

Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos at the 10th Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) Ministerial Meeting, United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), New York

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Dear all,

It is a pleasure to be here again this year at this very important Forum, as Commissioner responsible for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship of the European Union.

I would like to warmly thank Morocco, the Netherlands, Turkey and the USA for leading the Global Counterterrorism Forum in the past. This Forum has proved itself to be one of the most important instruments and tools in our hands in order to fight terrorist groups in an effective way. I would like to congratulate Canada for taking on the Co-chairmanship with Morocco.

Since its inception ten years ago, this Forum has produced a tremendous amount of useful guidance and best practices, and has been instrumental in facilitating bottom-up global approaches to countering terrorism and violent extremism worldwide.

Despite some advances against Da'esh, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, it is sadly evident that they still are a major threat to international stability and security.

Some issues need particular attention in future international coordinated efforts.

First, we must be sure that what we decide in this Forum is implemented on the ground.

It is our duty to consolidate the Forum's position to support and guide States in the development of effective policies, guidelines and efforts in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism.

At EU level, we have been doing a lot during the last five years. In 2015 we were taken by surprise and the EU was totally unprepared to address both migration and security issues. All these terrorist attacks have put us in front of our responsibilities and since then, we have done a lot. At our level we are strengthening our partnerships on security not only among us within the EU but with third countries like Egypt, which I would like to commend for its efforts to work with us in order to address this phenomenon, and other countries in Africa.

In doing so, we should not limit our efforts to only responding to terrorism. Prevention is instrumental. Societies must be supported. Each of these actors should be aware of their role and responsibility in building a resilient society and spreading and defending our shared values of respect, tolerance and democracy.

Second, the threat is evolving all the time.

That is why, in developing our responses, we must consider the shifts in terrorist groups' strategies, and counter the influence of their narratives on the most vulnerable individuals. The terror network still represents a major threat due to its propaganda. Da'esh seems to have been defeated on the ground but not on the internet, which is the other battleground.

The dreadful attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, made clear once again the harm that can be caused by the spread of terrorist and violent extremist content online in a matter of hours.

For the past four years, within the EU, we have been at the forefront of preventing the dissemination of terrorist content online. Thanks to the EU Internet Forum, a solid and trustful cooperation has been established with our Member States, the Internet Industry players and Europol.

Many of the global initiatives that the industry has taken, such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, have grown from this cooperation.

Beyond this cooperation, the European Commission was the first to propose, exactly a year ago, EU-wide rules to remove terrorist content online within 1 hour, and I hope this will become law soon.

We are pleased to see that the Christchurch call for Action has created a momentum for global commitment and action. In the EU, we are working on an EU Crisis Protocol, which should receive political commitment by all stakeholders at the next meeting of the EU Internet Forum on 7 October.

Third, developments in Iraq and Syria have sharpened the global debate on the return of Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their families, with a particular attention to women and children.

This issue raises difficult questions not only as regards effective law-enforcement, but also regarding their reintegration into society.

National mechanisms for monitoring radicalisation in prisons and after release must also be promoted. De-radicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration must be dealt with jointly as a package to prevent further spread of terrorist ideology.

In addition, to bring terrorists to justice, we need better information exchange and judicial cooperation.

The UN capacity-building project in certain UN Member States to collect and process Passenger Name Records (PNR) is a big step in the right direction.

In conclusion, a strong multilateral framework remains essential in this global fight - to build understanding of the nature of the challenges and to establish cooperative mechanisms across continents.

With trust between us, and a strong sense of unity and purpose in our efforts, we can build bridges and accomplish our goal which is to crack down on these networks and finish once and for all with this phenomenon that is threatening our lives and our democracies.

Thank you for your attention.