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Global Group of NGOs Deplore Lack of Attention to Human Rights in Latest Review of UN’s Global Counterterrorism Strategy by UN Member States

July 10th, 2018

The organizations listed below welcome the adoption on June 26th, 2018 of UN General Assembly Resolution 72/284 reviewing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which reaffirms states' commitment to global responses to terrorism. The UN’s Global Counterterrorism Strategy, first adopted in 2006, sets out a plan of action for the UN and member states at the global, regional, and national level to counter-terrorism.

Our organizations recognize the value of a global counter-terrorism strategy where human rights are an essential component. The resolution importantly reaffirms states' obligations to comply with international law, including international human rights law, while countering terrorism and that human rights are the “fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism.”

We are, however, concerned at member states' failure to adequately address human rights abuses and the increased militarisation of counter-terrorism approaches. We are also concerned about member states' failure to provide an enabling environment for civil society entities, including those relating to women, to be meaningfully engaged in the Strategy review.

In particular, this 6th review of the UN's Global Counterterrorism Strategy failed to sufficiently address the spread of human rights violations perpetrated while countering terrorism and the erosion of international humanitarian law in armed conflict.

The review missed the opportunity to bolster the Strategy's too often neglected 4th Pillar that requires the mainstreaming of human rights in all counter-terrorism activity and underscores that the promotion and protection of human rights for all and the rule of law is essential to all components of the Strategy. As successive UN Special Rapporteurs on counter-terrorism and human rights have noted, the mainstreaming and resourcing of an integrated human rights infrastructure in countering terrorism is an urgent priority within the UN system.

Furthermore, references to the inclusion of women have remained unchanged since 2016, limiting an opportunity to strengthen gender analysis. There is a strong need to integrate a gender analysis of power and question systems and practices that deepen traditional gendered roles facilitating conflict and militarised security. Without a gender analysis of discrimination, violence, and lack of access to resources in relation to women and to different groups within societies, efforts to counter terrorism cannot be effective. Indeed, measures developed without gender analysis often prove counterproductive.

These omissions not only erode the protection and promotion of human rights globally, but ultimately are self-defeating in ensuring sustainable long term responses to terrorism.

Finally, at a time when civic space is being systematically eroded around the world under the pretext of countering terrorism, we are deeply disappointed that the review does not recognize the essential role that civil society plays in guarding against abusive counter-terrorism practices and responding to and preventing the conditions conducive to terrorism. Fundamental rights underpinning the work of civil society must be protected. States can and should do better, and make sure the UN does too.

On a positive note, we welcome the review's emphasis on the role of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) to share information with relevant United Nations counter-terrorism bodies and relevant international, regional and subregional organizations. However, this sharing can only take place with the permission of those member states under CTED assessment; though we recall, as CTED itself has emphasized, that information may only be shared in a manner consistent with human rights, we urge these states to not require the Directorate to keep such information confidential.

We also welcome the request in the review for the Secretary-General to report annually on the progress of the United Nations Office for Counter-Terrorism in increasing transparency in selection and funding of projects and their impact, as well as on the efficiency of shared funding arrangements. The aim of this request is to ensure meaningful assessment of the UN Counter-Terrorism Architecture at the 7th review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We urge the Secretary-General to prioritize this important task.

Co-signatories:

Amnesty International
ARTICLE 19
Fair Trials
Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect
Global Center on Cooperative Security
Human Rights Clinic (Columbia Law School)
Human Rights Watch
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)
International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
Open Society Justice Initiative
Privacy International
Reprieve
Rights Watch UK