

## **UN Should Ensure Independent Oversight of UN Counter-Terrorism Architecture**

*Critical need for UN Member States and Secretary-General to use new UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy to develop an independent oversight mechanism to assess and mitigate harm from counterterrorism measures*

[New York, United States, June 30] - UN Member States and the Secretary-General should ensure that the 7th review of UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS), adopted today by the UN General Assembly, leads to robust, independent and impartial oversight of the impact of UN counter-terrorism activity on human rights, including with respect to gender equality and children's rights; as well as on the rule of law; humanitarian action; and civic space, 20 members of the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism said today.<sup>1</sup>

The Strategy serves as a guide for both member states and the UN counter-terrorism architecture, which has expanded dramatically since the attacks of September 11, 2001. It plays a leading role in influencing Member States' counter-terrorism policies and practices. Overwhelming evidence has demonstrated that many UN Member States are violating an array of human rights, including women's and children's rights, as well as curtailing humanitarian action, and suppressing civil society organizations and human rights defenders in the name of countering terrorism.

While the new GCTS retains or adds several important human rights protections, many Member States rejected other critical language supportive of human rights, gender equality and civic space.

Alarming, some Member States went out of their way to amend or remove text from earlier drafts that would have created stronger safeguards for human rights and civil society. By doing so, they have, among other concerns, significantly weakened a critical proposal for the establishment of an independent oversight mechanism to monitor and evaluate the impact of the entire UN counter-terrorism architecture on rule of law, good governance, human rights, and gender equality. Instead of establishing independent oversight, the final draft merely calls on the Secretary-General to report by February 2023 on whether any such cross-cutting internal advisory or monitoring and evaluation is necessary.

Given the importance of this proposal, we urge the Secretary-General to prioritise such an assessment in the coming months and not to wait until February 2023. The assessment process should be UN system-wide and inclusive, involving meaningful civil society participation. We further call on the Secretary-General to explore creative solutions to ensure the establishment of an independent and impartial mechanism, with broad oversight powers, over UN counter-terrorism policies and programs.

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<sup>1</sup> The General Assembly adopted draft resolution (A/75/L.105) a roadmap to implement the 2006 Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, by consensus on June 30, 2021.

The new GCTS also asks the Secretary-General to assess and report by 2022 on the options for increasing resources and granting new powers for the UN Office of Counterterrorism, the lead UN counterterrorism agency, and implementing partners. We are gravely concerned at the prospect of providing additional resources to the UN counterterrorism system without increasing genuinely broad and independent oversight. As a result, we call on the Secretary-General to assess the request for increased counterterrorism resources in tandem with the request for independent oversight, and to undertake these assessments simultaneously.

We appreciate the efforts of co-facilitators to include civil society groups in the review process, which resulted in far more engagement than during the last review in 2018. Nevertheless, civil society participation still fell well short of UN system’s best practices. We ask that future strategy reviews include multiple tracks that ensure meaningful engagement for civil society groups. Further, we call for greater opportunities for a broader cross-section of civil society to meaningfully participate in future UN high-level conferences on counterterrorism. While it appears that participation has increased for the 2021 Counter-Terrorism Week, we believe that organizers could have invited many more civil society organizations to attend and to serve as panellists in official events and side-events.

While the UN counter-terrorism architecture has undergone dramatic growth in recent years, civil society has too often been side-lined and resources to uphold human rights protections have been left far behind. Despite some shortcomings, the 7th GCTS provides an opportunity to redress these dangerous imbalances. However, States’ failure to agree on urgently needed counter-terrorism reforms reveals deep divides and puts the UN at serious risk of being implicated in human rights violations and attacks on civil society, contrary to the institution’s fundamental goals and international law.

