

Speech by Stef Blok, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the GCTF Ministerial Meeting, New York, 25 September 2019

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Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I'd like to welcome you to the tenth Ministerial Meeting of the GCTF in the margins of the UN General Assembly. A special occasion! This Forum was founded eight years ago as a trailblazing organisation with 30 members devoted to developing long-term approaches to countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. It seeks to reduce terrorist recruitment and increase civilian capabilities for dealing with terrorist threats. These goals are just as relevant today as they were eight years ago.

That's why I applaud the valuable and necessary work done by you, the members of the GCTF. Terrorism continues to threaten our societies, and your presence in this room underscores our joint commitment to fighting it.

After four years, today marks the Netherlands' last meeting as co-chair of the GCTF. It's been a pleasure to share this responsibility with the Kingdom of Morocco, a key leader on strong border security and countering terrorist travel. Our two countries have worked tirelessly to give focus to the GCTF, and stimulate open and transparent dialogue on how best to deal with the threat of violent extremism. We couldn't have wished for a better partner and friend as co-chair. Minister Bourita – Nasser – thank you once again for the excellent cooperation. Your continuing leadership is reason enough to be optimistic about the GCTF's future work. Canada, a longstanding friend and ally, will take over from the Netherlands. I wish you both success in this endeavour.

Before I part with the chairmanship, I'm pleased to present the Moroccan-Dutch legacy paper, which reflects on two consecutive terms of co-chairing this Forum.

Looking back, I see a Forum that we can be proud of.

First of all, the GCTF has always been ahead of the curve. We've been tackling issues like homegrown terrorism, returning foreign terrorist fighters, and the links between terrorism and organised crime from day one. Those of us in this room today face various aspects of these threats. In the case of the Netherlands, for example, we saw an attack with a possible extremist motive in Utrecht earlier this year and the arrest of several people with terrorist intentions.

Secondly, the Forum has developed 18 policy documents which offer policymakers concrete guidelines to effectively deal with the many aspects of the terrorist threat.

Finally, it has brought together 30 committed members and over one hundred partners worldwide. The fight against terrorism requires a broad effort by a multitude of actors. And I'm glad to see so many of them here in this room today, united by a shared objective.

Specifically, I would like to thank former co-chair Turkey for its continued active role in this Forum, and its ongoing support to the GCTF Admin Unit. Mr Çavuşoğlu, I appreciate your continued involvement in the GCTF, and on counterterrorism more generally.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'd like to turn to the themes on this year's agenda:

First, stamping out terrorist travel. We must remain committed to preventing potential terrorists from reaching the places where they intend to strike. We can only do this if we work together. The Netherlands has shown its commitment to this policy priority by handing over our TRIP system for registering passenger data to the UN last year.

Secondly, the threat of terrorist use of Unmanned Aerial Systems, or UAS's. While usually harmless when used for civilian purposes, UAS – or drones – pose a significant and worrying threat when weaponised and used for terror.

The GCTF has discussed the use of administrative measures to counter terrorism, with due respect for international and human rights law. We've also talked about the role of women in countering violent extremism, while not forgetting that they too can be perpetrators.

Cooperation on these topics, through this Forum, is as necessary today as it was eight years ago.

Take ISIS. It may have been driven out of the lands it once occupied, but its violent ideology continues to call people to violence. Some of its fighters have gone underground, waiting for an opportunity to resurface. Many others are still behind bars. But as we've seen in the past, these places are hotbeds of radicalisation and recruitment. We must remain vigilant to a resurgence in this threat. This is equally true with regard to Al Qa'ida, Boko Haram, Al Shabaab and other terrorist groups. Recent terrorist attacks, such as those in Christchurch, Nairobi and Sri Lanka, have demonstrated that we cannot let our guard down.

As long as fighters are not brought to justice, as long as discontent and the lack of prospects continue to exist, the threat of violent radicalisation remains real. We owe it to the victims to hold perpetrators accountable and ensure that they're tried in national, regional or international courts or tribunals and in accordance with international law standards. Impunity can never be our answer to terrorism.

This is why tomorrow I will host an event together with my colleague from Iraq to discuss accountability and the need for just and fair trials for the atrocities committed by ISIS in Iraq and Syria, some of which may amount to genocide. Because lasting peace simply cannot be achieved without accountability.

Ladies and gentlemen, It has been an honour and a privilege to chair this important forum together with Morocco for the last four years. Without the enduring commitment to this Forum by its members, our shared work would not have been possible. Your dedication makes me hopeful that our societies are stronger than the threat of terrorism. I thank you for the honour of guiding the Forum's work for two terms.