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Tenth 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, also known as Da'esh) and associated individuals and groups. In paragraph 97 of the resolution, the Council requested that I provide an initial strategic-level report on the threat, followed by updates every four months. In its resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#), the Council requested that I continue to provide, every six months, strategic-level reports that reflect the gravity of the threat, as well as the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat.

2. This is my tenth report on the threat posed by ISIL to international peace and security.² The report was prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,³ in close collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism, other United Nations entities and international organizations.

3. Continuing ISIL activity in parts of Iraq and increased activity in certain areas of the Syrian Arab Republic are highlighted in the report. Outside conflict zones, ISIL remains reliant on inspired attacks to demonstrate its relevance, while it is actively working to re-establish its former capacity to direct complex international operations. Owing to their high number, foreign terrorist fighters remain an acute issue and will continue to pose short-, medium- and long-term threat.

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

² 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](#) and [S/2019/612](#).

³ The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions [1526 \(2004\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities.



II. Threat assessment

A. Overview of threat/Middle East

4. Following its loss of territorial control in the Syrian Arab Republic in March 2019, ISIL has adapted by reconstituting itself as a covert network in the country, as it had done after the loss of territorial control in Iraq in 2017. While the overall level of violence related to ISIL has decreased, the group remains a significant threat and has shifted to insurgent tactics, with attacks continuing in different parts of the country. In remote areas of Iraq, ISIL continued to mount attacks on official checkpoints, infrastructure and officials.

5. In 2019, the Government of Iraq launched Operation Will of Victory, aimed at expelling ISIL fighters from remote areas. The international counter-ISIL coalition believes that ISIL in Iraq has approximately 11,000 fighters. Figures compiled by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), on the other hand, indicate that ISIL has 4,662 fighters. The discrepancy between the figures of UNAMI and the international counter-ISIL coalition could be due to the difference in the classification of active fighters, logistics enablers and sympathizers.

6. Challenges remain in securing the border between the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, and fighters are managing to cross in both directions. ISIL activity has increased in Dayr al-Zawr and Hasakah Governorates, and a spike in attacks targeting the international counter-ISIL coalition and local non-State armed groups in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic has been observed.

7. On 27 October, the United States of America announced the death of the leader of ISIL, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,⁴ following an operation in Idlib Governorate in the Syrian Arab Republic. The ISIL spokesman, Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, subsequently died in an air strike nearby. Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi was announced as the new leader of ISIL on 31 October. Some Member States assess that Abu Ibrahim is Amir Muhammad Said Abdal Rahman al-Mawla, previously al-Baghdadi's deputy, but that is yet to be confirmed.

8. ISIL has become increasingly focused on its fighters and dependants in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. In September 2019, al-Baghdadi urged efforts to free them from detention and displacement facilities. This situation adds to the challenges faced by the international community in connection with the Hawl camp, as well as detention facilities in the area, as emphasized in my eighth and ninth reports submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#).

9. The total population of all the detention and displacement facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic comprises more than 100,000 individuals. More than 70,000 of them are women and children housed in the Hawl camp. There is considerable variation in terms of what alleged crimes, if any, female camp residents may have committed and how ideologically committed they may be to ISIL. Some extremist women in the annex to the Hawl camp, which houses foreign women and their children, lead the camp's Hisbah morality police, who reportedly murdered at least two other women for "immoral" behaviour. The number of males of fighting age is reported to have fallen with the recent return of some Iraqis to Iraq. One Member State estimates that there are now 6,000 Syrians, 2,000 Iraqis and 2,000 foreign terrorist fighters, amounting to 10,000 males of fighting age.

10. The current improvised holding arrangements for suspected ISIL fighters, supporters and dependants are hard to secure and police. Some Member States find it

⁴ Listed as Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai (QDi.299).

challenging to liaise with local authorities and non-State armed groups in the area, who are themselves uncertain of how long and on what basis they can continue to administer the holding facilities. Several hundred individuals suspected to be affiliated with ISIL, including fighters, are reported to have escaped in October 2019.⁵

11. In addition, unsuitable and overcrowded facilities can be breeding grounds for despair and radicalization to violence, especially in the case of young people, endangering rehabilitation attempts and leading to the possibility that many may become hardened violent extremists. In keeping with the responsibility that they have for their nationals, some Member States advise that the best way of addressing the issue is to pursue the repatriation of individuals associated with ISIL, while others remain reluctant to accept returnees. Some Member States assess that some repatriation programmes show signs of success and will likely reduce the threat posed by the individuals repatriated.

12. The issue of foreign terrorist fighters remains acute, with Member States continuing to estimate that between half and two thirds of the more than 40,000 who joined the so-called caliphate are alive. Foreign terrorist fighters and adherents of ISIL will continue to pose short-, medium- and long-term terrorist threats on a scale many times greater than was the case with Al-Qaida from 2002 onwards, based on the much greater numbers involved.

13. In some conflict zones outside Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, ISIL is not the strongest terrorist group. Al-Qaida affiliates are predominant, especially in the Sahel, Somalia and Yemen. The presence of ISIL in Afghanistan is still of great concern to Member States. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (QDe.161) suffered major setbacks in November 2019 but has shown resilience in the past and is still believed to pose a serious threat.

14. Islamic State's West African Province in the Lake Chad Basin was a very active ISIL affiliate during the second half of 2019. It sustained a high tempo of attacks and reportedly seized significant war spoils of arms, materiel and other supplies during raids on the security forces of Nigeria.⁶ It also reinforced its links to Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, which adopted the tactics, techniques and procedures of Islamic State's West African Province to further harass defence and security forces in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

15. ISIL has still not been able to reconstitute its external operations capability and remains reliant on inspired attacks to demonstrate relevance outside conflict zones. These attacks are usually unreliable or have limited impact, and Member States report that ISIL is actively working to re-establish its former capacity to direct complex international operations. Documents have emerged in the Syrian Arab Republic concerning a plan within ISIL to reconstitute a structure to assist operatives in Europe with the planning and execution of attacks. Despite weaknesses in the current command and control, the threat of such a complex attack still exists, especially from experienced operatives able to work independently.

16. Current assessments of the financial reserves available to ISIL vary from \$100 million to \$300 million. The increasing brazenness of ISIL in its activities in both Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic also extends to fundraising activities. Extortion of residents by ISIL in the areas of Dayr al-Zawr and Hasakah in the Syrian Arab Republic is occurring more openly.⁷ In Iraq, there are reports of ISIL cells raising funds by establishing fake checkpoints and disguising themselves as Iraqi military personnel or popular mobilization militia. ISIL in Iraq also continued to

⁵ Information provided by a Member State.

⁶ Information provided by a Member State.

⁷ Information provided by a Member State.

extort funds from local businesses. Cash couriers and unregistered money service businesses remain the most common means of transferring funds to and from ISIL, which maintains a network of cash couriers with the ability to transport resources across borders at limited transaction costs.

17. There are reports of funds reaching foreign terrorist fighters and their dependants in holding facilities in the Syrian Arab Republic, at least in part through traditional banking channels. These methods can involve wire transfers to accounts in neighbouring countries, which are subsequently collected and couriered to beneficiaries. There is at least one money service business operating in the Hawl camp for internally displaced persons.⁸ These transactions, even if motivated by family ties, may violate sanctions measures that prohibit the financing of terrorism.

18. The diversion of small arms and light weapons, materiel and improvised explosive device components and precursors continues to aggravate conflict zones. Weapons from Libya reportedly continue to find their way into the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel, thereby augmenting the capabilities of terrorist organizations in those areas. Member States remain concerned about the adaptation of unmanned aerial systems for terrorist purposes. Front companies established by ISIL near the core zone have also been used to move funds and procure unmanned aerial systems technology.⁹

B. Regional trends

1. Africa

19. According to Member States, the number of ISIL fighters in the south of Libya fell to between 100 and 200. The reduction was primarily due to a series of aerial attacks targeting ISIL strongholds around Murzuq in late October and early November. Some ISIL members reportedly left Libya for conflict zones in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, which further contributed to the decreased number of ISIL fighters in the south of Libya. Although these air strikes against ISIL have led to the death of some leadership figures, ISIL has retained the ability to mount hit-and-run operations in the cities of Fuqaha', Ghadduwah and Sabha in the south of Libya. ISIL affiliates were also captured during the reporting period in the northern cities of Ajdabiya, Darnah and Misratah. There are still ISIL cells on the Libyan coast.

20. Member States expressed fears that ISIL might attempt to carry out a publicity-generating attack against oil fields in the south-west of Libya. The video released by ISIL in Libya on 5 December, which showed the brutal murder of civil servants in Fuqaha', had only limited success in demonstrating relevance within the larger ISIL network. However, the video and the apparent ability to continue to wage attacks in the south despite recent setbacks, emphasizes the enduring resilience. With its reduced numbers in Libya, ISIL faced a correspondingly reduced financial burden and was able to use its reserves to pay for weapons on the illicit market. The group is also investing in small projects in coastal cities, though likely within the informal economic sector in order to avoid detection.

21. ISIL also became active in Algeria after a two-year hiatus, with Jund al-Khilafah in Algeria (QDe.151) launching an attack in November 2019 against security forces in Tamanrasset, near the border with Mali and the Niger.

22. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara faced significant attrition from counter-terrorism operations but the group retains a stronghold in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger and maintains pressure on defence and security

⁸ Information provided by a Member State.

⁹ Information provided by a Member State.

forces in the Ansongo and Ménaka areas. In two major attacks, the group killed 49 soldiers at the I-n-Déli-man military camp in Mali on 1 November and 71 soldiers at the I-n-Atès camp in the Niger on 10 December. Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger also suffered substantial losses in other significant attacks perpetrated by Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin,¹⁰ Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Ansarul Islam. Since July 2019, 45 members of the defence and security forces of Burkina Faso, more than 100 members of the forces of Mali and 100 members of the forces of the Niger have been killed.

23. Member States report that the operational efficiency of terrorist groups in the region is enhanced by deconfliction and operational collaboration between the groups in high-profile attacks. A similar fluidity exists between organized crime and ISIL affiliates, since both use the same smuggling routes and invest in lucrative illicit activities such as narcotics, trafficking in weapons and migrants and small-scale mining.

24. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, which benefits from a closer relationship with Islamic State's West African Province, embraced tactics that proved efficient against the military forces of Nigeria. During the reporting period, it mostly targeted large military camps to seize a substantial number of weapons, ammunition, vehicles and fuel. The presence of joint facilitators for Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Islamic State's West African Province could presage an enhanced operational connection between the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin theatres, but the leader of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, Adnan Abou Walid Al-Sahraoui (QDi.415), will likely remain operationally independent from the commander of Islamic State's West African Province, Abu Abdullah Idris Ibn Umar Al-Barnawi (not listed).

25. Raids on security forces by Islamic State's West African Province continued to be successful and led to significant war spoils of materiel and other supplies. An unspecified number of foreign terrorist fighters, possibly of Chadian, Libyan or other North African origin, may have joined the group, which is now much stronger than the Boko Haram faction led by Abubakar Mohammed Shekau's (QDi.322)¹¹ in terms of both capability and the number of fighters (up to 5,000 for Islamic State's West African Province compared with estimates of 500 to 2,000 for Mr. Shekau).¹²

26. In the latter part of 2019, ISIL in Somalia lost personnel owing to an ongoing military offensive. However, the group remained resilient, operating covertly and continuing to recruit within Somalia and online. Furthermore, it gained new impetus when the ISIL core began to restructure its affiliates in Africa. According to several Member States, ISIL in Puntland is now operating as the command centre for ISIL affiliates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique and is in charge of loose networks of supporters of the affiliates. The ultimate goal is to consolidate a triad connection of the operations of ISIL affiliates in Eastern, Southern and Central Africa. In that vein, ISIL began, through its online presence, to merge footage from the three regions to show central coordination.

27. During the reporting period, the threat from Islamic State Central Africa Province continued to evolve. Some Member States reported that it now comprises about 2,000 local recruits and a large contingent of foreign terrorist fighters. Member States also observed the improved quality and content of online propaganda, pointing to probable new resourcing and funding. However, the group's leadership structure remains blurry.

¹⁰ Listed as Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (QDe.159).

¹¹ Listed as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (QDE.138).

¹² Information provided by a Member State.

2. Europe

28. Regional Member States assessed that nationals and resident foreigners radicalized online continue to pose the main threat to European countries. Such individuals use online platforms and encrypted Internet applications for training, information-sharing and possibly to connect with each other. They claim attacks in the name of the ISIL core even without contact with the group or its authorization. Member States highlighted the risk, especially for migrants, of being targeted by propaganda aimed at inspiring attacks.

29. In November 2019, through a Referral Action Day Against Islamic State Online Terrorist Propaganda organized by the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, online service providers were requested to remove large quantities of online ISIL material, including from an instant messaging platform.

30. The threat posed by terrorist or radicalized prisoners is also of continued concern. They include returnees, “frustrated travellers” who have failed to join ISIL abroad and perpetrators, supporters and planners of terrorist attacks, as well as other individuals radicalized while in custody. As many as 1,000 foreign terrorist fighters imprisoned on return to Europe prior to 2015 are expected to be released in Europe in 2020.¹³ Some are assessed by Member States as still dangerous.

31. Concerns remain among Member States over the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes and the evaluation of released terrorists. On 29 November, a convicted terrorist released on probation in 2018 killed two people in London while attending an offender rehabilitation conference. The attacker is reported to have acted alone, without any direct current connection to ISIL.

32. Regional Member States reported instances of clandestine networks of women members of terrorist organizations helping other terrorists and radicalized prisoners to exchange information with individuals outside prisons by receiving and delivering messages when they visit relatives in prison. The risk posed by women terrorists and radicalized female inmates also needs to be adequately addressed. Member States continue to highlight the threat potentially associated with the repatriation of women from the Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic, since they consider many to be violent and determined to radicalize others. Some Member States have received injunctions from their courts to repatriate children from the camp together with their mothers.

33. The use of various travel routes and measures by foreign terrorist fighters to avoid detection when returning to Europe continues to be a challenge to regional Member States. During the third quarter of 2019, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) coordinated a six-week maritime border operation involving six Member States, which led to the detection of 12 returnees using maritime routes between North Africa and Southern Europe.

3. Asia

34. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan came under severe military pressure from the security forces of Afghanistan and Taliban fighters towards the end of 2019, leading to its virtual expulsion from what had been its Afghan headquarters in Nangarhar Province. The authorities of Afghanistan took custody of more than 1,400 people, including fighters of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan and their dependants. Most of the male detainees are Afghan nationals but there are also foreigners from Azerbaijan, Canada, France, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. The impact on the number and geographic distribution of the

¹³ Information provided by a Member State.

group's fighters is assessed as significant. Some 2,100 fighters are now in Kunar Province, which has effectively become the group's new Afghan core area, whereas the number of fighters elsewhere in Afghanistan may now be as low as 400, giving a total estimate of 2,500 for the whole country. Up to 25 of them constitute a covert Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan presence in Faryab Province, led by a former Taliban member, Qari Salahuddin (not listed).¹⁴

35. Nevertheless, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan remains active, ambitious and threatening. It continues its online recruitment and propaganda, for which it also conducts outreach activities in religious and academic institutions in Afghanistan, including Kabul University.¹⁵ It has established informal contact with other terrorist groups, including Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (QDe.152), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (QDe.132) and Lashkar-e-Islam, which regularly mount attacks on border posts of Pakistan. The approach of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan has the potential to exacerbate the security threat to countries neighbouring Afghanistan.

36. Several Member States reported that Central Asian fighters had travelled from the Syrian Arab Republic to locations in Africa, including specifically the Central African Republic, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau and the Sudan. Some Member States assess that there could be among them individuals transiting those locations to join ISIL affiliates in the Sahel and the wider West Africa.

37. The South-East Asia region benefits from close collaboration and information-sharing among intelligence and security services, as well as targeted initiatives to identify and thwart would-be travellers. Notwithstanding some success by counter-terrorism initiatives in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, the threat posed by ISIL remains persistent. Porous maritime borders and the risk of abuse of on-arrival visa procedures have established pathways for foreign terrorist fighters, many of whom are from South-East Asia and seek access to the southern Philippines. In late November, forces of the Philippines killed Abu Talha, who was affiliated with the Abu Sayyaf Group (QDe.001). He was described as bringing sophisticated bomb-making skills and acting as a key financier for the group.¹⁶ The kidnapping for ransom of fishers is a common means of financing some groups in the southern Philippines. Extortion and criminal activity, including the smuggling of arms and vehicles, are also reported methods of fundraising.

38. The role of women in the operational planning, financing and execution of terrorist attacks in South-East Asia continues to be cited by Member States as a concern. ISIL has, in its propaganda, abandoned any pretence of discouraging the involvement of women in attacks and openly calls for their involvement.

III. Updates on responses to the evolving threat

A. Overview

39. Since my previous report, the United Nations, Member States and international, regional and subregional organizations have continued to strengthen, refine and promote their use of effective tools and measures to address the threat posed by ISIL, its affiliates and supporters and by returning or relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

40. Further efforts have been made to strengthen the coherence, coordination and effectiveness of the counter-terrorism work of the United Nations. Four new entities signed the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, bringing

¹⁴ Information provided by a Member State.

¹⁵ Information provided by a Member State.

¹⁶ Information provided by a Member State.

the total number of members and observers to 42. In July 2019, the Global Compact Coordination Committee adopted its first joint programme of work, for the period 2019–2020, marking an important further step in the operationalization of the Compact.

41. Ahead of the Counter-Terrorism Week at United Nations Headquarters, to be held from 29 June to 2 July 2020, the Office of Counter-Terrorism has continued to organize a series of high-level regional conferences with Member States, including a conference on harnessing new technologies to counter terrorism, held in Minsk in September 2019; a conference on regional policy responses to prevent radicalization and terrorism, held in Budapest in November 2019; and a conference on empowering youth and promoting tolerance to prevent terrorism, held in Abu Dhabi in December 2019. The outcomes and recommendations of the regional conferences also inform the programmatic response and technical assistance provided to Member States by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and entities of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact.

42. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate updated the “Technical guide to the implementation of Security Council resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#) and other relevant resolutions”, which was issued in December 2019 after consideration by the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#) concerning counter-terrorism and is aimed at assisting Member States in their implementation endeavours. The Executive Directorate continued to conduct assessment visits to Member States on behalf of the Committee to monitor, promote and facilitate their implementation of the relevant Council resolutions and to identify strengths, shortfalls, technical assistance needs, useful experiences and good practices in that regard.

B. Responding to evolving challenges posed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

Current situation

43. I commend Member States that have repatriated or are in the process of repatriating from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic their nationals with suspected links to terrorist groups listed by the United Nations. However, thousands of people, mostly women and children, remain stranded in overcrowded camps, living in inhumane conditions. Since my previous report, the humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated by the absence of basic services, such as food, water, medical care and education, and by the lack of appropriate psychosocial support. Many children and women in the camps lack identification, which jeopardizes their rights related to their nationality and places them at greater risk of exploitation and potential terrorist radicalization.

44. People in the camps may include victims of sexual violence committed by ISIL, including sexual slavery and forced marriage, and children born as a result of sexual violence, in addition to children kidnapped, indoctrinated, recruited or exploited by parties to the conflict. There are also significant challenges relating to ensuring comprehensive screening and risk assessment and determining possible criminal responsibility. The situation has profound security implications, which require urgent attention by the international community in accordance with international law, in particular international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law.

45. Women can be facilitators, supporters and perpetrators of crimes, while also being victims of violence, trafficking and other human rights violations. Therefore,

gender-responsive policies in risk assessment, interrogation, detention, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration are required. Member States should develop appropriate prosecution strategies, and repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies should be tailored to the needs of the individual, following international human rights standards.

46. Reports of children deprived of their liberty and interned in pretrial and post-trial detention camps for their actual or alleged association with ISIL remain of concern. It is stipulated in the guiding principles on foreign terrorist fighters (Madrid Guiding Principles) (S/2018/1177, annex) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict that children, including those with links to terrorist groups listed by the United Nations, should be treated primarily as victims, and any prosecution should be conducted in accordance with internationally recognized juvenile justice standards. Detention should be used as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate time. Appropriate legislation and protections need to be introduced to rehabilitate children and reintegrate them into their communities on a priority basis.

47. Following the key principles developed by the United Nations system in March 2019 on the protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children with links to terrorist groups listed by the United Nations, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre within the Office of Counter-Terrorism is implementing a project with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to support requesting Member States in the repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of suspected foreign terrorist fighters and their dependants.

Repatriation efforts

48. In September 2019, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate issued two analytical briefs on the repatriation of women and children associated with ISIL.¹⁷ The first brief outlined gaps that remained in understanding the motives of women who joined ISIL, including their non-binary role as victims and perpetrators within ISIL, thereby complicating efforts to determine their criminal responsibility and develop any subsequent prosecution and rehabilitation measures. The rate of return for women is currently much lower than those for men and children. This phenomenon requires urgent attention.

49. Member States have primary responsibility for the repatriation of their nationals and therefore for taking appropriate measures to develop comprehensive repatriation strategies, for providing consular services, for issuing birth certificates and other identification documents for children born to their nationals, for taking all measures necessary to prevent arbitrary denial of citizenship rights and for protecting their nationals, especially children, from becoming stateless in accordance with international law. In its dialogue with States, including in Europe, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continues to underline the need to ensure procedural safeguards for individuals affected by measures relating to citizenship and to stress that such safeguards can be particularly challenging to implement while the affected persons are in the conflict zones.

50. In the handbook *entitled Children Affected by the Foreign-Fighter Phenomenon: Ensuring a Child Rights-based Approach*,¹⁸ issued in September 2019 by the Office

¹⁷ See www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CTED-Analytical-Brief-Repatriation-of-Women.pdf and www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CTED-Analytical-Brief-Repatriation-of-Children.pdf.

¹⁸ Available at www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/ftf_handbook_web_reduced.pdf.

of Counter-Terrorism in collaboration with United Nations entities, Member States and other stakeholders, it is recommended that repatriation efforts are comprehensive and coordinated, guided by the best interests of the child, as well as by principles of family unity, to prevent recurring cycles of violence and further victimization.

Prosecution

51. Member States continue to face challenges in bringing ISIL members and their affiliates, including foreign terrorist fighters, to justice, in accordance with international legal standards, including guarantees of due process and fair trials. Further efforts are needed to investigate and prosecute the crimes committed by ISIL members, in particular through mutual legal assistance.

52. Since my previous report, United Nations entities have continued to work with Member States to strengthen their counter-terrorism policies and measures and address gaps in national legislation. In 2019, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and UNODC launched an initiative on comprehensive and tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for persons associated with terrorist groups, aimed at developing, inter alia, guidelines for Member States. The Executive Directorate and UNODC, supported by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, held an expert meeting in Vienna in October 2019 with Member States, United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact entities and civil society to gather good and emerging practices on gender- and age-sensitive strategies for the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of suspected terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members.

53. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism continued their close cooperation to address priority technical needs identified pursuant to the assessment visit to Iraq undertaken by the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#) concerning counter-terrorism, in 2015, and the subsequent high-level consultations held jointly by the Office and the Executive Directorate in Iraq in 2018. The Government of Iraq has taken steps to introduce legislation allowing for the prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. United Nations entities continue to support such efforts with a view to establishing a strong domestic legal basis for the prosecution of crimes committed by ISIL in accordance with international human rights law and standards. The Government of Iraq is facilitating the repatriation of suspected foreign terrorist fighters and their dependants from its territory to their countries of nationality.

54. Concerns remain relating to ensuring due process in the prosecution of individuals associated with ISIL in Iraq, including the prosecution of defendants, among them women, for mere association with terrorist groups, reliance on confessions allegedly obtained under duress and ineffective defence. The UNAMI is engaged in systematic trial monitoring aimed at promoting fair trial standards and the integrity of the judicial process, in compliance with procedural guarantees to strengthen the rule of law, which are critical tools for efforts to prevent conflict and counter terrorist radicalization.

Rehabilitation and reintegration

55. The development of evidence-based rehabilitation and reintegration programmes that are guided by international human rights laws and standards is needed, preserving the rights of returnees and in accordance with international law, including the absolute prohibition of torture and the prohibition of arbitrary detention.

56. Many Member States continue to face challenges in effectively preventing terrorist radicalization and managing terrorist offenders within correctional systems.

A lack of resources prevents prison administrations from addressing prisoners' needs and assessing risks. Other infrastructural and managerial issues, such as minimal oversight and accountability governing high-risk detainees, ill-trained prison personnel, overcrowding and disregard for prisoners' rights, could contribute to the spread of violent extremism conducive to terrorism within prison populations.

57. In November 2019, Security Council members held an Arria formula meeting focused on strategies to manage terrorist and other violent extremist prisoners, best practices and persistent challenges in dealing with radicalization in prison and the promotion of rehabilitation and reintegration policies for detainees. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and UNODC have continued to implement a joint project to assist Kazakhstan, Tunisia and Uganda in taking a holistic best practice view of the effective management of such challenges. The project supported increased knowledge and capacity-building for prison and national security officials in all three countries and disseminated specialized technical guidance materials.

58. Member States should develop tailored rehabilitation and reintegration programmes that are aligned with national priorities and sensibilities and explore community-based alternatives to detention, including individualized needs assessments, vocational training, education facilities, psychosocial counselling, social reintegration initiatives and restorative justice alternatives. I also encourage Member States to continue to strengthen coordination between national authorities and local governments, along with relevant civil society organizations, to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees.

59. UNODC assisted Indonesia in the development of guidelines to establish a critical incident management system and enhance corrections intelligence to address deficiencies in the management of violent extremist prisoners. In the Philippines, the Lanao returnee reintegration programme has been launched, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, for ISIL returnees from the Lanao del Sur Province. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and UNODC also collaborated on a capacity-building workshop for Central Asia, held in Kazakhstan in October 2019, which was focused on the effective reintegration of children repatriated from conflict zones.

60. Progress has been achieved through national approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration in implementing the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, with the support of United Nations entities. During the reporting period, several dozen individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram completed a rehabilitation programme in the Niger. The national commission on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of Cameroon became operational, and Chad adopted a regulation to set up a centre to host surrendered individuals previously associated with Boko Haram.

C. International and regional cooperation

61. The transnational nature of the terrorist threat requires continued international judicial cooperation in extradition, investigation and prosecution efforts, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions¹⁹ and applicable bilateral and multilateral treaties. United Nations entities have facilitated efforts to engage policymakers and community leaders and enhance their understanding of

¹⁹ Resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1373 \(2001\)](#), [1624 \(2005\)](#), [2322 \(2016\)](#) and [2396 \(2017\)](#).

international guidelines and have also strengthened national capacity to investigate and prosecute terrorist offences.

62. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, UNODC and the Inter-Parliamentary Union have continued to implement a joint programme to strengthen the engagement of parliamentarians, as lawmakers and policymakers, and community leaders in international efforts to prevent terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism. A regional conference for national parliaments of Asia and the Pacific, held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2019, resulted in 15 recommendations and priority areas for strengthening the role of parliaments in combating terrorism nationally and globally.

63. In West Africa, the Accra Initiative, launched by Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo to address threats of terrorism and transnational organized crime in the region, has facilitated the creation of a platform to exchange information and intelligence between the police, the gendarmerie and the security services. UNODC has continued to provide capacity-building and mentoring services to specialized counter-terrorism units, based on respect for the rule of law, including through the launch of a new module for Nigeria to train investigators and judges on gender-sensitive investigation and adjudication of terrorism. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre is launching a joint project with INTERPOL for implementation in 2020 to facilitate the exchange of information on foreign terrorist fighters in Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East.

64. In the Lake Chad Basin, the presence of foreign terrorist fighters held by various State authorities renders cooperation indispensable, ranging from investigations at the individual level to the coordination of prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration policies aimed at facilitating orderly repatriation. The increasing movement of such fighters between Central, Eastern and Southern African States has led to enhanced judicial cooperation, encompassing formal mechanisms, including the adoption of regional cooperation agreements, as well as informal exchanges between prosecutors at the local level.

Military evidence

65. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate launched the "Guidelines to facilitate the use and admissibility as evidence in national criminal courts of information collected, handled, preserved and shared by the military to prosecute terrorist offences"²⁰ in December 2019, developed within the framework of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact, in collaboration with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre. The first edition of the guidelines is intended to serve as the basis for discussions with Member States on their development of domestic policies and legal frameworks. Member States are encouraged to make full use of the document and contribute to its subsequent review in order to comprehensively cover new issues, such as the need to develop detailed guidance for the detention, arrest and questioning of witnesses and victims. UNODC, a close partner in the initiative, has launched a project addressing the challenges of collecting battlefield evidence for the Niger.

Electronic evidence

66. The use of electronic data as evidence has become an essential tool to effectively conduct criminal investigations, prevent attacks and bring terrorists to justice. Pursuant to Security Council resolutions [2322 \(2016\)](#), [2331 \(2016\)](#), [2341 \(2017\)](#) and [2396 \(2017\)](#), and recognizing existing challenges on cross-border access to electronic

²⁰ Available at www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Battlefield_Evidence_Final.pdf.

evidence while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and UNODC have continued to implement a joint global initiative with the International Association of Prosecutors on cross-border access to electronic evidence, providing capacity-building support to national practitioners on the use of the *Practical Guide for Requesting Electronic Evidence Across Borders*, which is now available in four languages. Through the organization of multi-stakeholder expert group meetings, the initiative is aimed at promoting public-private dialogue, thereby helping to build trust and facilitate collaboration, and at identifying remaining challenges and ways to support the actors concerned. At the beginning of 2020, the global initiative will present a simplified request form that will standardize direct requests to technology companies and communication service providers.

67. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and INTERPOL continued to collaborate to build the capacity of several Member States to use social media to identify and investigate foreign terrorist fighters with a series of capacity-building workshops in Asia, using their joint handbook “Using the Internet and Social Media for Counter-Terrorism Investigations”, published in June 2019.

D. Supporting victims of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and ensuring accountability

68. The United Nations continued to develop comprehensive strategies to better address the rights and needs of victims and survivors of terrorism. The recent adoption by the General Assembly of resolution [73/305](#) on the enhancement of international cooperation to assist victims of terrorism and the establishment of a Group of Friends of Victims of Terrorism demonstrate the proactive engagement of Member States on the issue. The Office of Counter-Terrorism continued to lead efforts under the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact regarding victims of terrorism and organized the second commemoration of International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, on 21 August 2019, as well as an exhibit featuring testimonies of victims of terrorism.

Investigative efforts of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

69. One year after its arrival in Iraq, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) is fully operational and has made substantial progress, collecting key documentary, digital, forensic and testimonial material in support of domestic proceedings to hold ISIL accountable for its crimes. The team has expanded its strategy to include additional investigative priorities, ensuring that its key objectives reflect the breadth of communities affected by the crimes committed by ISIL in Iraq. UNITAD is collecting victims’ testimonies and conducting targeted evidence collection activities in several locations across Iraq, including through excavations of mass grave sites and the exhumation of victims’ remains, along with the digitalization of evidence, to build case files on ISIL members with alleged responsibility for acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

70. UNITAD, acting in cooperation with the judiciary of Iraq and adhering to the right of victims to have access to justice and participate in criminal proceedings against perpetrators, has provided support for ongoing proceedings in a third State to prosecute members of ISIL for atrocity crimes committed in Iraq. The testimony of

eight witnesses was presented via video link in ongoing national proceedings in an appeals court in Finland relating to two Iraqi nationals facing charges of aggravated war crimes in connection with mass killings perpetrated by ISIL in June 2014. Ensuring the representation of victims' voices in judicial processes relating to ISIL crimes, through the systematic collection and presentation of witness testimony, is essential to build credible cases against ISIL perpetrators and promote accountability.

Conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

71. On 30 October, at an event held in New York to mark the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Security Council mandate to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence, participants took stock of progress and discussed ways to approach challenges and implement existing commitments to a survivor-centric and rights-based approach. Survivors of sexual violence around the world provided their testimonies and called for tangible actions in judicial remedies and reparation efforts.

72. There remains a lack of progress in addressing sexual violence in conflict and bringing perpetrators to justice. The Office of my Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict supported the launch of a Global Survivors Fund for conflict-related sexual violence, to complement existing efforts to ensure justice and holistic care. In 2020, pilot projects will be launched in Iraq for victims of sexual violence committed by ISIL. However, there is a need for States to enhance their efforts to tackle the culture of impunity and address structural gender-based inequalities and other drivers of sexual violence.

E. Counter-financing of terrorism

73. Security Council resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#) on preventing and suppressing the financing of terrorism reflects the Council's continued determination to assist Member States in depriving terrorists of funds and the need to fully integrate financial intelligence into counter-terrorism efforts. An increasing number of States has subsequently introduced regulations to mitigate the vulnerability of virtual assets and crowdfunding sites to terrorism financing, by extending anti-money-laundering mechanisms.

74. In October 2019, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team disseminated a questionnaire to all Member States on measures taken to disrupt terrorist financing. The responses will feed into a report to be presented at a special meeting on terrorism financing to be held in March 2020 jointly by 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, in cooperation with the Financial Action Task Force.

75. A focus on enhancing national capacities and building institutional mechanisms for identifying and disrupting terrorism-financing activities is recommended. Strengthened regional collaboration would also be beneficial. Two Financial Action Task Force-style regional bodies in Africa – the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group and the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa – are in the process of developing and implementing dedicated operational plans on countering the financing of terrorism. For the former, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre collaborated in the organization of two subregional dialogues, in Turkey in October 2019 and in South Africa in December 2019.

76. During its recent visits to West Africa, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate noted a general lack of understanding of terrorism-financing risks, challenges in coordination between financial intelligence units and other counter-terrorism stakeholders, a lack of asset-freezing mechanisms and limited monitoring of money transfers involving mobile phones, cash and other bearer negotiable instruments across borders (a widespread practice throughout Africa).

77. In response to Security Council resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#), the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre has developed a multi-year global programme on countering the financing of terrorism, in consultation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and other entities of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact, which builds on good practices developed under a previous project completed in January 2020. The thematic priorities include targeted financial sanctions, protecting the non-profit sector, financial inclusion, partnerships with the private sector, national risk assessments and international cooperation. UNODC has also been supporting Member States in Africa, South-Eastern Europe, the Middle East and South-East and Central Asia through operational mentoring programmes on countering terrorism financing.

78. As noted by the Security Council in its resolution [2482 \(2019\)](#), Member States remain concerned at the linkages between terrorism and organized crime, including trafficking in arms and narcotics and the illicit trade in natural resources, such as gold, and precious metals and stones. In December 2019, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in collaboration with the World Customs Organization, enhanced the work of its informal network of law enforcement officials on mineral-related crimes, promoting information-sharing, building capacity and enhancing knowledge of supply chains and related crimes with law enforcement and customs officers, financial intelligence units and recipient States. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has continued to promote international regional cooperation in preventing and countering illicit trafficking in cultural property as a source of terrorism financing.

F. Border management and law enforcement

79. In accordance with Security Council resolutions [2178 \(2014\)](#) and [2396 \(2017\)](#), United Nations entities have continued to support Member States in Central Asia, North Africa and South Asia in strengthening capacities to detect, intercept and investigate foreign terrorist fighters in border areas and implement effective border control.

80. The implementation of the multi-agency United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme launched in May 2019 has begun in several pilot States. A total of 31 Member States worldwide have formally asked to benefit from the programme. In September 2019, the Office of Counter-Terrorism established a programme support office in Budapest to facilitate programme delivery.

81. Through its Border Security Management Programme, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, together with partners such as UNODC, the World Customs Organization, the International Organization for Migration and the International Air Transport Association, conducted six training activities during the reporting period in West Africa, the wider Sahel, East Africa, the Caribbean and South-East and Central Asia to strengthen the capacity of front-line officers at selected international airports to counter the threat of foreign terrorist fighters.

82. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and UNODC continued to support the Specialized Judicial Unit to Combat Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime of Mali and its Specialized Investigation Brigade,

through training and technical and logistical support for its investigations, including into the attack against the country's armed forces in Boulikessi in September 2019. During the reporting period, 16 terrorism-related trials were completed; 13 defendants were found guilty, with sentences ranging from two years to life imprisonment, and 6 were acquitted. UNODC provided technical assistance to support the development of the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization Regional Counter-Terrorism Centre of Excellence.

83. Effective protection of so-called soft targets and critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks requires the implementation of physical protection measures, the development of strong and resilient communities and close engagement with civil society and the private sector. Within the framework of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and INTERPOL held regional expert workshops on the issue, using *The Protection of Critical Infrastructures against Terrorist Attacks: Compendium of Good Practices*²¹ to enhance the implementation of Security Council resolution 2341 (2017) on the protection of critical infrastructure and its resolution 2396 (2017) regarding soft targets.

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

84. ISIL and its affiliates have continued to adapt and diversify their use of the Internet and social media, including by migrating to smaller platforms, in response to the efforts of larger platforms, in collaboration with Member States and civil society, to identify and remove terrorist and violent extremist content.

85. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continued its efforts to counter terrorist narratives, including by leading jointly with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre a project within the counter-terrorism framework that will deliver recommendations for effective monitoring and evaluation and a toolkit for Member States and other key stakeholders, encompassing both online and offline spaces. Through its programme on strategic communications, the Centre assisted Member States in South-East Asia in building better knowledge of terrorist narratives and communications skills and expertise to counter the threat, and assisted the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in developing a regional approach to crisis communications in East Africa.

86. United Nations entities continued to support Member States in their development of national or regional action plans for preventing and countering violent extremism conducive to terrorism through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre coordinated support from entities of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact for the development by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations of the work plan to implement its 2018–2025 plan of action to prevent and counter the rise of radicalization and violent extremism.

87. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute published a report in September 2019 in which it analysed the actions of grass-roots community organizations in nine countries of the Maghreb and the Sahel. It identified practical, innovative and sustainable measures that could help to strengthen the resilience of local communities to terrorist narratives and recruitment.

²¹ See www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Compendium_of_Good_Practices_Compressed.pdf.

88. UNESCO continued to promote the recovery of cultural heritage, preventing violent extremism and strengthening community resilience through programmes such as “Revive the Spirit of Mosul”, which is aimed at addressing violent extremism through educational interventions in Iraq. In the Sahel region, UNESCO guides for teachers promote transformational education that strengthens learners’ resilience capacities and encourages them to promote non-violence in their communities.

IV. Observations

89. The transnational threat of terrorism remains acute, with ISIL at its centre. Since the loss of its last stronghold in the Syrian Arab Republic in March 2019, the ISIL core has continued its rapid reconstitution into a covert network. It has continued to seek resurgence and global relevance online and offline, including the capacity to carry out external operations. Its regional affiliates pursue their strategy of entrenchment in conflict zones by exploiting local grievances, with alarming advances in Western Africa. Evolving links among terrorist groups and with organized criminals, as well as the large number of remaining foreign terrorist fighters, highlight the imperative for Member States to remain vigilant and united to tackle the threat.

90. It is paramount for Member States to work together to collect, secure and share admissible evidence to ensure accountability, in accordance with international law and international standards, for the crimes committed by ISIL, to uphold the rights and needs of victims, to stabilize affected areas and to earnestly tackle the conditions that were conducive to the rise of ISIL. Concerted efforts remain necessary for the rehabilitation and reintegration of men, women and children who are stranded, especially in conflict zones, including in camps and detention facilities in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Member States have primary responsibility for the repatriation of their nationals. All measures taken by Member States for the protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children with links to terrorist groups listed by the United Nations should be in compliance with their obligations under international law, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law, as well as international standards and relevant Security Council resolutions. Relevant General Assembly resolutions should also be taken into consideration.

91. The United Nations system will continue with resolve to encourage and support Member States in their efforts to implement the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, relevant Security Council resolutions and applicable international law provisions. I am hopeful that Member States will seize the opportunity of the Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations, to be held from 29 June to 2 July 2020, including the seventh biennial review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the first ever Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism and the second United Nations High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, to come together and reaffirm the international consensus against terrorism as the United Nations commemorates its seventy-fifth anniversary.