

14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Kyoto, Japan
7 -12 March 2021

High-Level Event on *The UNODC Roadmap on the Treatment of Children Associated with Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups*

Thursday 10 March 2021
14:00 - 15:30
Venue: Conference Room A

PROGRAMME

This High-Level event is co-sponsored by the Governments of Japan and the Republic of Indonesia.

Opening remarks

TBC

Speakers

TBC

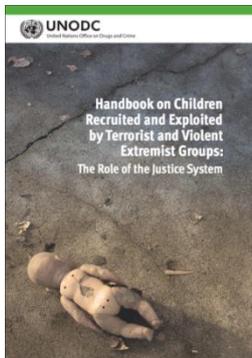
Moderator

TBC

HIGH LEVEL EVENT OBJECTIVES

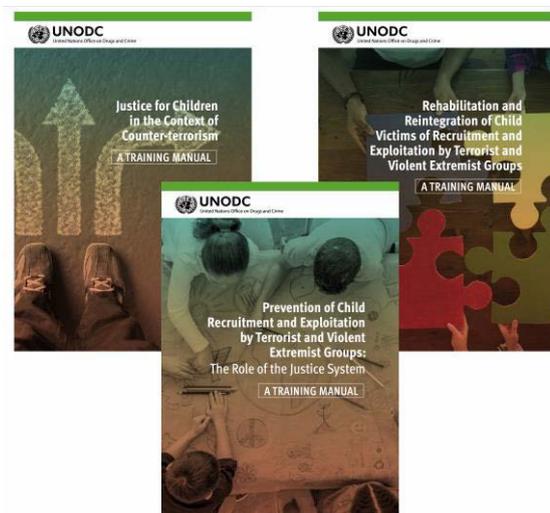
1. Present the [UNODC Roadmap on the Treatment of Children Associated with Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups](#).
2. [Outline the work that has been carried out by UNODC](#), thanks to the generous support of the Government of Japan to the Global Programme to End Violence against Children in this area of work.
3. Discuss challenges faced by Member States in dealing with children recruited and exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups.
4. Raise awareness on the role of key actors in promoting measures aimed to: *i)* prevent recruitment of children by terrorist and violent extremist groups; *ii)* provide appropriate treatment to children recruited and exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups; and, *iii)* promote the rehabilitation and the reintegration of those children, and in particular those who are deprived of their liberty and who are affected by the FTFs phenomenon.
5. Gather political support by UN Member States in the dissemination and further implementation of measures aimed to tackle the phenomenon.
6. Discuss enhanced cooperation at the national, regional and international levels with Member States.

A UNODC TRAINING PACKAGE



In light of UNODC mandates in the areas of justice for children, violence against children and counter-terrorism, the Office is uniquely positioned to provide technical assistance to Member States facing child recruitment and exploitation by terrorist and violent extremist groups. Since 2015, UNODC has been implementing, under the UNODC Global Programme on Violence against Children, a project entitled, *Preventing and Responding to Violence against Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups*.

Under this project, UNODC has provided technical assistance services to over 30 countries in different regions of the world. Building on its experience, UNODC launched a **Comprehensive Training Package** on the treatment of children recruited and exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups (a [Handbook](#) and three accompanying training manuals entitled: *(i) Prevention of Child Recruitment and Exploitation of Children by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System: A Training Manual*; *(ii) Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Child Victims of Recruitment and Exploitation by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: A Training Manual*; and *(iii) Justice for Children in the Context of Counter-terrorism: A Training Manual*. The training package is complemented by the [Roadmap on the Treatment of Children](#)



[Associated with Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups](#) which outlines the ten key principles of UNODC's intervention, and introduces the core guidance in each of the intervention areas supported by the project.

BACKGROUND – THE CHALLENGES

Children are often among the casualties of acts of terrorism and are victims of abduction, trafficking, and sexual and gender-based violence by designated terrorist groups. In recent years, the international community has been increasingly confronted with the recruitment and exploitation of children by terrorist groups. This phenomenon is closely connected to, and overlaps with, the longstanding practice of child recruitment and use by armed groups, brought to global attention over 20 years ago by the Machel Report.¹ At the present, the recruitment and exploitation of children are perpetrated by a variety of groups all over the world, making this a **truly global issue**.



It is important to note that while the nature and gravity of violence against these children may vary, its short- and long-term implications are severe for both children and society as a whole. The consequences of this violence can be devastating and amounts to a serious form of violence against children, impacting not only on their physical development, but on their cognitive, emotional and psychological development and wellbeing also.

Furthermore, the technological advances and strategic specificities of terrorist groups have made instances of recruitment more difficult to detect, recruitment campaigns broader, and have also made children associated with such groups more vulnerable to stigma and discrimination. The cross-border nature of terrorist activities, highlighted by the latest wave of individuals who travelled abroad to join designated terrorist groups, adds another dimension that impacts on children. The phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), defined as individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or

nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflicts,² poses also considerable challenges to Member States. In this context, children affected by the FTFs phenomenon and children born to or accompanying FTFs, are of growing concern to Member States.

On the one hand, the children born in the conflict zones from parents with different nationalities are often at risk of statelessness, due to lack of proper documentation, documentation that is not recognized, and/or nationality laws that do not allow the mother to pass her nationality to the child. In several cases, children are currently detained and face prosecution on charges under counter-terrorism legislation, even for association with these groups through familial ties. Many of them are being held in adult prisons or in administrative detention. On the other hand, the degree to which the specialized juvenile justice system is involved in the criminal justice response to children alleged to have committed terrorism-related offences varies greatly. Children allegedly recruited and exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups are

¹ Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1).

² United Nations Security Council, *Security Council Resolution 2178*, adopted by the Security Council on 24 September 2017 (S/RES/2178 (2014)).

at enhanced risk of experiencing stigmatization and secondary victimization upon apprehension and while in contact with national authorities, or when returning to their families and communities of origin.

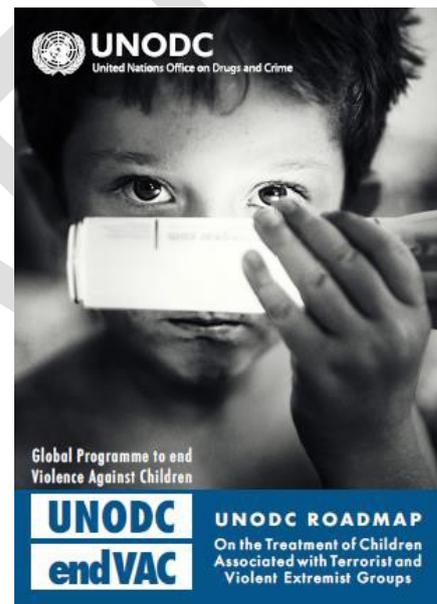
The defeat of ISIL in Syria has placed the issue of children affected by the FTFs phenomenon at the centre of the international agenda and has highlighted the lack of common approaches to address this critical issue. At the same time, this is a global phenomenon which extends further than only one group, and that requires comprehensive, courageous responses at international and national level.

These challenges are at the heart of the new development agenda, which incorporates, peace, justice and robust institutions. Goals 5, 8, 11, 16 and 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),³ call for a comprehensive approach in dealing with violence against children as an integral part of ensuring global development.⁴

UNODC'S ROADMAP

UNODC provides technical assistance to requesting Member States on the treatment of children associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups. UNODC recognises the duty of Member States to protect society, and in particular children, from the threats associated with terrorism and violent extremism, in accordance with international law. Thanks to the generous contribution of the Government of Japan, UNODC has developed a [*Roadmap on the Treatment of Children Associated with Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups*](#).

The Roadmap is the result of four years of technical assistance work by UNODC to Member States that are affected by this phenomenon. It was developed under the framework of a Japan-funded initiative and counted on the substantive input of representatives of the following 10 countries: Bangladesh, Iraq, Japan, Lebanon, Morocco, Maldives, Nepal, Philippines, Tunisia, and Sri Lanka. The Roadmap also draws on the work of UNODC and Member States in other regions of the world including West and East Africa. It builds upon the twofold mandates of UNODC in the areas of violence against children and counter-terrorism, as well as on an increased understanding of the challenges and promising practices in this area. The Roadmap outlines and emphasizes the ten key principles for ensuring a coherent, system-wide approach to this complex and still-emerging phenomenon, based on an integrated understanding of children's rights and security interests. It encompasses issues related to the identification of the international legal framework applicable to children who are associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups from their initial contact with national authorities, using as a benchmark relevant provisions of international human rights law, international criminal law, international humanitarian law and international law regarding counter-terrorism.



³ UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (A/RES/70/1).

⁴ *Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System*, (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017) at 16.

The Roadmap addresses the treatment of all children associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups, regardless of the different types or methods for association and recruitment and of the different purposes for which the child has been used by the group. It also **summarizes and advances comprehensive and holistic guidance to prevent these children from coming into contact with these groups; rehabilitate and reintegrate them** when they are involved or otherwise affected by these groups; and **ensure that there is an effective justice for children system in place** within this context. It is envisaged that these are measures that can be taken by Member States and other key stakeholders, such as International Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations, working together to deal with the issue of child recruitment and exploitation.

In doing so, the **Roadmap acts as a manifesto**, intended to promote an integrated approach to the treatment of these children, recognizing that security interests and child rights must be pursued as complementary objectives, if societies are to be protected from the threat of terrorism. In addition, the Roadmap **serves as guidance** to countries to overcome the challenges associated with the phenomenon of children associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups. Finally, the Roadmap builds on “**what works**” at global and national level when dealing with the situation of these children. Its key objective is to guide UNODC’s provision of technical assistance in this area, as well the intervention of Member States.

UNODC organized four high-level events, two in which the Roadmap was launched and presented in June 2019 at UN headquarters in New York and in July 2019 at the African Regional High-Level Conference on Counter-Terrorism in Nairobi, Kenya, respectively. The third high-level meeting was organized by UNODC jointly with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCTT) in September 2019, in which UNODC presented its comprehensive training package on children recruited and exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups. The fourth high-level meeting organized by the Working Party on Terrorism (COTER) of the European Council in October 2019, in which UNODC promoted the effective rehabilitation and reintegration of these children and also presented the Roadmap. Various countries affected by the phenomenon expressed interest in and willingness to use the Roadmap as policy guidance at the national level and to address efforts to implement it with the support of UNODC.

UNODC’S KEY RESPONSES

- 1) Efforts should be addressed to **prevent child association with these groups**;
- 2) Children associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups should **be primarily considered and treated as victims of crime, and such consideration leads to the need to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of all child victims regardless of their involvement in criminal activities** as alleged offenders. Great efforts must be addressed to prevent secondary victimization of these children;
- 3) When children are alleged as, accused of or recognized as having committed a terrorism- related offence, **they are entitled to all rights established by international law in relation to juvenile justice, with no exception or derogation due to the nature of the offence committed**; and,
- 4) The key objective of any action taken in relation to all children associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups should be to **promote their rehabilitation and reintegration**.



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