations [Secretary-General](#) told delegates from Member States attending the first ever High-Level Conference on Counter-Terrorism, that he was committed to meeting the challenge of "keeping your citizens safe".

["We must fight terrorism together"](#), with methods that do not compromise the rule of law and human rights," said Antonio Guterres, speaking at the end of the two-day conference marking Counter-Terrorism Week, at UN Headquarters in New York.

The UN chief said that "we should engage with all who can help us achieve our goals", including empowering young people through education, jobs and training, and engaging women and all of civil society in the fight against terrorism.

He said consideration was being given to establishing a new unit in the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, to ensure that the views of civil society groups – who were among the more than 1,000 delegates attending the landmark two-day event – are "fully reflected" in policies and programmes.

A Global Network of Counter-Terrorism Coordinators, was another likely initiative he said, which would allow expertise and best-practices to be more effectively shared.

Prevention was also key said Mr. Guterres, adding that "terrorists remain determined to find a weakness in our defence...To stay ahead of the terrorists, I call on the international community, the private sector and academia, to share knowledge, expertise and resources to prevent new technologies becoming lethal terrorist weapons," said the Secretary-General.

Other top UN officials echoed the call for greater youth-involvement as well as preventing the misuse of new technologies and the internet by terrorists.

## **Development can play a vital role**

Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), highlighted the role development can play in the "prevention approach."

"Very often the context within which extremism grows is to some extent linked to failures in development and weaknesses in the institutions that represent the Nation State. Desperation and frustration then may lead people, young people in particular, to lose confidence in state institutions because they have not delivered," he said.

Our youth is not our greatest threat but our greatest hope – *UNDP head Achim Steiner*

Mr. Steiner added that despite youth often becoming the “target” for radicalization by violent extremist groups, many young people display “extraordinary resilience” and are addressing violent extremism in a broad range of settings.

“We need to recognize their unique role and further engage them as meaningful partners and leaders. Our youth is not our greatest threat but our greatest hope,” he said, noting that the global community should do “everything possible” to ensure their potential is not undermined by misuse of new technologies of which they are the fastest adopters.

In his remarks, the head of UNDP also highlighted the “enormous potential” offered by new technologies, including to enhance public transparency, broaden meaningful inclusion and participation in decision-making.

### **We must not fail ‘our future’ – UN Special Adviser**

Adama Dieng, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, cited conflicts around the world where States and non-State actors, including terrorists and violent extremist groups, have committed horrific atrocity crimes and that some of those groups have misused religion and the false interpretation of religious texts to incite and justify violence.

Our young people are our future ... we must not fail them – *UN Special Adviser Adama Dieng*

In particular, many have sought to entice young people, exploit their grievances and hopes, and drag them into the “trap of violence and terror” he warned.

“Our young people are our future. We must not fail them,” stressed the Special Adviser, calling for including youth in the design and development of workable solutions. “Including youth in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism must be a priority,” he said.

In his remarks, Mr. Dieng also called on religious leaders to engage more with young people and reach out to those who are marginalized and may be vulnerable to recruitment by terrorists. Collaborate with them to confront ideologies that promote violent extremism, and address topics that religious extremists monopolize, providing counter narratives, he urged.

### **Gender stereotypes drive choices that terrorists make**

Also addressing the conference, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), spoke of the work done by the Organization to address complex gender dynamics around terrorism.

“Gender stereotypes contribute towards the choices that terrorists make: they target women in a specific way, taken them away from families and abduct them where they are not valued,” she said, noting that boys and men too are targeted using “toxic masculinity” to attract them to violence and extremism.

Gender stereotypes contribute towards the choices that terrorists make – *UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka*

The head of UN Women also cautioned that terrorist groups are increasingly using women and girls in conducting attacks given that they are not perceived as a threat to the extent that young men and boys are.

Prejudices and stereotypes against women and girls are now being used by terrorists to use the same “negative stereotypes” that exist in society and perpetuate gender norms that regard girls and boys in different ways, she explained.

The world must recognize the role of women and girls of all ages as “partners in prevention” and response, urged Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka.

“They can facilitate interventions that are human rights-based and gender sensitive ... avoiding any unintended consequences,” she said.