

Mr. Koenders (Netherlands):

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Arab Republic of Egypt for organizing this important debate.

Today's debate is, in my view, a very timely one, timely because of the upcoming review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and because of the several, very tragic events that have happened recently: terrorist bombs in Ankara and Istanbul and gunmen attacking a hotel in Ouagadougou. Last week I was on the beach in Côte d'Ivoire to pay tribute to those who were killed in Grand-Bassam. The dozens of ordinary men, women and children in a park in Lahore killed by a suicide bomber targeting Christians at Easter; the dozens of lives lost in terrorist strikes at Brussels' airport and metro, and today, the tragic attacks in Baghdad killing at least 85 people underline the urgency of this debate. My thoughts and sympathies go to the victims of terrorism all over the world and to their families. I would like also to pay my condolences to you, Mr. President, because of the lost policemen in Egypt this weekend. Such attacks try to create fear, panic and the destruction of our ways of life and our freedoms. They try to instil fear and division among us, and they will not succeed because their attacks underline the vital importance of international cooperation in the fight against terrorism, in preventing violent extremism and in offering alternative messaging.

Nobody in this Chamber can afford to go it alone, if we want to achieve long-term success. Foreign terrorist fighters, a new term, are in fact not foreign, as they come from among us, from the social fabric of our societies. Nobody can go it alone; we are all going through stress tests in our societies, and one of the main lessons we can draw from the recent attacks in the past month is the need to think globally and act very locally.

As such, the Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, and underlines the importance of building national action plans. Such comprehensive plans should not be perceived as an exercise in finger pointing. No — all of us face the same challenge of violent extremism, and we have to work together to meet it effectively. Sharing information is one key element of cooperation, and frankly we need more trust among ourselves and our nations and among our law-enforcement agencies, our border guards and our intelligence operations. We need to break the code of silence that sustains networks of foreign terrorist fighters and facilitates suspected terrorists, who operate under the radar. We need to work with the private sector and with civil society to break the silence and stop terrorist financing in a legal and effective framework.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has committed to contributing robustly to the multilateral approach to cooperation, including through the Global CounterTerrorism Forum, which we currently co-Chair together with the Kingdom of Morocco. In that Forum, we work to streamline our national policies on, for example, the rehabilitation of former terrorists, because that is a second obligation, namely, to achieve a better balance between dissuasive and preventative approaches. We have to work in our prisons, with returnees, with youth, with police and with religious leaders. That is the day-to-day work in our societies. The Jordan-led Aqaba Middle East peace process poses an example of an effective exchange of lessons learned, building bridges between countries and increasing our day-today collaboration.

Even though Governments can be instrumental in delivering a strong and positive narrative, messages are more effective when they are developed and disseminated by our new generations. To young people who question the legitimacy of authority in general, any message disseminated only by a Government could be received with suspicion. So what are our alternatives? We need to acknowledge

that we as Governments often try to fight a modern battle with old weapons. We need young people, who can understand the motivations for joining brutal terrorist groups, who speak the right language and who know how to communicate via apps and online tools.

We need to promote the positive role played by young people who have fled from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and who are brave enough to speak up. As a Government, the Netherlands can empower them, with you and others to protect them against those who want to stifle their voices. For that we have to work with all the stakeholders — the teachers, the business community, the parents and even the sports clubs.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands believes freedom of speech is crucial for stimulating critical thinking, which is one of the strongest weapons against extremist propaganda. Last year, our association of journalists organized a road show on press freedom and taught young people how to question the opinions that they encounter. We should reach out to children at an early age to familiarize them with alternatives to violent narratives. In Jordan and Lebanon, we are working with local partners to build bridges between refugee communities and host communities, with education for children on values like tolerance, diversity and respect for others.

In conclusion, let me make two final observations. First, the Council has not heard me use the word “counternarrative”. I don’t actually care much for that word because, to me, it sounds defensive and reactive. There are no general counternarratives that can do justice to an individual’s life in all its brilliance and confusion and with all its challenges and rewards. I prefer to use terms such as “positive” or “inclusive” narrative.

My second observation is that working with our young people should be our top priority for preventing violent extremism. They are our first line of defence, the people who can build bridges between countries and prevent their friends from becoming terrorists. But they need our help, at the national, local and international levels. In order to enable them to be the voice of reason, we must ensure that we put in place appropriate international frameworks and policies for upholding the standards of international human rights, the rule of law and the freedoms that distinguish us from barbaric terrorist groups. The only way to make our strategy work is to teach young people to be critical thinkers, make up their own minds and take control of their own lives without hurting others. They are the agents of change.

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