

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 4 November 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that the Security Council is scheduled to hold a high-level meeting on the subject “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts: international cooperation on combating terrorism and violent extremism” on Wednesday, 19 November 2014. A concept note, prepared to inform the discussion, is attached (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex were circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Gary **Quinlan**
Permanent Representative



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Concept note for the open debate of the Security Council on the subject “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts: international cooperation on combating terrorism and violent extremism”

As President of the Security Council, the Foreign Minister of Australia will chair a high-level open debate on international cooperation on combating terrorism, including addressing the interrelated threats posed by foreign terrorist fighters, violent extremism, Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

In unanimously adopting resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014), the Council sharpened the international counter-terrorism framework in order to address the growing threat posed by ISIL and the Al-Nusrah Front (ANF), as well as the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters more broadly. The debate will use the reports requested by the Council in resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014), as well as the practical experience of States in implementation, to identify concrete follow-up actions that will:

- (a) Help Member States more effectively respond to the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters and violent extremism, including through cooperation, information sharing and the identification of best practices;
- (b) Reinforce the effectiveness of Security Council counter-terrorism measures through capacity-building as well as the imposition of sanctions targeting the emerging sources of recruits and funds; and
- (c) Strengthen strategic capability and coordination within the United Nations in order to address terrorism and extremism.

Background

The Al-Qaida movement remains one of the most significant challenges to international security. It has transformed itself over the past decade, developing from a single hierarchical terrorist organization into a network of affiliated but largely autonomous groups operating across many regions. Several terrorist groups in Africa that have operated with a predominantly nationalistic agenda have increasingly become aligned with Al-Qaida in name, ideology and tactics. ISIL and ANF, like other Al-Qaida affiliates and splinter groups, threaten an increasing number of States in all regions owing to global recruitment networks, the spread of extremist ideology online and diversified and significant funding streams from illicit sources, such as oil and trade in other economic resources, kidnapping for ransom, and extortion, but also from willing donors.

The phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters is only one factor in the increase over the past year of the threat from transnational terrorist groups, but it is a significant factor, with immediate and long-term consequences. The inflow of fighters has strengthened ISIL and ANF and shifted the dynamics and intensity of the conflict in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Foreign terrorist fighters are also helping Al-Qaida-related groups to exploit and exacerbate conflict in other parts of

the world, for example, in Libya, the Arabian Peninsula, the Maghreb and the Horn of Africa, and there is the potential for foreign terrorist fighters to travel from conflict to conflict with battle-hardened experience.

Foreign recruits are often responsible for higher levels of violence than local recruits, and they increase the prospects for operational success. Currently, the average age of terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters, is much younger than for the previous generation of terrorists, with many in their late teens. The Internet and social media have been catalytic in broadening the reach of radicalization. Terrorist groups also exploit these platforms by competing for attention through increasingly barbaric acts.

In its fourth biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, in June 2014, Member States unanimously expressed concern about the increasing flow of international recruits to terrorist organizations, including foreign terrorist fighters, and the threat that this poses for all Member States. Beyond the immediate threat, namely, the impact of such fighters on conflicts today, are the medium- and long-term threats that they pose in returning to their countries of origin or residences, or in travelling to third countries, in order to engage in terrorist activity. The “horizontal threat” of foreign terrorist fighters is not limited to a particular region or group of countries. Over 80 countries across all continents now have nationals or residents either engaged as or supporting foreign terrorist fighters, including countries that have not previously faced any Al-Qaida-related challenge. The problem of foreign terrorist fighters has profound security implications for third countries, including transit countries. Many foreign terrorist fighters continue to move easily and quickly, using irregular or illegal migration options or people-smuggling operations.

Practical action to prevent travel

Security Council resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) include measures for States to take in dealing with foreign terrorist fighters within their territories, as well as appropriate measures, including data collection and evidence-based travel and screening procedures, to help prevent the transit of foreign terrorist fighters across borders. Recent listings by the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities demonstrate how States can use United Nations sanctions against Al-Qaida to prevent and track the travel of foreign fighters, recruiters and facilitators. In adopting resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014), the Council also recognized the need for States to improve international, regional and subregional cooperation in order to prevent the travel of foreign terrorist fighters, including through the sharing of information on identification and patterns of travel; prevent terrorists from exploiting technology, communications and resources to incite terrorist acts; and secure prosecutions. It also recognized the need to build national capacity to prevent and interdict the travel of foreign terrorist fighters across land and maritime borders, in particular those of States that neighbour zones of conflict.

The United Nations system and other international entities, as well as regional organizations, play key roles in promoting cross-border cooperation and in mobilizing and delivering technical assistance. Resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) also highlight the need for the Council to monitor the effectiveness of its own measures for targeting the evolving threat posed by terrorism.

Countering terrorist narratives and extremist ideology

As the Security Council summit, held in September 2014, responding effectively to terrorism, including the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters, requires a comprehensive approach that includes strategies to counter violent extremism as well as the ideology of extremism that underpins the terrorist narrative. Resolution 2178 (2014) and the fourth review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy both called on States to do more to develop strategies to address violent extremism, building on resolution 1624 (2005).

The causes of the radicalization that leads to terrorism are complex and multidimensional, and the strategies to deal with them must be, as well. Key challenges in developing effective national strategies include: (a) obtaining the data needed to understand the scale and causes of radicalization and recruitment; (b) developing effective community-based mechanisms that leverage civil society; (c) generating counter-narratives on platforms that influence youth and, specifically, those at risk for recruitment; (d) undertaking de-radicalization in prisons and communities; and (e) coordinating international, regional and subregional narratives and interventions. The search for best practices and lessons learned is more critical than ever. For example, there is a growing awareness that effective approaches include robust legislation; strong coordination across many social and security agencies of government; and the incorporation of educators, social workers, religious scholars, and communities in prevention initiatives, in particular harnessing women as operational agents of change.

The United Nations plays a central role in the global fight against terrorism and extremist ideologies. It is integral to strengthening international, national and regional cooperation and capacity. Technical assistance in counter-terrorism has expanded significantly at United Nations headquarters since 2001, but expertise and programming in countering extremism remain limited. In addition, the reality that terrorism and extremism are now influencing and shaping many conflicts must be taken into account in United Nations peace and security operations, including peacekeeping, peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The United Nations itself has been attacked, as we saw recently in the context of peacekeeping operations in Mali and the Golan Heights, events that have implications for force protection. The mainstreaming of measures across the agenda of the United Nations to prevent terrorism and extremism will require a more coordinated approach among these efforts. To be more effective in countering the diffuse threat of terrorism, the United Nations must better integrate into its work efforts to address the conditions and drivers that lead people to become terrorists. This will require addressing the political, economic and social conditions that make people vulnerable to exploitation by extremists, as well as using the legitimacy of the United Nations to counter extremist narratives.

Establishing a champion within the United Nations system for countering extremism would help reduce extremism by assisting in harnessing internal capacity and existing activities; enhancing coordination and coherence; and instituting more effective communication. A champion could also provide advice to United Nations field missions on how to adapt their strategies for addressing extremism.

Open debate

In order to inform discussion on this topic, the Secretary-General will update the Council and Member States on the threat posed by terrorism, the ways in which

transnational terrorist networks are influencing conflict and the response of the United Nations. In response to resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014), the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) will report on the preliminary analysis of the threat of foreign terrorist fighters and on the sources of ISIL and ANF recruits, funds and arms. The Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee will report on the preliminary gap analyses of capacity and the work of the Committee and its Executive Directorate in order to identify best practices and facilitate technical assistance for strengthening implementation, building on resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1624 (2005). Council members and Member States will then be invited to speak.

Bearing in mind the time constraints, Member States may wish to focus on a few of the following elements:

- **National experience in implementing programmes to counter violent extremism and the ideology of extremism.** What aspects of counter- or de-radicalization did the programme focus on? What were the challenges for implementation? How did the programme engage civil society, religious and traditional leaders, and industry? Was independence from government important in engaging the community? Was the programme underpinned by any empirical research into the processes and pathways to radicalization? Has the programme been evaluated to measure effectiveness? Were counter-narratives, developed regionally or internationally, effective?
- **Experience in data collection and monitoring programmes to prevent the travel and transit of foreign terrorist fighters.** What methodologies were used? What metrics were collected? How was data collection linked to border controls? How was information shared among government agencies, bilateral partners and civil society? Was it important for information collection to be supported by legislation or regulation? What bilateral and international arrangements were effective in joint efforts to disrupt travel? How was recruitment on the Internet and social media incorporated into strategies?
- **Areas in which United Nations entities have a comparative advantage in supporting international efforts to address the challenges of terrorism and violent extremism.** Are there gaps in strategic communications and support to States? What improvements could be made to fill these gaps? How could coordination with Special Representatives of the Secretary-General be improved? How could a Special Representative on extremism act as a focal point in the United Nations system to enhance capacity and coherence and address extremist ideologies that underpin terrorism? How could United Nations peacekeeping, peacebuilding and conflict prevention capacities be better equipped to deal with terrorism and extremism? How could the United Nations best support regional and subregional organizations?

At the session, the Security Council will adopt a presidential statement that identifies practical steps for improving information-sharing among States in order to prevent the travel and financing of terrorists; address the spread of violent extremism and the ideology of extremism; strengthen international efforts to starve ISIL, ANF and other Al-Qaida entities of funds and recruits; enhance United Nations coordination for the purposes of preventing terrorism and extremism; and strengthen capacity-building efforts.