



# Security Council

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## Sixteenth 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 Levant<sup>1</sup> (ISIL, hereinafter referred to as “Da’esh”)<sup>2</sup> 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 sixteenth such report.<sup>3</sup> It was prepared by 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,<sup>4</sup> 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 2022, the threat posed by Da’esh and its affiliates to international peace and security remained high and increased in and around conflict zones where the group was present. The convergence of global threats, in particular the complex and interconnected relationship between armed conflict, terrorist attacks and transnational organized crime, was a development that must be taken into account for counter-terrorism efforts targeting Da’esh. While the United Nations continued to support Member States in countering Da’esh and other terrorist groups, including through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact,

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<sup>1</sup> Listed as Al-Qaida in Iraq (QDe.115).

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

<sup>3</sup> 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](#), [S/2021/682](#), [S/2022/63](#) and [S/2022/576](#).

<sup>4</sup> The present threat assessment is based in part on the Monitoring Team’s thirty-first report.



multilateral cooperation remained essential for the integrated and balanced interpretation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

## **II. Threat assessment**

### **A. Overview and evolution of the threat**

4. As observed in previous reports, the threat posed by Da'esh and its affiliates was high and increased in particular in conflict zones and neighbouring countries. The geographic spread and incidence of terrorist violence by Da'esh increased across the African continent, where Da'esh, its affiliates and other terrorist groups continued to exploit local conflict dynamics and fragilities in order to advance their agendas. The situation in the Sahel, in particular, deteriorated significantly, with increased terrorist violence, especially against civilians, and armed confrontations between government forces and non-State armed groups. In Afghanistan, the Da'esh affiliate Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (QDe.161) remained the Taliban's main antagonist, demonstrating an ability to mount operations in a variety of areas.

5. Member States expressed concern about Da'esh's continued objective to project a threat outside conflict zones, including by seeking to inspire attacks by individuals or small cells that had been self-radicalized by Da'esh propaganda. This threat was further compounded by foreign terrorist fighters with battlefield experience relocating to their home or third countries, as terrorist attacks committed by such individuals had proven to be particularly sophisticated and lethal.

6. Da'esh continued to use information and communications technologies (ICT), including the Internet and social media platforms, to spread its propaganda. Such efforts have become more sophisticated and prolific. The content often promotes conflict with other groups, competition for sources of revenue and other efforts to attract new followers and incite adherents to violence.

#### **1. Da'esh leadership**

7. On 30 November, Da'esh announced the death of its former leader, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi al-Qurashi, during counter-terrorism operations from 15 to 17 October in Jasim in the Syrian Arab Republic, and immediately identified Abu al-Husain al-Husaini al-Qurashi as its new leader. The true identities of both men remained unknown, which was a preoccupation for Member States during the reporting period. One Member State indicated that Juma'a Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri (not listed) had been detained along with, or shortly after the arrest of, Bashar Khattab Ghazal al-Sumaida'i (not listed), ruling out both as the true identity of the former Da'esh leader. One Member State characterized the new leader as an Iraqi national and Da'esh veteran who was likely to continue the same strategy as his predecessor. Da'esh regional affiliates expect and value the continuity in leadership that its core delivers, and Member States noted numerous immediate pledges of allegiance to the new leader without specific knowledge of his identity or qualities as a leader.

8. The Da'esh leadership branch in the Syrian Arab Republic was affected by the death of its leader, Maher al-Agal (not listed), in July and one of his deputies in October, following counter-terrorism operations by the United States of America. Several other Da'esh leaders or facilitators were killed or captured, including through arrests by Türkiye. Although the attrition of leadership weakened the Da'esh core, Member States assessed that the group remained resilient. Moreover, the pool of potential leaders in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic with the desired lineage and operational experience was sufficiently deep to withstand leadership losses in the

short term, as manifested by the group's activity levels generally and the number of attacks that it claimed globally.

## **2. Da'esh finances**

9. Member States estimated that Da'esh cash reserves held in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic remained in the range of \$25 million to \$50 million, down from historic highs but in line with the amounts indicated in previous reports, with several Member States assessing that the reserves were depleting. Da'esh financial resources were used to fund recruitment and propaganda operations and support its affiliates and members around the world, including to secure the release of fighters from prisons, camps and other detention facilities. Da'esh's largest expenses, which may total hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, continued to be payments to fighters and financial assistance to the families of deceased or imprisoned fighters.

10. While recent leadership losses had not significantly affected Da'esh finances, they contributed to a decline in revenues. Counter-terrorism operations also placed revenue streams under pressure, as the expenses of the Da'esh core for weapons, ammunition, training and salaries outpaced its income. Moreover, the scarcity of resources reportedly resulted in declining morale. These factors rendered revenue generation and fundraising critical for Da'esh. While methods varied depending on the geographic location of the affiliate, funds were increasingly raised primarily through extortion, looting, donations and kidnapping for ransom. Da'esh controlled illegal commercial routes, on which it taxed smugglers of weapons and narcotics as well as human traffickers. Some Member States contended that oil smuggling continued as a revenue source in some locations, such as Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic. One Member State reported that Da'esh had begun to launder money through investments in legitimate businesses such as hotels and real estate in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Da'esh had reportedly also used livestock theft to raise money.

11. Unregistered informal cash transfer (hawala) networks and mobile money services continued to be the dominant means by which Da'esh moved money, along with cash couriers, currency exchanges, secure payment systems and virtual assets. Da'esh increasingly used virtual currencies, especially so-called stable coins, and continued to fundraise on social media platforms, often using creative means such as the exchange of video gaming points into fiat currency.

## **3. Da'esh access to weapons**

12. Member States were concerned about Da'esh's continued access to various weapon systems, including the abundance of small arms and light weapons in the Middle East, Africa and Afghanistan. Illicit arms trade between terrorist groups such as Da'esh and transnational criminal networks was a concern as it could contribute to destabilization in neighbouring countries. Da'esh increasingly used unmanned aerial systems that were commercially available at a low cost for surveillance and reconnaissance and to attack targets with a high degree of accuracy and efficiency. Authorities in Mozambique reported shooting down two Da'esh surveillance drones. In West Africa, Da'esh affiliates used reconnaissance drones for surveillance. Unmanned aerial systems were also used by the Allied Democratic Forces in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

13. The proliferation of conventional and improvised weapons among Da'esh affiliates in Africa was noted by Member States. Da'esh in Somalia acquired illicitly trafficked weapons from intermediaries in the Puntland region, who smuggled weapons from Yemen to Somalia on dhows and supplied both Da'esh and Al-Shabaab with arms. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, weapons used by the Allied

Democratic Forces were captured mostly from attacks on the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Mozambique, the Da'esh affiliate Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (not listed) seized weapons from police armouries in towns that it had attacked, with police units in Nangade suffering several such attacks recently. Member States noted the construction of improvised explosive devices by both groups, and there was evidence that remote detonators for the devices were being assembled in their camps.

#### 4. Da'esh fighters and their family members in Iraq and Syrian Arab Republic

14. Despite limited progress with repatriation, Member States noted no significant improvement in the volatile situation in camps and detention facilities holding Da'esh fighters and children and women believed to be associated with Da'esh, in particular in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. Da'esh remained active in the area and was intent on freeing its fighters and followers, highlighting the increasingly grave security, legal, human rights and humanitarian risks of this precarious situation, including acute concerns that children in the camps were potentially exposed to Da'esh indoctrination efforts through its "Cubs of the Caliphate" programme, which remained active.

15. Prison break operations led by Da'esh to replenish its cadres remained a serious risk. However, one Member State assessed that, despite between 100 and 300 detainees escaping in the attack by Da'esh on the Sina'a prison in Hasakah in January 2022, the group had lost significant military capabilities, which it was still working to rebuild.

16. The Syrian Democratic Forces launched an operation in late August to eradicate Da'esh facilitation networks in the Hawl camp, which resulted in over 200 arrests as well as the discovery of tunnels, the confiscation of weapons and the liberation of several women apparently held as slaves. While the operation degraded Da'esh capabilities in the camp, the group continued to use it for recruitment purposes.

## B. Regional developments

### 1. Africa

#### *Central and Southern Africa*

17. In Mozambique, the deployment of forces to Cabo Delgado Province by Member States in the region had a significant impact on the Da'esh affiliate Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a, disrupting its leadership, command structures and bases. Member States in the region estimated that the number of Da'esh-affiliated fighters in Mozambique has been reduced from an initial 2,500 fighters to 280 adult male fighters and that between 70 and 120 fighters and commanders had died between 1 June and 1 December 2022. On 14 July, regional forces captured the Sheik Assane base, an important Da'esh camp in Macomia, killing its leader, Sheik Assane, and freeing 600 hostages.

18. Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a nevertheless demonstrated strategic and tactical coordination, overstressing regional forces by launching attacks against civilians and internally displaced persons, as well as mining companies in northern, central and southern Cabo Delgado. Its fighters moved further south than ever before, opening a new theatre of operations in Ancuabe and Chiure districts, which had never previously experienced attacks, causing the displacement of 161,046 persons in June and July alone. The group launched attacks as far south as Nampula Province, while attacks continued to be launched in the northern districts of Macomia, Nangade and Muidumbe. Although Member States were of the view that there was no clear

evidence of command and control orders from its core, Da'esh recently referred to Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a as a separate affiliate.

19. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, some factions of the Allied Democratic Forces pledged allegiance to Da'esh. The Allied Democratic Forces continued to be dispersed into smaller units following joint military operations by Congolese and Ugandan forces in eastern parts of the country. Following raids on its camps, the Allied Democratic Forces pulled out of strongholds near the Ugandan border and was headed west, widening the theatre of conflict from the Ugandan border to western Ituri, with attacks taking place as far west as Mambasa territory in Ituri and as far south as Goma in North Kivu.

20. The Allied Democratic Forces also increased attacks in and near Butembo in North Kivu. It carried out a successful prison break in the city on 10 August, freeing 800 prisoners. The majority were forcibly assimilated into the group, which was assessed to have between 1,500 and 2,000 fighters after the prison break, constituting a significant increase. Under the leadership of Seka Baluku (alias Musa Baluku; not listed), the Allied Democratic Forces had notably fractured into two groups over Baluku's strong allegiance to Da'esh. Despite Baluku's pledges and joint propaganda efforts, in which Da'esh claimed responsibility for attacks carried out by the Allied Democratic Forces, several Member States in the region reported having no information to indicate any command and control links between the Allied Democratic Forces and the Da'esh core.

#### *East Africa*

21. Da'esh in Somalia is now estimated to have between 200 and 250 fighters in Puntland, down slightly from the 200 to 280 estimated in the previous report. Its presence in Somalia was still important to the group owing to the presence of its so-called Al-Karrar office, which continued to act as a financial hub for transmitting funds to other regional affiliates. Abdul Qadir Mumin (not listed), a former leader within Al-Shabaab who had pledged allegiance to Da'esh in October 2015, remained head of the group. While Member States assessed that Da'esh in Somalia generated up to \$100,000 per month through extortion of the shipping industry and illicit taxation in Puntland, they had not presented definitive information on the exact source of the financial flows. The limited numbers of its fighters as well as the continued armed clashes with both Somali government forces and Al-Shabaab prevented Da'esh from carrying out territorial expansions or large-scale sophisticated attacks.

#### *West Africa*

22. While the Da'esh affiliate in the Sahel (Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, QDe.163) had experienced a slowdown in its operations in 2021 due to attrition within its command structure, several Member States reported a sharp increase in violence after the appointment of the new leader, Abba al Saharawi (not listed), in May 2022. The Da'esh central media arm (Al-Furqan) capitalized on claims by its regional affiliate of operational success against the regional Al-Qaida affiliate (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, QDe.159), for instance during the assault on Talataye in September. Da'esh increased recruitment within local communities by exploiting the frustrations and differences among those communities. One Member State assessed that the Da'esh regional affiliate in the Sahel had gained capacity.

23. Taxes and donations funded the operations of the Da'esh affiliate in the Sahel and the recruitment of its new fighters, and it was able to seize weapons during attacks on army barracks. However, apart from the counter-terrorism pressure that the security forces of countries in the Sahel had applied, Da'esh also faced opposition

from the regional Al-Qaida affiliate as well as local militias owing to its expansion, increased activity and the local tensions that it consequently fuelled.

#### *North Africa*

24. The Da'esh affiliate in Libya (QDe.165) was further confined to the southern territory of the country, with a decrease in its area of operations following strikes against its positions in southern Libya, which eliminated important field commanders. The group redeployed to several cities in the south and to mountainous areas such as Akakus and Haruj al-Aswad. It nevertheless remained present, exploiting the protracted political impasse and economic decline in the south while cooperating with tribal elements involved in smuggling and illicit trade that attracted new members. The Da'esh affiliate in Libya is led by Abdulsalam Darkullah (not listed). He recently changed the group's deployment strategy in southern Libya, dividing its fighters into six main cells of 30 to 40 individuals and using foreign fighters from Ghana, Kenya, the Niger, Nigeria and the Sudan. The group financed itself from arms and oil smuggling in Libya, taxes on illicit trade routes and kidnapping for ransom, in addition to revenue from small and medium-sized enterprises in towns in the Sahel run by Da'esh sympathizers, especially in western Libya.

25. While counter-terrorism pressure by Egypt in the Sinai reduced the presence of the Da'esh-affiliated Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (not listed), the group remained active and continued to target local communities and Egyptian security forces. Its strength is now assessed by Member States at around 1,000 fighters, concentrated mainly in the north, a significant increase from the 500 fighters noted in the previous report. Some Member States noted that Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis had improved its capability of perpetrating terrorist acts, such as in the village of Jalbanat in August and by targeting the Egyptian 26th Military Brigade in July.

26. In the rest of North Africa, Da'esh-affiliated groups remained largely constrained, owing mainly to counter-terrorism measures, in particular in Algeria and Tunisia, as well as the relocation of some fighters to front lines in the Sahel.

## **2. Middle East**

#### *Iraq and the Levant*

27. Following sustained counter-terrorism operations by Member States, Da'esh is now estimated to have 5,000 to 7,000 members and supporters spread between Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, roughly half of whom are fighters. In the Syrian Arab Republic, Da'esh maintained hideouts west of the Euphrates River and spread cells of around 15 to 30 individuals across the country, including in the south, notably in Dar'a. The group continued its guerrilla warfare tactics, waging asymmetric attacks against Syrian government forces as well as the Syrian Democratic Forces and civilians, with operations concentrated in Dayr al-Zawr and Homs Governorates. The central (Badiyah) desert continued to have strategic importance to Da'esh for remobilization and training purposes.

28. In Iraq, the Da'esh insurgency remained active despite Iraqi counter-terrorism efforts, which succeeded in killing approximately 150 Da'esh operatives in 2022. The group operated in rural mountainous areas, leveraging the porous Iraqi-Syrian border and retaining manoeuvrability to evade attacks by Iraqi forces. Da'esh maintained its ability to perpetrate attacks in Iraq, with a slightly abated frequency during the reporting period. According to some Member States, the reduced frequency stemmed from a deliberate effort by Da'esh to reduce its visibility in order to rebuild and recover from losses.

29. Da'esh activities in Iraq were concentrated in a “logistical theatre” in Anbar, Ninawah and Mosul and an “operational theatre” comprising Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah Al-Din and northern Baghdad. Attacks in these areas underscored the importance of maintaining enhanced cooperation between Iraqi and Peshmerga forces. Da'esh continued to target Iraqi security forces, community leaders and civilians, mainly in the form of armed assaults and with improvised explosive devices.

30. Despite recent setbacks, the risk of a Da'esh resurgence in the core conflict zone remained, with neighbouring countries similarly vulnerable to attacks directed or inspired by Da'esh. One Member State reported that on 26 October a Da'esh fighter had attacked the Shah Cheragh shrine in Shiraz in the Islamic Republic of Iran, killing 15 people, including three children. Da'esh claimed responsibility for the attack in its weekly magazine.

#### *Arabian Peninsula*

31. Da'esh elements in Yemen claimed one attack in July after slipping into near obscurity. While some fighters pledged allegiance to the new Da'esh leader, the group was expected to continue to decline in Yemen, overshadowed by Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (QDe.129). The group had no local leader, and internal disputes appeared significant. One Member State assessed Da'esh strength in Yemen at around 250 fighters, consisting mostly of Al-Qaida defectors.

### **3. Europe**

32. Member States described the threat of terrorism in Europe as endogenous, stemming mainly from self-radicalized individuals with the potential to plan and carry out attacks. They assessed that Da'esh propaganda had lost some momentum and peer influence. However, Member States flagged the threat of returning foreign terrorist fighters engaging as recruiters to form homegrown cells in Europe and expressed concern that terrorists might have entered Europe undetected. Most of them are reportedly individuals with direct links to Da'esh central commands in conflict zones.

33. Some Member States noted that some Western European countries had experienced cases of female returnees indoctrinating others, especially children, which put into question the effectiveness of existing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

### **4. Asia**

#### *Central and South Asia*

34. The activities of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan remained a significant terrorist threat in Central and South Asia, and the group retained ambitions to conduct external operations. It had positioned itself as the primary rival to the Taliban and was reportedly set to portray the Taliban as incapable of providing security in the country. By targeting diplomatic missions, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan also sought to undermine the relationship between the Taliban and Member States in the region. The attack on 5 September on the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Kabul was the first against a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan since the takeover by the Taliban. In December, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan claimed attacks against the Embassy of Pakistan and a hotel frequented by Chinese nationals. The group also threatened to launch terrorist attacks against the Embassies of China, India and the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan. Apart from high-profile attacks, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan conducted near daily attacks targeting Shia minorities, which also served to undermine the Taliban's authority and challenge their nascent security agencies.

35. Member States in the region estimate the current strength of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan at between 1,000 and 3,000 fighters, of whom approximately 200 are of Central Asian origin. Other Member States believe that these numbers may be as high as 6,000. The group was concentrated primarily in eastern Kunar, Nangarhar and Nuristan Provinces, but a large cell remained active in Kabul and its environs. Balkh, one of the most economically developed provinces in the north, is of primary interest to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan in terms of revenue generation. One Member State reported that the group had started to smuggle narcotics, which would represent a new development.

36. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan media organization Voice of Khorasan released propaganda in Pashto, Persian, Tajik, Uzbek and Russian with the goal of recruiting from ethnic groups in the region to strengthen the group's capabilities.

37. One Member State noted the cooperation between the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (QDe.088), also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party, and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, even though historically the former had aligned itself with Al-Qaida. According to the Member State, such cooperation included jointly published Uighur-language propaganda posters, the exchange of personnel, military advice and planned joint operations, such as the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement sending members to join the operational unit of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan responsible for tracking and carrying out attacks against Chinese nationals. On 29 July, the two groups reportedly plotted to purchase weapons and conduct terrorist attacks against Chinese targets in Afghanistan. The same Member State reported that the Syrian branch of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement had actively recruited Chinese nationals from Da'esh in the Syrian Arab Republic.

#### *South-East Asia*

38. Terrorist activity in South-East Asia remained low during the reporting period, notwithstanding the sizable presence of terrorist groups associated with Da'esh, including the Abu Sayyaf Group (QDe.001). In Malaysia, curfews on the Sabah coast curbed incursions by the group. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in South-East Asia (QDe.169), one of the Da'esh affiliates in the region, remained heavily reliant on funds from the Da'esh core to ramp up propaganda activities and carry out attacks.

39. In the Philippines, collaboration between former insurgent groups and security forces resulted in the arrest in July and August of four Da'esh militants from the Maute Group (not listed) and the arrest of two Da'esh members of the Hassan Group (not listed). Counter-terrorism pressure, the lack of funds, food and shelter, and limited support among the local population in Mindanao resulted in the surrender of eight militants from the Maute Group and one from the Hassan Group, who received amnesty from the Government. In November, counter-terrorism operations led to the surrender of 150 members of the Abu Sayyaf Group in Mindanao in exchange for amnesty.

### **III. Updates on responses to the evolving threat**

#### **A. Overview**

40. The United Nations continued to support Member States in countering the threat posed by Da'esh, including through the broad resumption of in-person activities as restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic were lifted. These included efforts in regions facing an elevated threat from Da'esh and its



affiliates, where attacks continued to pose significant challenges to adequately and safely addressing terrorism, international crimes and their related implications.

41. While some Member States renewed efforts to repatriate their nationals, in particular women and children, stranded in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, several States remained reluctant to do so, especially in relation to adult males and incarcerated minors. The United Nations, through its Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees, continued to support requesting Member States in developing appropriate responses to address the precarious situation in camps and detention facilities and repatriate their nationals.

42. Technological innovations offer significant promise for countering terrorism, as demonstrated by the digitalization of evidence management implemented by the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD). Conversely, the use of information and communications technologies, including the Internet and social media, as well as new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, remained a pressing challenge. At the special meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, participants discussed the threat posed by terrorist use of the Internet and social media, new payment technologies and fundraising methods and unmanned aerial systems. The unanimous adoption of the Delhi Declaration on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, the outcome of the special meeting, was a symbol of the shared determination of Security Council members to tackle these challenges.

43. Moreover, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, acting on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, continued to carry out assessment visits, including in Iraq, Malaysia, Nigeria and Uzbekistan, to support Member States in implementing relevant Security Council resolutions.

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

### **1. Current situation**

44. The potential for long-term security and human rights repercussions will continue to increase as long as the situation for foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members persists. Grave abuses continued in areas where Da'esh and its affiliates operated, primarily against women and children, in areas where Da'esh and its affiliates operated, and children continued to suffer from the impact of landmines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, in both conflict zones and post-conflict settings such as in Iraq. Similarly, women and children continued to bear the consequences of the atrocities committed by Da'esh, including abduction and sexual violence.

45. The number of Da'esh fighters and their family members in camps and detention facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic remained largely the same. Children continued to have limited access to basic humanitarian and essential services, such as nutrition, shelter, education and medical care, while their fundamental rights and freedoms, including the rights to education and a fair trial, as well as freedom from arbitrary detention, continued to be breached. The security situation in camps in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic remained volatile, with increasing levels of violence, including against humanitarian workers, and instances of targeted assassination, kidnapping and other human rights abuses. The

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) raised concerns over the sharp rise in violence in the Hawl camp, including the reported killing of 42 people, some of whom were children, since the start of 2022.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Repatriation efforts

46. Although progress continued to be made, in particular by Iraq of Iraqi nationals, Member States remained hesitant to address the repatriation of adult men and incarcerated male minors from the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, underscoring persistent challenges relating to, inter alia, developing comprehensive and tailored screening processes and risk assessments and satisfying evidentiary and jurisdictional requirements. A few States cited the prospect of short prison terms for individuals accused of terrorist offences, stemming from domestic sentencing practices, as an additional consideration against the repatriation of such persons.

47. Following the joint scoping exercise conducted under the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees, which is co-chaired by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Government of Iraq launched a coordination mechanism to facilitate collaboration between the Government of Iraq and United Nations entities on the repatriation of Iraqi nationals from the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. To facilitate efforts in the repatriation, rehabilitation, reintegration and, when appropriate, prosecution of returning Maldivian nationals, a joint scoping exercise was conducted to identify the needs of returnees, communities of return and the Government of Maldives, as well as how the United Nations might be able to support them.

48. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in setting up and running sustainable centres to receive women and children believed to be associated with foreign terrorist fighters following their return from camps in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. In partnership with local authorities, UNICEF supported the repatriation and reintegration of two children allegedly associated with the Allied Democratic Forces, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to their families in Uganda, including through the provision of basic needs and mental health care.

## 3. Prosecution and investigation

49. Supporting prosecution and investigation remained central to United Nations efforts to address the crimes committed by Da'esh. In preparation for the repatriation of third-country nationals from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, UNITAD continued to support domestic efforts to hold Da'esh accountable by collecting, preserving and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that might amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed by Da'esh in Iraq regarding terrorist crimes that Iraqi nationals might have committed. The volume of evidence being collected by UNITAD surged owing to increased field deployments and the implementation of key field-based, evidence-centric activities such as the digitization and archiving of Da'esh evidence and mass grave excavations.

50. The United Nations system continued to play an important role in working with partners to address war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide crimes committed by Da'esh and its affiliates. UNITAD continued to support the joint investigation team created by the national prosecution authorities of Sweden and France in investigating atrocity crimes committed against the Yazidis, including by

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/11/syria-un-human-rights-chief-condemns-brutal-killing-two-girls-alarmed-sharp](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/11/syria-un-human-rights-chief-condemns-brutal-killing-two-girls-alarmed-sharp).

identifying perpetrators, corroborating battlefield evidence and expanding information on foreign terrorist fighters and the atrocity crimes for which they could be held accountable. UNITAD also conducted interviews with key witnesses within and outside Iraq. In Nigeria, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict and a partner civil society organization strengthened the capacity of Nigerian prosecutors to investigate and prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by terrorist groups. UNODC also supported the Joint Investigation Centre in Nigeria and the Nigeria Police Force in strengthening investigation capacities, including by providing training activities and equipment for forensic analysis.

51. In support of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, UNODC, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism continued to support Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria in strengthening cross-border cooperation and developing comprehensive and tailored approaches to screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration. In November, following two workshops organized by the Executive Directorate, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and UNODC, the Government of Chad adopted a national action plan on the screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals associated with Boko Haram.

52. To ensure adherence to applicable international human rights obligations in the context of investigating and prosecuting Da'esh crimes, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and OHCHR worked with the Iraqi judiciary to finalize a set of guidelines on fair trial standards for distribution to all courts. OHCHR continued to support the Government in implementing the Law on Support for Female Yazidi Survivors by advocating funding, liaising between relevant institutions and raising awareness of the application system among survivors.

#### **4. Rehabilitation and reintegration**

53. The United Nations continued to support Member States in providing comprehensive and tailored rehabilitation and reintegration programmes that were gender-sensitive, age-appropriate and in compliance with international human rights law. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali contributed to efforts to prevent the radicalization of adult detainees by developing a road map for preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism and radicalization and by holding workshops on detecting signs of radicalization. By strengthening prison security mechanisms and improving the capacity of prison officials, UNODC continued to support Member States in addressing the threats posed by high-risk prisoners, including violent extremists and returning foreign terrorist fighters in the national prison systems of Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Tajikistan, Tunisia and Uganda. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and UNODC enhanced the capacity of parole and probation officers and other relevant stakeholders to support former violent extremist prisoners in Indonesia.

54. The reintegration funds managed by the International Organization for Migration covered procedural costs for issuing birth certificates, access to health and education, school supplies, livelihood assistance and counselling to facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of 228 returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Kosovo.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

In addition to individual support, the International Organization for Migration designed and implemented 13 initiatives to strengthen social cohesion in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Kosovo, including support for local youth centres, schools and non-governmental organizations in providing essential social services.

55. In Mozambique, UNICEF contributed to community-based reintegration efforts by providing family tracing support to children who had been displaced by the conflict with Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a, reuniting 468 children with their families during the reporting period. It also provided humanitarian assistance to displaced populations, including family tracing and reunification, mental health and psychosocial support, access to health and nutrition, civil documentation and activities specific to the empowerment of girls and boys. UNODC contributed to improving the detention conditions in Mozambique of children and young people formerly associated with Da'esh and to strengthening the capacity of professionals working to rehabilitate and reintegrate them.

### **C. International and regional cooperation**

56. United Nations entities continued to promote the benefits of international and regional cooperation on counter-terrorism. In October, the Government of Tajikistan and the Office of Counter-Terrorism organized a high-level conference on international and regional border security and management cooperation to counter terrorism and prevent the movement of terrorists. Held in Dushanbe, the conference was attended by more than 700 participants, who addressed practical challenges and capacity gaps to enhance border security.

57. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia organized a series of national workshops for Member States in Central Asia to strengthen the capacity of their relevant law enforcement and security organs and mitigate potential risks of incursion by violent extremist and terrorist groups in regions bordering Afghanistan. With the Naif Arab University for Security Studies, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate organized a high-level seminar for government officials from the Middle East to discuss trends and propose recommendations to address challenges related to the nexus between organized crime, terrorism and its financing.

58. The United Nations and the African Union organized two meetings of a joint technical working group on preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism and countering terrorism to strengthen coherence, coordination and cooperation, inform joint analysis and develop recommendations to address the threat of terrorism in Africa. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region co-organized a meeting on the threat of terrorism in the region in order to develop a joint understanding for better-informed programme delivery.

### **D. Supporting the victims of Da'esh**

59. Victims and survivors of terrorism, including sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by Da'esh and other terrorist groups, continued to face a general lack of support at the national level. In September, the international community reaffirmed its commitment to the rights of victims of terrorism at the first United Nations Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism, organized by the Office of Counter-Terrorism. Attended by over 400 participants, including 113 victims of terrorism and representatives of victims' associations, the Congress featured a call to action by 10

victims of terrorism. The Office of Counter-Terrorism also organized a high-level online event on 21 August to observe the International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism.

60. UNAMI and OHCHR continued to support the Government of Iraq in preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence, using a victim-centred approach. In October and November, UNAMI and OHCHR, along with four civil society organizations, held a workshop for a group of Yazidi women survivors to develop a long-term road map to address their needs and rights.

## **E. Border management and law enforcement**

61. The United Nations system continued to bolster Member States' border management capacities. The United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme,<sup>7</sup> led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, currently supports 60 beneficiary Member States in developing or enhancing their capability to collect, analyse and use passenger data to identify and counter the movement of foreign terrorist fighters and others who pose a terrorist threat, in line with Security Council resolutions, international standards and good practices, and human rights. The Programme delivered capacity-building training to Botswana, Moldova, Mongolia, Namibia, the Philippines and Togo, strengthening foundational awareness and understanding of countering terrorist travel using advance passenger information and passenger name record data. With the support of the Programme, Azerbaijan, Botswana and Norway established effective passenger information units, which have operational capability to collect, analyse and use passenger data to identify terrorist threats. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, in cooperation with the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, held a regional training course on advance passenger information and passenger name record data to assist members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Turkmenistan in detecting and interdicting foreign terrorist fighters and other serious criminals.

62. Efforts to protect critical infrastructure and vulnerable targets from terrorist attacks continued to be prioritized within the United Nations system. Within the Working Group on Emerging Threats and Critical Infrastructure Protection of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and other partners revised the Compendium of Good Practices on the Protection of Critical Infrastructure Against Terrorist Attacks, of 2018, and delivered technical assistance to Indonesia, Tajikistan, Togo and Tunisia. The Executive Directorate, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in close partnership with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, held a workshop for experts to strengthen capacities and facilitate the exchange of good practices among States in Central Asia on protecting vulnerable targets from physical attacks and cyberattacks. In October and November, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Executive Directorate, the Department of Peace Operations, INTERPOL and the African Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism delivered a series of training sessions to Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Mozambique, Togo and Uganda to strengthen their national-level inter-agency coordination mechanisms to better understand the terrorist threats that they face.

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<sup>7</sup> Partners include the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of Information and Communications Technology and the International Criminal Police Organization.

63. Preventing the illicit flow of weapons to Da'esh, its affiliates and other terrorist groups remained key to the work of the United Nations. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate led capacity consultations on behalf of the Committee in Turkmenistan to strengthen the Government's ability to address the terrorism-arms-crime nexus under the Office of Counter-Terrorism's programme to prevent the illicit trafficking and supply of small arms and light weapons to terrorists. Similar capacity consultations were held with the Governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

## **F. Countering the financing of terrorism**

64. United Nations entities continued to support efforts to mitigate Da'esh's ability to generate resources for terrorism purposes. By applying digital technology, UNITAD expanded the evidence base against financial networks believed to have supported Da'esh. UNODC supported efforts to counter the use of virtual assets for terrorist financing purposes. During training in Indonesia and Mauritius, UNODC contributed to establishing an informal platform for practitioners to exchange information on risks and best practices.

65. In September, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate held a virtual launch of a Trends Alert report<sup>8</sup> to increase awareness of actual and potential uses of revenue generated from the exploitation, trade and trafficking of natural resources for the purposes of terrorism financing. Also in September, the Executive Directorate, in close cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations, organized an online round-table discussion to identify challenges related to the traffic and illicit trade of cultural property for terrorist purposes, including the use of emerging technologies and social media platforms for such activities and to generate proceeds from other related activities. In November, United Nations entities, including the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Executive Directorate and UNODC, contributed to the third ministerial conference on counter-terrorism financing, on the theme "No money for terror", at which ministers analysed the evolving global terrorist threat and recent terrorism financing trends.

## **G. Impacts of information and communications technology and new technologies on counter-terrorism**

66. ICTs such as the Internet and social media, new payment technologies and fundraising methods, and unmanned aerial systems, including drones, were the focus of six online technical sessions led by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate in September and October. The sessions served to inform the special meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, hosted by the Government of India on 28 and 29 October. At the special meeting, the Delhi Declaration<sup>9</sup> on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes was adopted unanimously by the Counter-Terrorism Committee to enhance the Security Council's approach to addressing this threat in a comprehensive and holistic manner. The Declaration also reflected the Committee's intention to develop a set of non-binding guiding principles

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<sup>8</sup> Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate Trends Alert, "Concerns over the use of proceeds from the exploitation, trade and trafficking of natural resources for the purposes of terrorism financing", June 2022.

<sup>9</sup> See [www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/delhi-declaration-countering-use-new-and-emerging-technologies-terrorist-purposes-now-available](http://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/delhi-declaration-countering-use-new-and-emerging-technologies-terrorist-purposes-now-available).

to further assist Member States in implementing relevant Council resolutions on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes and reaffirmed the importance of public-private partnerships, human rights and civil society engagement. In December, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2022/7) in which it welcomed the adoption of the Declaration.

67. The Office of Counter-Terrorism raised awareness of the need to prevent the potential misuse of the metaverse by terrorists and organized an event in November to address the risk of exploitation as well as the potential use of the metaverse as a tool for practitioners working to counter terrorism and prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute launched a project, with the support of the European Commission, to develop a practical toolkit for responsible artificial intelligence innovation in law enforcement.

68. In a recent report,<sup>10</sup> the Office of Counter-Terrorism examined the intersection between online gaming and violent extremism conducive to terrorism and analysed the potential use of gaming spaces for terrorist purposes and, conversely, for preventing and countering violent extremism. While the Office established no causal link between gaming and violent extremism in the report, it found that terrorists exploited the cultural relevance and reach of gaming for recruitment and propaganda purposes, in both open and closed networks.

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

69. The United Nations continued to engage with relevant entities to promote a whole-of-society approach to counter-terrorism and efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism. The report of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate on discussions with civil society organizations in south-east Europe offered reflections and recommendations on the involvement of civil society in developing and implementing national counter-terrorism strategies in the subregion.<sup>11</sup> UNDP continued to facilitate participatory and safe online community engagement activities to prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism, including by offering masterclasses to strengthen the capacity of more than 50 staff from five geographical regions around the world. On the basis of knowledge, tools and best practices from the masterclasses, UNDP developed a resource hub for online community engagement activities.

70. UNESCO-led technical and vocational education and training programmes in Mosul, Iraq, contributed to countering the divisive and violent narratives of Da'esh and its affiliates by reinforcing the historically strong pluralism that characterizes the city. The programmes provided skills to 1,315 people, strengthening their resilience to unemployment and a sense of community. Furthermore, the reconstruction and rehabilitation of historic houses in Mosul created more than 5,000 local jobs. UNESCO made considerable progress in rehabilitating monuments and historic houses destroyed by Da'esh in Mosul. It was also safeguarding and restoring manuscripts saved from destruction by Da'esh and completed the stabilization of the historic Aghwat mosque. In addition, a community information centre was opened in the old city of Mosul to enable multicultural dialogue and exchange.

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<sup>10</sup> Office of Counter-Terrorism, "Examining the intersection between gaming and violent extremism", October 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, "Civil society perspectives: engagement in countering terrorism and violent extremism in south-east Europe", December 2022.

71. In Iraq, UNDP finalized research on how to better account for gender in efforts to prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism and to facilitate reintegration, contributing to the strengthened participation of women in these areas. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continued to highlight the importance of incorporating a focus on masculinities into counter-terrorism analysis and policies as an essential element of gender mainstreaming. The Executive Directorate, in partnership with the International Peace Institute, the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, co-organized a forum to discuss the policy implications of applying a masculinities lens to preventing and countering terrorism, following the publication of a related policy report by the Executive Directorate and the International Peace Institute.<sup>12</sup>

72. In December, the Office of Counter-Terrorism delivered a capacity-building workshop for over 60 participants from the Government of Uzbekistan and Uzbek civil society organizations on communication strategies to facilitate the peaceful reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members.

#### IV. Observations

73. Despite leadership losses and successful efforts to curb its finances, Da'esh and its affiliates continued to represent a serious threat to international peace and security. The group increasingly used new technologies, including unmanned aerial systems and cryptocurrencies, as well as ICTs, including the Internet and social media platforms, to further its goals. The United Nations increased its efforts in response to these trends and was actively exploring ways to leverage digital technologies, grounded in human rights and the rule of law, to enhance counter-terrorism measures. I welcome the special meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, as well as the Delhi Declaration that was consequently adopted.

74. In armed conflict settings, Da'esh continued to leverage local dynamics and exacerbate existing grievances and intercommunal tensions. Moreover, continued rivalry with other non-State armed groups, including Al-Qaida and its regional affiliates in Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan, underscored the need to understand the threat posed by Da'esh within the local context. It also demonstrated that terrorism remained a strategic security risk, as emphasized in my report entitled "Our Common Agenda", and required multilateral cooperation as part of the New Agenda for Peace. Decades of counter-terrorism have shown that security responses alone are not sufficient. They must be accompanied by efforts that prevent new recruits from joining the ranks of Da'esh and other terrorist groups. I call on all actors to reconsider prevention needs and make serious investments in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

75. As the group's reach beyond conflict zones persists, continued international coordination on countering Da'esh remains essential, in particular in the Syrian Arab Republic. Escalating armed confrontations in the vicinity of camps, prisons and other facilities that hold individuals with suspected links to Da'esh and other terrorist groups may have negative ramifications on regional and global security, providing opportunities for Da'esh to continue to plan prison breaks or otherwise enable suspected terrorists to remain at large. I reiterate my call for Member States with nationals in such facilities to consider the medium-term and long-term implications of the situation and to significantly step up their efforts to facilitate the safe, voluntary

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<sup>12</sup> See [www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/masculinities-and-violent-extremism](http://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/masculinities-and-violent-extremism).



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and dignified repatriation of all those individuals, in line with applicable international law and the best interests of the child.

76. In the mid-to-long-term, the threat posed by Da'esh is compounded by foreign terrorist fighters relocating to new areas, who could take on roles as Da'esh recruiters or leverage their battlefield experience to plan and carry out more lethal attacks. This may also have implications for responses to prevent terrorist attacks by lone actors with affiliation to or in the name of Da'esh, underscoring the need for international cooperation and the exchange of good practices. Member States have the primary responsibility to implement the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and meet their international counter-terrorism obligations. I look forward to the eighth review of the Strategy and encourage Member States to keep striving for unity and consensus, which remains fundamental to multilateral responses to terrorism. The United Nations will continue to work with Member States, international and regional organizations, civil society and other partners, including through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, to support the balanced implementation of the Strategy and responses that are gender-sensitive and firmly anchored in the rule of law and human rights.

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