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Fourteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat

I. Introduction

1. In adopting its resolution [2253 \(2015\)](#), the Security Council expressed its determination to address the threat posed to international peace and security by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant¹ (ISIL, hereinafter referred to as “Da’esh”)² and associated individuals and groups and requested that the Secretary-General provide an initial strategic-level report on the threat, followed by updates every four months. In its resolution [2610 \(2021\)](#), the Council requested that the Secretary-General continue to provide, every six months, strategic-level reports that reflect the gravity of the threat posed by Da’esh to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat.

2. The present report is the fourteenth such report.³ It was prepared by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,⁴ the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in close collaboration with other United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities.

3. During the second half of 2021, the threat posed by Da’esh and its affiliates to international peace and security continued on the trajectory observed in my previous reports and remained significant. The interplay between terrorism and conflict and the threat of regional spillover is a strategic challenge, while online terrorist radicalization and recruitment and attacks inspired by Da’esh remain a foremost concern outside conflict zones. Echoing the report of the Secretary-General on Our Common Agenda ([A/75/982](#)), Member States reaffirmed, during the high-level general debate of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, the need for continued cooperation to prevent and counter terrorism as a priority for the international community and multilateral cooperation.

* Reissued for technical reasons on 13 February 2024.

¹ Listed as Al-Qaida in Iraq (QDe.115).

² In line with General Assembly resolution [75/291](#).

³ See [S/2016/92](#), [S/2016/501](#), [S/2016/830](#), [S/2017/97](#), [S/2017/467](#), [S/2018/80](#), [S/2018/770](#), [S/2019/103](#), [S/2019/612](#), [S/2020/95](#), [S/2020/774](#), [S/2021/98](#) and [S/2021/682](#).

⁴ The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions [1526 \(2004\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities. The present threat assessment is based in part on the Team’s twenty-ninth report ([S/2021/83](#)).



II. Threat assessment

A. Overview of threat

4. During the reporting period, Da'esh continued to suffer leadership losses, while its affiliates maintained a high level of activity and attacks in Africa and gained in strength and visibility in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover. The interrelated issues of foreign terrorist fighters, other Da'esh fighters and their family members continued to concern Member States acutely. International efforts to address the human legacy of the Da'esh so-called "caliphate" in camps for internally displaced persons or detention facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic did not progress at a pace commensurate with the urgency and gravity of the issue.

5. Outside conflict zones, cross-border travel remained difficult for Da'esh and other terrorist operatives owing to measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and efforts by Member States to implement Security Council resolutions [2178 \(2014\)](#), [2396 \(2017\)](#) and [2482 \(2019\)](#). The pandemic has continued to make it harder for terrorists to raise money and identify and attack suitable targets. However, Member States remain concerned about the impact of the pandemic on terrorist radicalization and recruitment online, especially among young people. They continue to expect that attacks, some of them plotted during the pandemic, may occur when lockdowns ease.

1. Da'esh leadership

6. The group's operational leaders remain mainly in the Syrian Arab Republic, while some of its other leaders, who provide mostly financial and logistical support, are present in neighbouring countries.⁵ The leader of the group, Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Salbi (QDi.426), went a further six months without showing himself to his supporters or communicating directly. No video or audio recordings featuring him have been released since he assumed leadership, in late October 2019. One Member State observed that he takes extreme measures to ensure his security, allowing no electronics to be carried in his vicinity. He is believed to move regularly between Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

7. In a continuation of leadership losses since al-Salbi assumed control, Da'esh suffered a major setback in the capture by the Iraqi authorities in October of Sami Jasim al-Jaburi (alias Hajji Hamid) (not listed), who was responsible for Da'esh finances and believed to be al-Salbi's most senior deputy and a possible successor. He was reportedly found in possession of a residency permit identifying him as a refugee in a neighbouring country. Member States differ as to how significant this will prove, but the fact that al-Jaburi was taken alive means that the Iraqi authorities could acquire valuable intelligence.

2. Da'esh fighters and their family members in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic

8. The precarious situation of foreign terrorist fighters, other Da'esh fighters and their family members stranded in detention in the core conflict zone, especially in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, remains among the most pressing and urgent issues for Member States. Progress towards a comprehensive solution has continued to be slow and further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the reporting period, the Government reported having repatriated over 400 Iraqi families, consisting of over 1,700 individuals. Member States in Europe repatriated a few women and children from the conflict zone, including women who had had active

⁵ Information provided by Member States.

roles in Da'esh. In all, 59 children (25 girls and 34 boys) of foreign origin were repatriated from Iraq to two different countries.⁶

9. The Hawl camp remained severely overpopulated, with around 56,000 camp residents, according to the assessment of most Member States, against an intended capacity of 40,000. An estimated 94 per cent of camp residents were women and minors, with two thirds of the children under 12 years of age. The foreigners' annex at the Hawl camp still housed approximately 2,000 women and 7,000 children. The security situation at the camp continued to deteriorate, with 91 murders reported since January 2021. The transfer of some highly radicalized women to the nearby Roj camp has eased security concerns somewhat.⁷ The United Nations continued to advocate the provision of security at the camps in a manner that does not endanger residents or violate their rights and that does not restrict humanitarian access.

10. As time elapses, the risk that this protracted humanitarian, human rights and security crisis will exacerbate the global terrorist threat landscape in the medium to long term is increasing. Da'esh exerts social control over the Hawl camp, with residents exposed to Da'esh ideology and predation. According to one Member State, the group has reinstated its "Cubs of the Caliphate" programme, targeting mainly young boys, including, reportedly, two foreign children, selected for training to form the next generation of Da'esh fighters. In the absence of repatriation, children and their families are reportedly resorting to desperate and unsafe measures to leave the camps, including ones that put them at physical risk, risk of smuggling, risk of recruitment into armed groups and risk of child or forced marriage.

11. Member States in Europe report that most of the women who had returned from camps in the conflict zone two years ago have disengaged from Da'esh. At the same time, security concerns over adult returnees persist, as illustrated by the attempted escape of a female returnee from a French prison in November 2021 who wished to return to the core conflict zone. Some Member States, including in South-Eastern Europe, highlight the challenges of reintegration, with some individuals requiring ongoing monitoring.

3. Da'esh finances

12. Da'esh leadership located in and around the core conflict zone continues to control access to substantial liquid financial resources, although well below the amount that the group held before its territorial defeat. Several Member States estimate the group's current reserves to be between \$25 million and \$50 million, with some suggesting that the lower sum is more accurate. According to one Member State, most of the remaining cash reserves of Da'esh are located in Iraq. Member States report that the group is now consistently spending more than it fundraises, with revenues in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars and expenditures in the mid-hundreds of thousands of dollars. Funds are spent primarily on payments to fighters and family members of deceased fighters, as well as on operational activities and attempts to release fighters from detention. Revenues continue to be generated by opportunistic extortion, looting and kidnapping for ransom.

13. The Monitoring Team reported previously that Da'esh relies most heavily on unregistered informal cash transfer (hawala) networks and cash couriers to move money. According to one Member State, cash payments are regularly couriered to the Syrian Arab Republic from neighbouring States, with Da'esh cells receiving reduced payments monthly. There is reportedly also a well-established system for distributing funds to Da'esh family members residing both in and outside the Hawl camp, using a ledger

⁶ Information provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

⁷ Information provided by Member States.

system maintained by female Da'esh supporters. Families claim funds using, in some cases, an identification number assigned to them when they lived under the group's physical control. Several hawala lenders are reported to operate in Hawl, including elements of the Rawi network highlighted previously by the Monitoring Team.⁸

14. Member States assess that Da'esh leadership exerts sufficient control over its reserves to allow the transfer of significant sums to certain affiliates abroad. Da'esh in Afghanistan, according to one Member State, has received in excess of \$500,000 from the Da'esh core after more than a year of receiving no funding. Ismatullah Khalozai (not listed) is described by one Member State as an international financial facilitator responsible for delivering approximately \$87,000 to Da'esh in Afghanistan and for personally smuggling a Da'esh courier from Afghanistan to Turkey. It will be important to monitor any change in Da'esh core financial support to its affiliate in Afghanistan as an indicator of the strategic importance that the group attaches to the country following the Taliban takeover.

4. Da'esh access to weapons

15. Member States remain concerned about the glut of weapons, especially small arms, that exists in the Middle East, Africa and Afghanistan, to which Da'esh, its affiliates and other terrorist groups could gain access. Such concerns have been exacerbated by the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, given the large quantities of weaponry and other military equipment in the country. With Afghanistan facing a severe economic, financial and humanitarian crisis, there is a risk that tradable commodities such as arms and related materiel could be acquired by organized criminals and terrorists inside Afghanistan and even that they could find their way into neighbouring countries.

B. Regional developments

1. Africa

Central and East Africa

16. A regional terrorism threat is emerging in Central and East Africa, characterized by a proliferation of funds, intensified recruitment efforts and terrorist tactics linked to Da'esh affiliates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. In Mozambique, Cabo Delgado Province saw continued attacks by Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (not listed). The group led by Abu Yasir Hassan (not listed), a Tanzanian national, is estimated to have 600 to 1,200 fighters, comprising mostly locals but also some fighters from Tanzania.⁹ It has pledged allegiance to Da'esh, which regards it as its component Islamic State Central Africa Province. However, Member States in the region assert that there is no clear evidence of Da'esh command and control over Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a. Nevertheless, they are increasingly worried about the spread of terrorism in the region of the Southern African Development Community and view enhanced cross-border cooperation as critical to curbing the movement of foreign terrorist fighters.

17. Member States have noted that the forces deployed by the Southern African Development Community and Rwanda in Cabo Delgado Province in July at the request of Mozambique caused serious setbacks for Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a, given that several large-scale operations destroyed its bases and training camps, neutralizing senior leadership responsible for recruitment, indoctrination, attacks and abductions. Since August, over 300 Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a fighters have reportedly been killed in these operations. Sporadic violent attacks on civilians have since increased in more

⁸ See S/2021/655, para. 68.

⁹ Information provided by Member States.

remote areas, and Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a appears to be displaced rather than defeated. Its fighters have continued to regroup into smaller, more autonomous cells and to mount guerrilla attacks on security forces, beheading civilians as a warning not to cooperate with government authorities or foreign troops. They have plundered villages for food and provisions and have reportedly abducted young girls as sex slaves and young boys as child soldiers.

18. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Allied Democratic Forces (not listed), led by Seka Baluku, are responsible for the escalation of violence against civilians and security forces in the North Kivu Beni territory and their expansion into the Ituri Province Irumu territory. Baluku has taken an even harder line than his predecessor (who was arrested in May 2015), and pledged allegiance to Da'esh in July 2019 and again in September 2020. There are indications that this has led to a fracture within the Allied Democratic Forces leadership. Member States assess that cooperation on communication between the Forces and Da'esh serves to amplify the status and propaganda of the local Forces while enhancing the image of the Da'esh global footprint.

19. An attack by improvised explosive device in front of a popular bar in Beni town on 25 December was attributed by the authorities to the Allied Democratic Forces, and Da'esh claimed responsibility for it several weeks later. The attack suggests a tactical change, which could be intended to sow fear in the larger public and attract visibility for propaganda purposes.

20. The Allied Democratic Forces appeared to re-engage in Uganda. In October, the country suffered two deadly bombings bearing the hallmarks of the Forces and attributed to the group by the Ugandan authorities, which arrested the local Forces coordinators of the attacks. In November, three suicide bombers struck central Kampala, after which at least seven suspects were killed and well over a dozen others were arrested in a counter-terrorism operation, including the suspected Forces recruiter.

West Africa

21. Several Member States report that Da'esh and Al-Qaida affiliates in West Africa appear to have made decisive progress by exploiting local grievances, overwhelming stretched security forces and navigating complex interrelationships between armed groups. While some national authorities are inclined to pursue dialogue, others consider that negotiations risk consolidating the influence of terrorist groups such as the Da'esh affiliate Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (QDe.163) and the Al-Qaida affiliate Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (QDe.159).

22. The leader of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui (QDi.415), was killed in August in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger and replaced by Abdul Bara al-Sahraoui (not listed), an experienced logistician who had previously operated in Libya. Several Member States report that, in October 2021, Abdul Bara met in Mali with a delegation of Da'esh leaders that had travelled from the Da'esh core area to assess and guide its affiliates in the Sahel and Nigeria. After several operational setbacks, 400 to 1,000 Islamic State in the Greater Sahara fighters adopted a more defensive posture in the Liptako-Gourma area of the Niger with the objective of extending it towards Niamey and Tahoua; their operations are now focused on soft civilian targets, whereas they previously attacked military camps.¹⁰

23. In Nigeria, Islamic State West Africa Province (QDe.162) was strengthened by the death in May of Abubakar Mohammed Shekau (QDi. 322), leader of the rival Boko Haram group (QDe.138). Member States disagree as to the accuracy of reports that Abu Musab al-Barnawi (not listed), leader of Islamic State West Africa Province,

¹⁰ Information provided by Member States.

was killed in a fight with Boko Haram in September. The group has sought to integrate Boko Haram fighters, but unification has proved difficult.

24. Increasing attacks in Cameroon and the Niger underscore the ability of Islamic State West Africa Province to expand beyond Nigeria. In the Diffa region of the Niger, another senior leader of the group, Abba Gana (not listed), led more than 20 terrorist attacks in 2021. Several Member States reported that the group's tactical gains in north-eastern Nigeria may have increased its revenues, including through war spoils, extortion of the local population and the fishing and agriculture industries and exploitation of charitable payments.

North Africa

25. The authorities in Morocco remain concerned about the unpredictable nature of the threat from Da'esh and Al-Qaida, notwithstanding counter-terrorism successes that have suppressed the groups' activity in the country. A number of Da'esh-inspired lone actors were arrested, and three Da'esh cells were dismantled between June and October 2021.

26. In Libya, terrorist activity has declined with the failure of Da'esh to attract new recruits and control territory. According to Member States, the group's affiliate Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Libya (QDe.165) has been degraded to some 50 fighters. Although weakened, it retains some operational capability and prioritizes its presence in southern Libya, where it aims to reorganize its command. Unresolved political issues in Libya could provide space and opportunity for Da'esh to reassert itself, especially in the Fazzan region.

27. In Egypt, activity by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis has been reduced. The group is a local affiliate of Da'esh, which has been featured extensively in its propaganda. No terrorist attacks have been attributed to or claimed by Da'esh or Al-Qaida in mainland Egypt since 2019. This is credited both to counter-terrorism operations and an initiative to promote the defection of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis leaders, which has lowered morale and reinforced the impression that the group is declining, while public investments in infrastructure, transport and housing in the Sinai increased.

2. Middle East

28. Da'esh continues to operate as an entrenched rural insurgency in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, exploiting the porous border between the countries while maintaining operations in areas of low security pressure. Da'esh is estimated by Member States to retain between 6,000 and 10,000 fighters across both countries, where it is forming cells and training operatives to launch attacks.

29. In the Syrian Arab Republic, Da'esh remains active notwithstanding ongoing counter-terrorism operations, although its attacks have recently been more limited. The group uses desert hideouts for training, possibly for regional operations or even to revive an external operations capability. It continues to find a limited safe haven primarily in the central Badia desert in Homs, while smaller cells operate in the north-east and, to a lesser extent, in Idlib, in the north-west.¹¹

30. In Iraq, ongoing counter-terrorism efforts have yielded positive results in reducing Da'esh activities, with the October 2021 Babylon Music Festival proceeding without incident. However, cells remain active in desert and rural territories, and the group uses urban areas to expand its clandestine networks. A surge was reported in Da'esh fighters crossing the borders from the Syrian Arab Republic to Iraq, including

¹¹ Information provided by Member States.

through the Sinjar area, and taking shelter in the Hamrin mountain range.¹² Although Da'esh activity in Anbar Governorate has decreased, the region is assessed to have favourable conditions for the group to redeploy and strengthen its fighting capacity, and it is reportedly already building strongholds and tunnels, with many sleeper cells and hundreds of fighters in Anbar desert.

31. Da'esh maintained the ability to launch attacks at a steady rate in Iraq, including hit-and-run operations, ambushes and roadside bombs, with a marked concentration in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salah al-Din Governorates. It continued to attack both government forces and civilians with the apparent aim of instigating panic and increasing pressure on the authorities. Da'esh activity has become more frequent on the edges of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, including a high-profile attack in December that resulted in 13 deaths.

3. Asia

Central and South Asia

32. The security landscape in Afghanistan changed dramatically on 15 August, following a Taliban military campaign that seized 33 of 34 provincial capitals, including Kabul. There are no recent signs that the Taliban has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorist fighters in the country. On the contrary, Member States are concerned that terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom in Afghanistan than at any time in recent history. They have, however, reported only small numbers of foreign terrorist fighters moving to Afghanistan.

33. Member States assess that the strength of the Da'esh affiliate in Afghanistan, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (QDe.161), has increased from earlier estimates of 2,200 fighters to now approaching 4,000 following the release by the Taliban of several thousand individuals from prison. One Member State assessed that up to half the individuals are foreign terrorist fighters. While Da'esh controls limited territory in eastern Afghanistan, it is capable of conducting high-profile, complex attack such as the 27 August bombing at Kabul airport, which killed over 180 people, and several subsequent attacks, in particular against the Taliban and members of the Shia community.

34. Da'esh in Afghanistan continues to be led by Sanaullah Ghafari (QDi.431), an Afghan national. The group is taking advantage of the turmoil in the country, including by recruiting fighters from the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (QDe.088), also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party, among other foreign terrorist groups.¹³ It aims to position itself as the chief rejectionist force in Afghanistan and to expand into neighbouring Central and South Asian countries and is viewed by the Taliban as its primary armed threat. Member States are concerned that, if Afghanistan descends into further chaos, some Afghan and foreign violent extremists may shift allegiances to Da'esh.

South-East Asia

35. Member States in the region are concerned about the potential resurgence of a safe haven in Afghanistan for international terrorist activity, as well as about social media messaging that “celebrates the Taliban victory”, which could be used as a recruitment tool for violent extremism locally. National authorities in the region are not reporting any immediate uptick in attempted travel to Afghanistan, but are alert to this possibility.

¹² Information provided by Member States.

¹³ Information provided by Member States.

36. Both Indonesia and the Philippines reported significant counter-terrorism gains, leading to an overall decline in terrorist activity and cautious optimism that the operational capability of several groups in the region may be significantly degraded. At the same time, the threat of attacks by lone actors or inspired by radicalized individuals remains a concern.

37. In August, Indonesia disrupted plots to attack its Independence Day celebrations, with the arrests of members of both Jemaah Islamiyah (QDe.092) and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (QDe.164). The reported arrest of Jemaah Islamiyah leader Abu Rusdan (QDi.186) in September has further weakened the group. In September, Indonesian security forces killed Ali Kalora, the leader of Mujahidin Indonesian Timur (QDe.150), potentially severely affecting the group's long-term viability; one Member State observed that the group's remaining members appear to be in retreat. In the Philippines, security forces killed the leader of Daulah Islamiya, Salahuddin Hassan, in October in Maguindanao Province. Hassan was described by the Philippine authorities as one of their most wanted terrorist fugitives.

4. Europe

38. According to several Member States in the region, there is a common pattern in ongoing investigations of cases of home-grown terrorism. They typically involve young individuals with underlying vulnerabilities and a combination of a fascination with extreme violence and personal grievances, which make them receptive to Da'esh and Al-Qaida propaganda.

39. Following the killing of a high school professor in France in October 2020 by an individual of Chechen background, investigations led by several European Member States identified terrorist threats associated with several individuals and networks originating in the Northern Caucasus and parts of Central Asia, which had formed sleeper cells in European cities. Additional individuals from these communities who had travelled to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq but were previously unknown as foreign terrorist fighters were identified. Other investigations highlighted the financing of terrorism through the exploitation of charitable giving by individuals of Chechen background.¹⁴

40. Migration routes remain under scrutiny by relevant European State authorities, as illustrated by the arrest in Bulgaria in November 2021 of a Belgian-Moroccan foreign terrorist fighter returning from Turkey who had been an associate of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the "mastermind" of the 2015 Paris attacks directed by Da'esh. Several Member States cited cases of irregular migrants from Iraq who were subsequently identified from battlefield evidence as Da'esh operatives.

III. Updates on responses to the evolving threat

A. Overview

41. Terrorism-related developments since my previous report have further highlighted the challenges posed by an increasingly decentralized Da'esh. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to present States with formidable challenges in all policy areas, counter-terrorism included. The urgent need for pandemic-related mitigation and recovery has diverted resources away from the counter-terrorism efforts of Member States and related international support, as noted in the fourth analytical update published in December 2021 by the Counter-Terrorism Committee

¹⁴ Information provided by Member States.

Executive Directorate on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism.¹⁵

42. At the same time, many events organized in 2021 to take stock of 20 years of counter-terrorism since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 underscored the need to continuously monitor the evolving terrorist threat, enhance counter-terrorism cooperation and strengthen national and regional counter-terrorism legislation, policy frameworks and capacities, in line with international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

43. In the outcome document of the special meeting held in November by the Counter-Terrorism Committee to commemorate the adoption of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), the successes and significant steps taken by Member States towards its implementation are recognized, while the fact that much still remains to be done at the national, regional and international levels is noted. This is also apparent in the updated versions published in November of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate global survey of the implementation by States of Council resolution 1373 (2001) and other relevant resolutions¹⁶ and of Council resolution 1624 (2005).¹⁷

44. Member States have reaffirmed that the United Nations system should continue to play a key role in supporting their efforts in this regard by reinforcing the importance of its Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, spearheaded by the Office of Counter-Terrorism through key counter-terrorism mandates, including through the comprehensive review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the General Assembly in June, and the renewal by the Security Council in December of the mandates of the Monitoring Team and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate in its resolutions 2610 (2021) and 2617 (2021), respectively.

B. Suspected Da'esh fighters and their family members in conflict zones

1. Current situation

45. Significant concerns persist regarding the situation of individuals with alleged links to United Nations-designated terrorist groups who are stranded in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, especially thousands of women and children. There has been no improvement in the dire conditions in which they are detained, which are marked by considerable hardship, curtailed humanitarian assistance, violations of fundamental rights and freedoms and a volatile security situation.

46. Violence continues to be reported inside camp facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, including murder, enforced disappearances and other abuses attributed to individuals with suspected links to Da'esh.¹⁸ There are reports of children, primarily adolescent boys, including foreign nationals, held in detention facilities for adults without due process or due regard for the best interests of the child and with no measures of redress. Holding them in detention facilities without legal justification has significant moral, legal and security implications and may constitute a breach of international human rights law.

¹⁵ See <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/impact-covid-19-pandemic-terrorism-counter-terrorism-and-countering-violent-extremism-update>.

¹⁶ See https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/2021105_1373_gis.pdf.

¹⁷ See https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/files/documents/2021/Nov/ctc_gis_1624.pdf.

¹⁸ Information provided by Member States.

47. In September, the United Nations system formally launched the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees and the multi-partner trust fund to support requesting Member States in the protection, voluntary repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals with suspected links to United Nations-designated terrorist groups returning from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Coordinated, “all-of-United Nations” support continued to be provided to Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, co-led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

2. Protection

48. Trafficking in persons in the context of armed conflict, including from camps located in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, remains a grave concern. In August, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, published a report exploring the intersections between trafficking by proscribed groups and terrorism, highlighting failures in providing assistance to the victims of such trafficking (A/76/263).

49. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has continued to advocate the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Iraqi and Syrian internally displaced persons, including survivors of sexual violence and their children. The perceived affiliation of some of these individuals with Da’esh makes them vulnerable to human rights violations and other abuses, including harassment, stigmatization and ostracization. Robust and sustainable solutions are required to ensure the return of internally displaced persons, which should take into account the needs of receiving communities, including security and reintegration challenges.

3. Repatriation

50. United Nations entities have continued to engage with Member States towards the voluntary, safe repatriation of their nationals from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic on the basis of the informed consent of the concerned individuals and guided by the best interests of the child, including through the development of gender-sensitive, age-appropriate and human rights-compliant policies for repatriation. Such policies must comply with all States’ respective obligations under international law. The consent of relevant Governments to any activity to be undertaken in territories under their control is a paramount consideration in all repatriation efforts. Although several States have been proactive in repatriating their nationals, the pace of repatriation from the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic remains slow, and many States are only repatriating orphaned or unaccompanied children. Since January 2018, a total of 1,454 children (712 girls and 742 boys) has been repatriated to 22 countries in Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁹

4. Prosecution

51. In November, a member of Da’esh was for the first time convicted of genocide against the Yazidis, in addition to crimes against humanity and war crimes, following a trial in Germany. This was an encouraging development as Member States continue to face challenges in ensuring accountability for the crimes committed by Da’esh. In this regard, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) has expanded its core investigative work and accelerated the implementation of a major evidence-digitization project. It has expanded its support for 14 Member States by

¹⁹ Information provided by UNICEF.

identifying, securing, organizing and cataloguing evidence obtained in conflict zones and conducting interviews with survivors and witnesses.

52. In November, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre within the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) convened a workshop with government and civil society representatives from the Middle East and North Africa to develop a compendium of practices and lessons learned in the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of suspected terrorists. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Directorate and UNODC launched a joint project to support Burkina Faso in developing and implementing strategies for the screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of persons associated with terrorist groups. The three entities also continued to implement a joint project in support of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region.

53. It is crucial that States uphold their respective obligations under international law when bringing suspected terrorists to justice, including with respect to detention, due process and fair trial. Major concerns remain in some States regarding allegations of torture and ill-treatment, overreliance on confessions, long periods of detention without charges and use of the death penalty for counter-terrorism offences that do not meet the threshold of most serious crimes necessary under international human rights law for imposing such a sentence.

54. All children previously living under subjugation by Da'esh, including those alleged to be associated with Da'esh or other armed groups, must be treated primarily as victims. They should be seen first as survivors of grievous violations of their rights, regardless of their age.

55. In August, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and OHCHR published a joint report on legal conditions and procedural safeguards to prevent torture and ill-treatment and to ensure human rights in the administration of justice in Iraq.²⁰ The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and UNODC continued to support the Specialized Judicial Unit against Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime and other judicial institutions, including through technical and logistics support, in the prosecution of serious crimes and terrorism-related trials.

5. Rehabilitation and reintegration

56. The United Nations continued to support Member States in their development of comprehensive and tailored rehabilitation and reintegration programmes that are gender-sensitive, age-appropriate and in compliance with international human rights law. In Central Asia, UNODC supported rehabilitation and reintegration efforts regarding children associated with terrorist groups, while UNICEF worked with governments across Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus, Europe and North Africa to implement best practices for the reintegration of children who have returned from conflict zones. UNICEF continued to support national authorities in Burkina Faso and Nigeria in the adoption of handover protocols for the release and transfer to civilian authorities of children associated with non-State armed groups, including groups affiliated with Da'esh, supported Mali and the Niger in the effective implementation of such protocols and provided support for the reintegration of the children involved.

57. Member States continued to face challenges in managing violent extremist prisoners and preventing terrorist radicalization within correctional settings. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, UNODC and the Counter-Terrorism

²⁰ See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_Report_Administration_of_Justice_EN.pdf.

Committee Executive Directorate continued to participate in a joint pilot project to assist Kazakhstan, Tunisia and Uganda in this regard, including in the development of tailored prisoner classification frameworks and associated risk and needs assessment tools. In Mali, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and UNODC continued to support the implementation of a road map to prevent and combat violent extremism and terrorist radicalization in prisons.

C. Supporting victims of Da'esh

58. Victims of sexual and gender-based violence committed by members of terrorist groups, including Da'esh, require stronger protection and support. In November, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a joint statement²¹ calling upon States to comply with their obligations under the relevant international conventions and to provide comprehensive support and protection to women who survive sexual violence and their children.

59. The United Nations continued to assist the Government of Iraq in implementing the Yazidi Survivors Law, which provides, inter alia, assistance and reparations for survivors of Da'esh and affirms a survivor-centred approach. UNAMI continued to support the Government's implementation of the Joint Communiqué on Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, which ensures that sexual violence-related considerations are adequately reflected in the work of the national Counter-Terrorism Committee of Iraq. UNITAD has continued to actively support gender-competent and age-disaggregated aspects of investigations into crimes committed against the Yazidi community, including conflict-related sexual violence and acts of enslavement.

D. International and regional cooperation

60. Member States and international and regional organizations have continued to promote enhanced counter-terrorism coordination and cooperation. Some Member States have taken positive steps to overcome operational challenges, which have been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, in mutual legal assistance and judicial cooperation, specifically in matters such as extradition, investigation and prosecution.

61. UNODC promoted cross-border cooperation among Algeria, Libya and Tunisia for the investigation and prosecution of terrorism-related offences. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continued to support the Southern African Development Community in reviewing and implementing an amended regional counter-terrorism strategy, in particular in the light of the violence in Cabo Delgado Province, Mozambique, and the border regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Tanzania. In Central Asia, the Directorate led capacity consultations with Central Asian States on counter-terrorism issues, and United Nations entities continued to assist Member States in developing regional and international cooperation to prevent the movement of terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters, in compliance with international law.

62. In September, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, UNODC and the Inter-Parliamentary Union organized the first Global Parliamentary Summit on Counter-Terrorism to identify effective approaches for parliamentarians to contributing to the prevention and countering of terrorism. The Summit addressed support for victims of

²¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/Statements/Joint-CEDAW-CRC-joint-Statement-on-Children-Born-of-Rape.doc>.

terrorism, including draft model legal provisions developed by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, UNODC and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as well as hate speech, the prevention of terrorist radicalization and challenges faced by the Sahel region.

E. Border management and law enforcement

63. United Nations entities continued to strengthen the capacities of Member States to detect and prevent cross-border movements of terrorists, including through enhanced cooperation and operational information-sharing. In October, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate organized a regional expert workshop for Central Asian States to raise awareness and enhance capacity regarding the responsible use and sharing of biometric data. In December, the Directorate published an analytical brief on biometrics and counter-terrorism.²² In October, the Counterterrorism Watchlisting Toolkit was launched by the Global Counterterrorism Forum as the result of a joint initiative co-led by the United States of America and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, with the support of the Directorate.

64. The multi-agency Countering Terrorist Travel Programme, led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, continued to assist Member States in detecting and interdicting terrorism and serious crime-related threats at borders using advance passenger information and passenger name records in accordance with Security Council resolutions 2178 (2014), 2396 (2017) and 2482 (2019), international standards and recommended practices, as well as human rights principles and relevant privacy laws. A comprehensive virtual consultation led by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate for Iraq in July resulted in a road map for tailored assistance. In September, the Programme delivered interactive online training for Mongolia.

65. In September, the Office of Counter-Terrorism launched a programme on threat assessment models for aviation security to support Member States in developing inter-agency coordination to share relevant terrorist threat information and improve internal operational capacity to comply with international aviation security requirements. In December, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre conducted training for the Central Asian region, focusing on the land border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and organized a regional expert workshop on maritime security for East Africa.

66. United Nations entities continued to support Member States in addressing the possible linkages between terrorism and organized crime. For instance, in October, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and UNODC held a capacity-building workshop for Mauritania in this regard, which will be replicated in other countries in the Sahel region. In Central Asia, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, UNODC and the Office for Disarmament Affairs collaborated on capacity consultations and capacity-building for Member States, with a specific focus on the terrorism-arms-crime nexus.

67. Through capacity-building activities and training sessions, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and its partners provided ongoing support to Member States in strengthening cooperation to prevent terrorist use of conventional and non-conventional weapons and developing response and detection plans. UNITAD accelerated its investigation into the development and use of chemical and biological

²² See www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/cted-publishes-analytical-brief-use-biometrics-counter-terrorism#:~:text=in%20counter%2Dterrorism-,CTED%20publishes%20Analytical%20Brief%20on%20the%20use%20of%20biometrics%20in,of%20biometrics%20in%20counter%2Dterrorism.

weapons by Da'esh, including the identification of potential victims and witnesses and by gathering photographic and medical records as evidence.

68. United Nations entities continued to mainstream human rights into their counter-terrorism-related support to Member States and to offer dedicated capacity-building for law enforcement. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and UNAMI engaged in consultations with Iraq in this regard, as did OHCHR with the Ministry of Defence of Mozambique.

F. Countering the financing of terrorism

69. Countering the financing of terrorism is a critical priority for Member States and the United Nations in the fight against Da'esh and other terrorist groups. A joint special meeting in November of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities on the implementation of Security Council resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#) outlined current terrorism-financing methods and explored linkages with transnational organized crime, the abuse of new technologies and payment methods and the exploitation of natural resources. In December, a thematic summary assessment of gaps in the implementation of Council requirements on countering the financing of terrorism, prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate in consultation with the Monitoring Team, was submitted to the Office of Counter-Terrorism through the Counter-Terrorism Committee for the purpose of designing targeted technical assistance and capacity-building efforts, as mandated in resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#).

70. The United Nations continued to support Member States in increasing their national capacity, building institutional mechanisms and enhancing regional collaboration to counter the financing of terrorism. In this regard, United Nations entities pursued close cooperation with the Financial Action Task Force and Task Force-style regional bodies. The Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate held bilateral meetings with the President of the Task Force in December to further strengthen cooperation.

71. UNODC delivered capacity-building support to Indonesia, Mali, North Macedonia, Senegal and Tajikistan in financial investigation and worked on financial disruption plans with Burkina Faso, the Niger and Somalia. The Office also delivered legislative assistance to the Action Group against Money Laundering in Central Africa and supported Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire in establishing national asset-freezing committees in compliance with Security Council resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#).

72. In August, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre organized a capacity-building workshop for officials from the Office of the Prosecutor of Iraq, the Financial Intelligence Unit, regulatory authorities and law enforcement agencies. In September, the Centre and its partners held a capacity-building workshop to support the implementation of the regional operational plan of the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group. In October, the Centre convened, in collaboration with the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force and the Financial Intelligence Unit of Egypt, a regional workshop to strengthen capacities regarding the role of law enforcement and prosecution in countering and investigating terrorist financing.

73. UNITAD has widened the scope of its investigations into the economic structure of Da'esh to encompass key revenue streams, including trade in oil and antiquities, the takeover of local agricultural sectors, enslavement, and pillaging and persecution targeting ethnic and religious minorities across Iraq. The United Nations Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) developed an international communication campaign²³ to prevent and counter illicit trafficking in cultural property as a source of terrorism financing and to protect cultural property from the threat of armed conflict.

G. Countering the use of new technologies for terrorist purposes

74. Stronger, multi-stakeholder international cooperation is needed to counter, in line with international law, the use of rapidly evolving new technologies for terrorist purposes, including information and communications technologies and their enabling impact on other threats, such as terrorist access to and use of chemical, biological, nuclear or radiological materials.

75. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, in collaboration with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and UNODC, provided capacity-building assistance and training to Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Malaysia and Mongolia on the use of new technologies in counter-terrorism investigations in full respect of human rights and the rule of law and protecting critical infrastructure from terrorist cyberattacks. These efforts notably draw on the joint United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre-INTERPOL handbook for law enforcement on using open-source methods and online information to prevent, investigate, prosecute and adjudicate terrorist crimes, the second edition of which was launched in November.

76. In November, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and the International Telecommunication Union conducted a global cyberdrill, training more than 100 participants from 28 Member States on using online information, including cryptocurrency transactions, to respond to and investigate a ransomware terrorist attack against critical infrastructure. In December, the Centre and the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, in Saudi Arabia, organized regional training for Member States from the Middle East and North and West Africa on digital forensics for cybersecurity and counter-terrorism investigations.

77. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and its partners trained more than 450 officials from Iraq, Jordan, Kenya and Malaysia on preventing terrorists from acquiring conventional weapons or chemical, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction. The Centre organized a tabletop exercise on responding to a chemical terrorist attack for a response network across cities in Europe and North America and supported Iraq and Jordan in the preparation of response plans and the Horn of Africa region in strengthening cooperation on nuclear detection and response.

H. Countering terrorist narratives and engaging with communities to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism

78. Reflections within the international community on the progress achieved since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) underscored the need to redouble efforts to stem terrorist radicalization and recruitment across the ideological spectrum, including by engaging with communities to counter terrorist narratives and address the conditions conducive to terrorism as part of a comprehensive counter-terrorism approach. Da'esh, its affiliates and other terrorist groups have continued their efforts to exploit socioeconomic hardship, grievances and political tensions, which have often been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media

²³ See <https://en.unesco.org/news/real-price-art-international-unesco-campaign-reveals-hidden-face-art-trafficking>.

monitoring efforts identified a surge in hate speech, in particular following the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan.

79. Concerns over terrorist exploitation of social media, including gaming-adjacent platforms, have been compounded during the pandemic. Following the second Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations, in June, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, UNESCO and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations organized a session with video gamers from Asia to develop innovative ideas to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism on gaming platforms. In December, The Office of Counter-Terrorism organized an expert round table on video games and violent extremism as an introduction to a high-level meeting to be held in 2022.

80. In October, the United Nations convened a Global Education Ministers Conference on addressing hate speech through education, which resulted in recommendations for Member States in this regard. The Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide continued to provide support to United Nations field entities in developing tailored strategies in response to hate speech, and it developed a guidance note on gender-based hate speech. UNESCO conducted further awareness-raising and capacity-building with regard to leveraging education to address hate speech in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan while continuing to support Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger in preventing violent extremism through teacher development.

81. In July, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, in partnership with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, organized a webinar for young women and men from South Asia and South-East Asia to create an interactive, youth-led and intergenerational space in which to share experiences of preventing and countering violent extremism. The United Nations Development Programme engaged with partners to strengthen the integration of mental health and psychosocial support into peacebuilding and prevention programming and policy. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) continued to partner with regional and national stakeholders to strengthen gender-responsive policies and processes through gender mainstreaming and promoting the participation of women in security sector decision-making processes and mechanisms.

82. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute developed an initiative to assess the potential correlation between climate risks and violent extremism in Chad. In Iraq, UNESCO continued to restore cultural heritage destroyed by Da'esh and to address gender norms and stereotypes through education, and UNAMI developed an interactive platform to highlight local youth-led peace narratives to strengthen social cohesion and counter Da'esh propaganda. The International Organization for Migration continued to support the Government of Iraq in developing and implementing local plans of action to prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

IV. Observations

83. Successful counter-terrorism efforts against Da'esh have severely weakened its senior leadership and reduced the finances of its core, while the group is also constrained by rivalry with Al-Qaida and other non-State armed groups. However, Da'esh and its affiliates persist and continue to display opportunism. The threat that they pose to international peace and security remains potent and is even growing in some regions where its interplay with conflict and organized crime complicates dynamics further. This is a stark reminder that security responses are necessary but not sufficient to succeed against Da'esh and its strategy of entrenchment by winning

over sympathizers and coercing communities. Progress against terrorism is contingent on progress across collective goals – in sustaining peace, achieving equitable, inclusive and sustainable development and ensuring human rights for all. In my report on Our Common Agenda, it is emphasized that terrorism is a strategic security risk that requires continued multilateral cooperation as part of a new agenda for peace.

84. Collective vigilance and cooperation against Da'esh remain essential. The threat that it will pose as the world eventually emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic is unpredictable. Meanwhile, the hardships and grievances that people have experienced during the pandemic, as well as online violent extremist propaganda, add fuel to the group's appeal in and outside conflict zones. Illicit trafficking continues to supply Da'esh followers with small arms, light weapons and ammunition, while rapidly evolving new technologies provide new opportunities for terrorist purposes and tactics. The expansion of Da'esh affiliates in parts of Africa could have serious and lasting repercussions well beyond the continent. The turmoil in Afghanistan and the unresolved situation of individuals with suspected links to Da'esh who are stranded in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic risk aggravating the medium- to long-term threat. I reiterate my call to all States concerned that have not already done so to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of the women and children concerned, in accordance with the obligations of the States under international law, including the principle of non-refoulement and the best interests of the child.

85. On 11 September 2021, the sombre twentieth anniversary of the Al-Qaida attacks on the United States was marked, and tribute was paid to the victims and survivors. This was an opportunity to take stock of progress towards and lessons in preventing and countering terrorism following the impetus of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), including in dealing with the emergence of Da'esh from the remnants of Al-Qaida in Iraq. Civil society organizations called for meaningful changes in support for victims and to re-anchor counter-terrorism in human rights and gender equality while also safeguarding principled humanitarian action. These priorities were reinforced by the General Assembly in the seventh review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, along with the imperative of law enforcement and criminal justice cooperation and responses to prevent and ensure accountability for terrorist crimes, in line with international law. While the primary responsibility to counter terrorism, including Da'esh, lies with Member States, the United Nations will continue to support them through a range of efforts, including integrated and gender-responsive capacity-building based on human rights for requesting countries. I welcome the continued leadership and guidance of the Security Council in this regard, as well as the renewal of the mandates of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team.