

Speech

SDG 16 – Accountability and Reconciliation

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**3rd International Conference at Ministerial Level on the Victims
of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East**

14 May 2018

Brussels

There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development

SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels).

Target 16.3 “promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.

His Excellency, Mr. Didier Reynders, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium

His Excellency, Mr. Gebran Bassil, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon

Distinguished delegations from participating States

Dear participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me start by thanking the host country and organizers on behalf of the UNODC Executive Director Mr. Yury Fedotov, for having invited our Office to this important Conference to speak about accountability and reconciliation in our collective efforts to reach the SDG 16 on Peace, justice and strong institutions in the complex context of violence against ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East.

Let me also thank the speakers who have been victims and survivors of such violence and who have shared their testimony with us, among them Nadia Murad our Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of the Survivors of Human Trafficking.

The SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions presents a unique and unprecedented opportunity for all of us to remind ourselves of our collective goal and the urgent need to collaborate and increase our efforts to achieve globally fair, humane and efficient criminal justice systems.

To achieve SDG 16 we need to look seriously at global level, but especially in conflict, post-conflict and fragile societies into the real capacity of criminal justice systems with a view to ensure that they can and do deliver on what they have been created for: bring perpetrators to justice and provide victims of crimes, including of organized crimes, of violence and terrorism with protection and justice thus being accountable to victims and the public in the delivery of justice.

Since its foundation, crime prevention and criminal justice have been integral part of the mandate of the United Nations and of our office, the UNODC. One of our key mandates relates to the building, strengthening and/or reforming of criminal justice systems based on the rule-of law and human rights under a victim-centred and gender-sensitive approach. Our works targets both the criminal justice response to perpetrators and the response to victims with a focus to ensuring access to justice, for marginalized and vulnerable persons, or groups with specific needs.

With the evolving and interlinked global threat in organized crime, terrorism, corruption and money-laundering, our work has expanded to also include and cover the criminal justice response to an ever growing number and forms of organized crimes, including human trafficking and terrorism.

Our work is comprehensive and aligned with relevant UN Conventions on drugs, crime and corruption, instruments on terrorism, UN standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice as well as in response to security council and general assembly resolutions relating to in particular terrorism.

Based on these collective agreements, we support Governments in developing national policies and laws to address crimes and terrorism, such as terrorism prevention and PVE strategies for Iraq and we invest in capacity-building measures for criminal justice officials across the region to enhance investigations, prosecutions and adjudication of (organized) crime, terrorism and related cases using modern technologies and investigation techniques such as special investigation techniques, intelligence-led investigations and open source investigations- with the ultimate goal to build evidence-tight cases before the court and ensure convictions for perpetrators.

Regarding the treatment of victims, a whole body of UN mandates has evolved and developed in the last decades dealing with standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice and other instruments which focus on victims of crimes and terrorism. Their consistent, comprehensive and continuous implementation is instrumental to the achievement of SDG16. These include for example:

the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power

the Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems,

the UN Model Strategies on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

the updated Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

The United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law

Considering the situation in the Middle East with ISIL as a main perpetrator, our work with victims focuses on the key role that victims can play before, during and after legal proceedings as well as on their needs for protection, assistance and reparations.

Since 2014, UNODC has provided trainings for judges and prosecutors on strengthening legal protection and support for victims of acts of terrorism (including children and women) during criminal proceedings. UNODC has also supported the development of national policies and programmes to support and assist victims of acts of terrorism and we will be training judges and other relevant institutions on the rights of ISIL's victims in Iraq, within the context of the trials related to ISIL's accountability. Several manuals and handbooks have been developed by us and our partners which can be used by policy makers and criminal justice officials to support victims of terrorism. These include:

- The specialized technical assistance tool entitled *The Criminal Justice Response to Support Victims of Acts of Terrorism (together with CTITF)*
- *Good Practices in Supporting Victims of Terrorism within the Criminal Justice Framework.*
- A recently published handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System
- A Manual on Women as victims of terrorist crimes is under preparation.

Let me now focus briefly on the violence perpetrated in particular by ISIL specifically targeting women and girls, often in form of sexual violence and slavery also in connection with human trafficking. The sheer number of women and girls affected as well as the social and health consequences and the stigma that victims and survivors face are tremendous and challenge any justice or health system in an unprecedented way.

Survivors need urgently and immediately short and medium-term trauma-informed psychological and socio-medical support as well as assistance to rebuild livelihoods and return home, if they wish to. And they need justice which we need to help to deliver to them if we are to achieve SDG 16

UNODC is ready to support the rebuilding of national victim-centered and gender-sensitive criminal justice systems in Iraq and Syria which will help to address some of the demands of the victims and survivors.

Our possible support builds on many years of experience supporting national reform, in particular in countries in the Arab region. Particularly for female victims and survivors of violence, access to justice is essential to secure legal empowerment and enable disadvantaged women to access their rights and entitlements and seek remedies for grievances.

UNODC has considerable experience in building the capacity of criminal justice officials to address violence against women through a victim-centered approach.

For example, in Egypt, we are working closely with the Prosecutor General Office, the Forensic Medicine Authority and the National Council for Women's Complaint Offices to address existing capacity gaps. In the State of Palestine, UNODC is working together with other UN agencies to eliminate violence against women in the West Bank and Gaza, focusing on forensic services under the lens of sexual and gender-based violence.

UNODC is also supporting Governments in addressing human trafficking, be it through training of criminal justice officers or through designing protection and referral mechanisms with our national partners for Human trafficking survivors involving civil society organizations which are eligible to access the UN Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking.

Another group of victims of great concern are children: Children recruited and exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups are victims of violence at multiple levels. In such cases they have often become victims of extreme violence

which includes ferocious recruitment methods, enslavement, sexual exploitation, exposure to constant fear, indoctrination and psychological pressure. They are often injured or killed in combat. At the same time, because of their young age and psychological malleability, children have been and may be used by such groups for committing criminal offences, including, in acts of terrorism, war crimes or crimes against humanity. However, these children remain children and should be considered primarily as victims and treated in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Their reintegration and rehabilitation is essential for preventing further violence and a peaceful future of the societies they belong to. When accountability measures are required, it is important that such children are being dealt with by a juvenile justice system that understands their needs and aims at their reintegration.

The recently launched UNODC *Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System* can help countries in the Middle East and elsewhere in dealing with this trying situation. In this regard, UNODC already provides technical assistance to a number of countries, including Niger and Lebanon. We plan to start specific activities at the regional level in the Middle East and North Africa later this year and we are ready to discuss as required by affected countries.

The battle for justice for the victims is daunting and uphill. Criminal justice systems in the region already face many challenges in discharging justice given the evolving and more complex crimes and acts of terrorism. They often lack human and financial resources, equipment, facilities and specialized training not only in investigations, but also in applying victim-centered approaches. Criminal

justice institutions in the region, especially in the conflict countries require our urgent attention, our solid resources and comprehensive support to be able to deliver justice to all the victims of violence and terrorism, enable reconciliation and to honour our commitment on SDG 16 for strong institutions grounded in the rule-of law and human rights for a stable and peaceful future of the people in the Middle East.

General death and injuries

According to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), civilian casualty figures in Iraq were recorded as following; in 2018 (382 dead, 122 injured), in 2017 (3,298 dead, 4,781 injured), in 2016 (6,878 dead, 11,988 injured),

in 2015 (7,515 dead, 14,855 injured), in 2015 (12,282 dead, 23,126 injured), in 2014 (7,818 dead, 17,981 injured).

The UN no longer keeps track of casualty figures in Syria due to the inaccessibility of many areas and the conflicting reports from the various parties to the war there¹.

Children

As one of the defenseless victims of terrorism, children have also endured many sufferings in the recent years following their exploitation as military tools and their exposure to all forms of aggression. According to the Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/72/361-S/2017/821](#)) issued on 24 August 2017, 114 verified cases of recruitment of children and use by parties to the conflict were recorded in Iraq. At least 463 children remained in detention on national security-related charges, including association with armed groups. Killing and maiming remained the most prevalent grave violation: 138 incidents were verified, resulting in 229 children (145 boys, 58 girls, 26 sex unknown) killed and 181 children (129 boys, 44 girls, 8 sex unknown) injured. In Syria, the recruitment and use of children increased sharply. 851 verified cases attributed the recruitment of children by armed groups; 20 per cent of verified cases involved children under the age of 15. As a result of their association with parties to conflict, at least 37 children were killed and 17 injured. Moreover, terrorist groups have indoctrinated and trained thousands of children in the

¹ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based monitoring group, reported in March 2018 that it had documented the deaths of more than 353,900 people, including 106,000 civilians, since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began 2011.

territories under its control and invested huge sums to the military training and ideological induction of children with the aim of shaping the next generation of jihadist assault troops.

Through online propaganda of extremist groups, juveniles have declared loyalty to ISIL from all corners of the world, and they are usually recruited to undertake terrorist acts in different places around the world.

Women

Terrorist groups specifically target women and girls through acts of sexual and gender-based violence such as rape, forced marriages, and sexual slavery, to achieve tactical objectives such as recruitment, to terrorize populations into compliance, and to achieve ideological aims. While inflicted not only against women, in most cases, sexual and gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls.

According to CTED's Global survey of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) by Member States, published in 2016, ISIL abducted hundreds of Yazidi women and girls, many of whom were taken into its controlled territory in the Syrian Arab Republic and sold as sexual slaves or bonded labour, alongside other kidnapped women (for about \$100 each) or used as "bargaining chips" for ransom money. ISIL welcomed the sexual enslavement of Yazidi women as a symbol of conquest and a way to prevent a further generation of Yazidis from being born.

Moreover, hundreds of Muslim women and girls (some as young as 13) have been coerced into marrying ISIL fighters under the pretence that such marriages

represent a “reward”, rather than a punishment. As a result, early marriage increased, as families elected to marry their daughters early in order to avoid a marriage into ISIL. This raised serious concerns about violation of the social, economic and cultural rights of girls and young women, as well as the degrading of the overall social and economic development of the Syrian Arab Republic. Furthermore, this severely undermined global efforts not only to combat and prevent terrorism, but also to promote sustainable economic development and the building of more peaceful, just and equitable societies.

In 2015 alone, the United Nations verified 274 cases of children recruited by ISIL in Syria, and the existence of centres in rural Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr and rural Raqqah that provided military training to at least 124 boys between 10 and 15 years of age. Verification of the use of children as foreign fighters has increased significantly, with 18 cases involving children as young as 7 years of age. In Iraq, in two incidents in June and September 2015, more than 1,000 children were reportedly abducted from Mosul district by ISIL. While the lack of access to areas in conflict undercuts the possibility to gather precise data, it is known that these children are used to act as spies, transport military supplies, conduct patrols, man checkpoints, videotape attacks for propaganda purposes, as well as to actively engage in attacks or combat situations. In the case of ISIL, for instance, information often becomes available only after the children’s death, when they are eulogized as martyrs and their country of origin is revealed. During the period 2015-2016, data concerning 89 children who died in hostilities showed that they included nationals from not only Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, but also

nationals of Australia, France, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Yemen. These figures do not include children taken to ISIL territory by their families.