



# Security Council

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## Thirteenth 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 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 the Secretary-General continues 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 thirteenth such report.<sup>3</sup> It was prepared by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team<sup>4</sup> and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate in close collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism and other United Nations entities and international organizations.

3. During the first half of 2021, the threat posed by Da’esh to international peace and security continued to rise along the trends observed in the previous report. The threat has further expanded in Africa through the group’s regional affiliates, while the Da’esh core has remained focused on regrouping in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. In areas that experienced lockdowns related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, especially outside conflict zones, Da’esh has incited attacks that might have conceivably been deferred or planned for execution when restrictions ease. Against that background, the international community reaffirmed during the second Counter-Terrorism Week held at the United Nations in June its resolve to fight Da’esh and address the broader terrorism threat. The forward-looking seventh review

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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](#) and [S/2021/98](#).

<sup>4</sup> 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. The present threat assessment is based in part on the Team’s twenty-eighth report ([S/2021/655](#)).



of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (General Assembly resolution 75/291), adopted by consensus on 30 June, is a testament to the commitment of Member States to a comprehensive and multilateral response to the evolving scourge of terrorism, during and after the pandemic, with the support of the United Nations system.

## **II. Threat assessment**

### **A. Overview of threat**

4. The threat from Da'esh has remained steady, continuing to raise serious international concern during the reporting period. While the group continued to exploit the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Member States, it has taken no apparent steps to weaponize the virus. The pandemic has continued to have an impact on terrorist activity in non-conflict zones where the threat remains suppressed by limitations on the ability of operatives to travel, meet, fundraise and identify viable targets. Lockdowns in many areas were more comprehensive in early 2021 than in 2020, and it is conceivable that attacks have been planned for when restrictions ease at those locations. In conflict zones, however, where pandemic-related restrictions have less impact, the threat has already increased.

5. The leader of Da'esh, Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla (QDi.426), remains reluctant to communicate directly with supporters. The group's command and control over its global affiliates has loosened, even though it continues to provide guidance and some financial support. The autonomy of regional affiliates has been further strengthened, especially in West Africa and the Sahel, East and Central Africa, Afghanistan and South Asia. Member States judge that the success of this evolution will be an important determinant of the extent of the future global impact of Da'esh. They also assess that the group will continue to prioritize regrouping and seeking resurgence in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic as its core area of operations.

6. The most striking development of the period has been the expansion of Da'esh in Africa, which is also where groups designated as terrorist by the Security Council have inflicted the largest number of casualties. Some of the most effective Da'esh affiliates are spreading their influence and activities on the continent, including across national borders. Spillover from Mali into Burkina Faso and the Niger, incursions from Nigeria into the Niger, Chad and Cameroon, and from Mozambique into the United Republic of Tanzania, are all very concerning. One of the most troubling events of early 2021 was the deterioration of the security situation in Cabo Delgado Province, Mozambique, where the local Da'esh affiliate stormed and briefly held a strategic port near the Tanzanian border before withdrawing with spoils.

#### **1. Da'esh fighters and their family members in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic**

7. The human tragedy resulting from the Da'esh so-called "caliphate" continues to complicate the global outlook and level of threat posed by the group, with thousands of foreign terrorist fighters, other Da'esh fighters and their dependants, including tens of thousands of women and children perceived to be associated with terrorism, stranded in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Many of those individuals continue to be housed in camps for internally displaced persons or detention facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. Aside from the urgent need to address that issue on humanitarian and human rights grounds, the lack of a comprehensive solution to the situation could shape the future global terrorist threat landscape over the medium to long term.

8. The risk of COVID-19 outbreaks in overcrowded facilities has not yet manifested as seriously as was initially feared, yet it has prompted unrest and breakout attempts. In addition to escapes from those facilities, Member States expect Da'esh to orchestrate larger operations to release more detainees, some of whom will then join Da'esh-aligned groups in Idlib or be able to relocate to third countries. Reports indicate that Da'esh has stayed in contact with individuals in camps or prisons and is actively raising funds for them online.

9. Several Member States cite detention centres in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Hawl camp, located 13 kilometres from the Iraqi border, as security concerns owing to the visible presence of Da'esh and ongoing indoctrination of residents, including children. The Hawl camp continues to house a large population of displaced persons, mostly children, which is being gradually reduced but remains at around 60,000. Violence has increased in the camp, with more than 60 people reportedly killed since the beginning of 2021. The de facto local authorities that control the camp launched a major operation in March to arrest active Da'esh fighters and supporters. They announced the capture of 70 Da'esh members in that operation and the rate of killings fell in April, before increasing again in May to a rate that remains, however, lower than the period from January to March.

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

10. Several Member States revised downwards their assessment of the financial reserves available to Da'esh in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, with estimates currently ranging between \$25 million and \$50 million. One Member State assessed that most of those funds are in Iraq, making the group's Syrian network partially dependent on their counterparts in Iraq for financial support. Da'esh fighters in the Syrian Arab Republic are believed to have received several million United States dollars from Da'esh in Iraq in 2020. In mid-April 2021, Iraqi officials announced the discovery in Mosul of a sum equivalent to \$1.7 million in buried United States dollar and Iraqi dinar bank notes, as well as gold and silver. The gold appears to have been intended for production of Da'esh currency. The discovery underscores the extent of Da'esh cash reserves that may remain hidden.

11. One of the largest ongoing expenditure for Da'esh remains salaries to fighters and payments to families of imprisoned or deceased fighters. Da'esh also draws on its reserves to secure the release of its fighters and family members from prisons and camps for internally displaced persons in the region.

12. The Monitoring Team has previously highlighted flows of funds to Da'esh fighters and their families in detention facilities or camps for internally displaced persons in the Syrian Arab Republic through financial institutions, money service businesses and cash couriers in neighbouring States. Member States cite this as a persistent means of financing Da'esh and its supporters in the conflict zone. One Member State reported multiple instances of funds transferred from a European country through money service businesses to pay for the smuggling of women and children out of facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. According to that Member State, one individual has facilitated the travel of women with links to Belgium, Brazil, Finland, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago and Uzbekistan from camps in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic to the north-west and neighbouring countries, and in some cases to their countries of origin.

13. Member States also highlighted concerns about growth in the use of cryptocurrencies by terrorists and an evolution in tactics resulting from experience and training in how to send funds using methods with enhanced privacy. The case prosecuted in France and cited by the Monitoring Team in its report issued on 3 February 2021 (S/2021/68, para. 81) is one of the first successful prosecutions of a

terrorism finance case involving the use of cryptocurrencies. One Member State also cited the recent case of an Al-Qaida bounty offered for the killing of police officers with the reward to be paid in bitcoin.

## **B. Regional developments**

### **1. Africa**

#### *West Africa*

14. The reported death in May 2021 of Abubakar Mohammed Shekau (QDi.322), the leader of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram) (QDE.138), during an assault by Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (QDe.162), has left Boko Haram significantly weakened. Although some Member States believe that Shekau may have escaped the assault alive, the group remains under heavy pressure. Its losses are assessed to likely strengthen ISWAP, which has 3,000 to 5,000 fighters in the Lake Chad basin and is seeking to extend its area of operations towards Maiduguri, Nigeria. Abu Musab al-Barnawi (not listed) was reportedly reinstated as the ISWAP leader before the attack on Shekau's base. ISWAP launched repeated attacks on towns and military camps between February and May 2021, challenging the Nigerian security forces, as well as confronting Boko Haram. In the Diffa region of Niger bordering Nigeria, ISWAP commander Abba Gana (not listed) is specifically targeting foreign interests.

15. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (QDe.163) killed several hundred civilians in large-scale attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger in early 2021. In May, the Da'esh core released lengthy propaganda materials on the activities of its affiliate in the Niger to justify the killings on the ground that the victims had supported local authorities. The group remains at war with Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (QDe.159), and the death of its deputy commander, Salama Mohamed Fadhil, aka Abdelhakim al-Sahraoui (not listed), is unconfirmed.

#### *East and Central Africa*

16. Da'esh remains present in Somalia, primarily in Puntland and, to a lesser extent, in Mogadishu. The group values its presence in the country mainly for its Al-Karrar office, which supervises and supports the activities of its Central Africa "province" in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

17. In northern Mozambique, Cabo Delgado Province became in March 2021 emblematic of the influence of Da'esh in Africa, following the brief occupation of Palma by its affiliate, close to a major gas project led by a multinational company. Local authorities were unable to defend the city and provide security, as was also the case in Mocimboa da Praia, further south in Cabo Delgado, which has been occupied by Da'esh affiliates since August 2020. These developments could have far-reaching implications for peace and security in the region and need to be addressed through a coherent, regional approach as a matter of priority.

18. Da'esh in Central Africa attracts new recruits with promises of employment and a sense of belonging. Its leadership consists primarily of Tanzanian nationals, as well as individuals from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya.<sup>5</sup> Cabo Delgado Province, as a destination for economic migrants, is an easy transit area for Da'esh fighters. The region hosts numerous trafficking activities and is an entry point for drugs from Asia. As in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Mozambican

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<sup>5</sup> Information provided by Member States.

branch of Da'esh benefits from the informal economy. Members live clandestinely and extort local populations.

19. Da'esh in Central Africa looted as much as \$2 million from banks in the area, as well as identity cards and related documents. They also demonstrated an ability to operate at sea in the vicinity of Matemo, Vamizi and Makalowe islands, Mozambique, where they engaged in kidnappings and extortion raids. The autonomy delegated by the Da'esh core, the large number of small operational cells and the absence of significant counter-terrorism measures have effectively turned the regional affiliate into a major threat with the potential to develop further, possibly towards neighbouring countries. It remains supported by a focused propaganda campaign from the Da'esh core.

20. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Da'esh in Central Africa extended its area of operation in early 2021 outside Beni, in North Kivu Province, and the southern part of Ituri Province. It also appeared in South Kivu and Tanganyika Provinces, attacking military and civilian targets. Women and children were reportedly used as human shields to prevent counter-attacks. Musa Baluku (not listed), who leads the Da'esh affiliate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, diverted the group's resources for his own profit, before murdering the son of his main opponent to eliminate competition within the group.

21. In its attempt to expand in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Da'esh in Central Africa has to navigate other armed groups active in the region, possibly instrumentalize intercommunal disputes, and attract additional foreign terrorist fighters. Its insurgent model will also require more revenues and possible connections with criminal groups that have control over extractive industries and illegal mining activities in the area. The extent of the relationship between Da'esh affiliates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique remains unclear.

#### *North Africa*

22. Da'esh in the Maghreb region is assessed to have a limited presence, with supporters generally inspired rather than directed to act in the name of Da'esh, although there remain examples of local actors taking direction from the group's core. In Morocco, authorities disrupted a cell in April 2021 that was directed to target Moroccan forces on the country's eastern border. The security of Algeria is threatened by instability across its borders with Mali and the Niger. Hassan Naamoudi, the leader of Da'esh affiliate Jund al-Khilafah in Algeria (QDe.151), was killed with four others in an area west of Algiers in January 2021.

23. In Libya, six Da'esh members were arrested in early March 2021 as a result of a counter-terrorism operation coordinated by the then Government of National Accord in southern Tripoli. Members of that cell, and other Da'esh elements from southern Libya, reportedly fled to various coastal towns, including Tripoli. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Libya (QDe.165) lost its leadership and is greatly diminished in the country, even though Da'esh continued to claim responsibility for attacks, including in Sabha on 6 June and near Haruj al-Aswad, south-east of Jufrah, on 14 June. One Member State noted that the Da'esh core supplied its affiliate in Libya with funding couriered by returnees. One Member State reported that 200 Da'esh fighters had travelled from Libya to the Sahel region at the end of April 2021. The decline of Da'esh in Libya contrasts with the past appeal of the country to foreign terrorist fighters.

24. In Egypt, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which pledged allegiance to Da'esh in 2014, is assessed to be resilient, with 800 to 1,200 fighters, notwithstanding ongoing Egyptian military pressure. One of its leaders, Salim al-Hamadin, was killed in a security operation south of Rafah in March 2021. He is believed to be one of the people responsible for the attack on the Rawda mosque in November 2017.

## 2. Middle East

25. Da'esh remains active in wide swathes of the Syrian Arab Republic, where the group seeks to rebuild its combat capabilities while expanding its insurgency. Da'esh wages hit-and-run operations against checkpoints from hideouts on both sides of the Euphrates River in Dayr al-Zawr Governorate. It continues to target convoys and foot and mobile patrols with roadside improvised explosive devices. Its operations against Syrian government forces extend to Hama and Homs Governorates. East of the Euphrates and “white desert” area, its reach extends well into Raqqah and Hasakah Governorates. Da'esh maintains a significant presence in the desert area that extends from southern Aleppo to northern Hama Governorates, in particular between the villages of Khanasir and Athriya. Member States assess that the group has the intent and capability to sustain a long-term insurgency in the Syrian desert.

26. In Iraq, Da'esh remains active, albeit under constant counter-terrorism pressure. Although active Da'esh cells persist in remote areas of the country, the group's leadership has designated all of Iraq as a single “province”. They carry out hit-and-run operations seeking to undermine critical infrastructure projects, inflame sectarian divisions and communal grievances and generate media coverage. Repeated roadside bomb attacks have occurred on the roads linking Kirkuk, Tikrit and Tuz Khurmatu and against checkpoints near those cities. Such attacks indicate that some Da'esh fighters remain sheltered in the Hamrin mountain range and continue to exploit security gaps in some areas of those governorates.

27. Da'esh carried out two attacks in Baghdad after a long gap in such operations. On 21 January, two suicide bombers killed more than 30 people in a crowded marketplace. On 15 April, Da'esh detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device in Sadr City. The group is likely to continue to attack civilians and other soft targets in the capital whenever possible in order to garner media attention and undermine the Government of Iraq.

28. In late January, the Government of Iraq announced the killing of Da'esh deputy leader Jabir Salman Saleh Al-Isawi (aka Abu Yasir). In February, the leader of Da'esh in southern Iraq, Jabbar Ali Fayadh (aka Abu Hasan Al-Gharibawy), was killed, along with Ghanem Sabbah, who had trained the suicide bombers responsible for the January attack in Baghdad.

29. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Yemen (QDe.166) has suffered losses in fighting with rival groups. It has been in decline for an extended period and is assessed to be preoccupied with stabilizing itself and regrouping. One Member State estimated its fighting strength at just a few hundred. Its most likely future attacks are expected to take place in the south of Yemen, especially against government figures located in or moving to Aden.

## 3. Europe

30. The first half of 2021 saw a reduced threat level in Europe with fewer terrorist attacks. Member States, however, do not expect that trend to continue, as the threat from organized individuals planning complex attacks remains. In February 2021, 14 people were arrested in Denmark and Germany for planning attacks with explosive chemicals. Authorities in France arrested individuals of foreign origin with profiles similar to those who had perpetrated or planned attacks in France in 2020. They were not found to be acting under direct orders from Da'esh or Al-Qaida leadership, but were inspired by propaganda and local community members who promoted violent ideology. Two cells consisting of individuals of Chechen background were dismantled in eastern France in April and May 2021, respectively.

31. Authorities in Europe highlighted the challenge posed by teenagers, who are particularly vulnerable to online propaganda. There have been cases involving teens

as young as 14 years of age who expressed willingness to conduct or facilitate terrorist attacks. Such individuals are susceptible to incitement to violence in cases of perceived instances of blasphemy. False information and accusations are also used online to pressure individuals or entities that are considered enemies.

32. Terrorist radicalization in European prisons remains a serious challenge. The isolation of terrorist inmates is often not sustainable for practical reasons and there are resource limitations to post-incarceration monitoring. In some cases, prisoners reported approaching detention as an ordeal that enabled them to deepen their commitment to their beliefs. Some reportedly profile and recruit impressionable soon-to-be released prisoners, who will then have more freedom of action to plan and carry out attacks independently.

#### 4. Asia

##### *Central and South Asia*

33. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan (QDe.161) has expanded its presence in several provinces of Afghanistan, despite leadership, human and financial losses during 2020. The group has strengthened its positions in and around Kabul, where it targets most of its attacks against minorities, civil society actors, government employees and personnel of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Most recently, Da'esh claimed responsibility for the brutal attack of 8 June in which 10 humanitarian deminers were killed and 16 injured in Baghlan Province. One of the main risks identified by Member States is that militants in Afghanistan, from the Taliban or other groups, may join the Da'esh affiliate if they feel alienated or threatened by developments in the Afghan peace process.

34. In its efforts to regroup and rebuild, Da'esh in Afghanistan has prioritized the recruitment and training of new supporters. Its leaders also hope to attract intransigent Taliban and other militants who reject the agreement between the United States and the Taliban and to recruit fighters from Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and other conflict zones. Estimates of the affiliate's strength range widely, with one Member State reporting between 500 and 1,500 fighters, and another stating that it may rise to as many as 10,000 in the medium term. One Member State reported that Da'esh in Afghanistan is largely underground and clandestine.

35. On 6 May, in Maldives, the Speaker of Parliament and former President was severely injured by a motorcycle-borne improvised explosive device. The blast also injured three other people. The sixteenth issue of the Da'esh English-language magazine *Sawt al-Hind*<sup>6</sup> (*Voice of Hind*), dated 16 May 2021, introduced a regular column entitled "From the Brothers in Maldives", urging supporters to break prisoners out of jail or support them in other ways.

##### *South-East Asia*

36. Da'esh affiliates in South-East Asia continue to disturb counter-terrorism operations with a steady pace of attacks. Women in the region continue to play a role in both the planning and the execution of terrorist acts. A young couple, both supporters of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (QDe.164), attacked a church in Makassar, Indonesia, on Palm Sunday, on 28 March 2021, killing themselves and injuring 20 people. This is the most recent in a series of attacks attributed to Da'esh affiliates in South-East Asia targeting churchgoers.

37. On 20 March 2021, Philippine security forces succeeded in rescuing a group of hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf Group (QDe.001) for approximately one year.

<sup>6</sup> See [S/2021/68](#), para. 69.

During the intervention, they killed a key leader and tactician of the group who was known for maritime kidnap-for-ransom operations in the region. In April, two of the Group's members were killed in a clash with Philippine soldiers in Patikul. Nevertheless, despite attrition, it remains resilient; with only approximately 100 fighters, it is estimated to be responsible for 75 per cent of the terror attacks in the region. In February 2021, Philippine security forces arrested nine women on Jolo Island who were reportedly preparing suicide bomb attacks targeted at soldiers. Three of those women are the daughters of the late Group leader, Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, who had planned the attack carried out against the Jolo cathedral in January 2019.

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

#### **A. Overview**

38. Since the previous report, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to dominate the geopolitical landscape and hamper efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and the underlying spread of violent extremism in full compliance with international law. Member States and United Nations experts have continued to raise concerns that pandemic-related social restrictions, economic challenges and political tensions risk exacerbating existing grievances, which terrorist groups, including Da'esh, seek to exploit. The pandemic has also aggravated challenging humanitarian situations in many parts of the world.

39. The evolution of Da'esh and its affiliates, including their regional expansion in West, East and Central Africa, continued violent action in Afghanistan and an increasing online presence, highlights the need for Member States to adopt comprehensive and integrated counter-terrorism approaches. Strengthened national, regional and international counter-terrorism efforts are essential, in particular in view of the similar vulnerabilities of some States in those regions.

40. In order to address the differentiated impact of the threats that Da'esh and its affiliates pose to women and girls, a gender perspective is required. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) partnered with Burkina Faso, Kenya, the African Union Commission, the Economic Community of West African States and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding to develop a toolkit on how to generate gender-disaggregated data to inform gender-sensitive responses to threats posed by Da'esh and its affiliates.

41. From 28 to 30 June, more than 2,000 participants representing 147 Member States, 28 international and regional organizations, 88 civil society and private sector organizations and 38 United Nations entities attended the second United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States. In addition, some 10,000 participants took part in 36 side events held by the United Nations system in partnership with Member States, regional organizations and civil society.

42. The development of advanced technologies to assist Member States in identifying foreign terrorist fighters and other individuals linked to terrorism is encouraging, as showcased during the second United Nations High-level Conference on Counter-Terrorism, during which the impact of transformative technologies on terrorism and counter-terrorism was discussed. However, many challenges remain, including ensuring comprehensive, human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive border management strategies and the responsible use of new technologies. Member States should also improve their efforts to identify female foreign terrorist fighters and make better use of information collected from conflict zones and made available to their law enforcement officials through the International Criminal Police Organization channels.



43. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate has made notable progress in developing new analytical tools to help to monitor the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions by Member States. On 3 March, the Counter-Terrorism Committee approved the revised overview of implementation assessment and the electronic detailed implementation survey, developed by the Executive Directorate in accordance with resolution 2395 (2017), to streamline the latter's assessments, improve their utility for the design of technical assistance and facilitate the real-time production of analysis and reports.

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

### **1. Current situation**

44. The dire situation faced by individuals with alleged links to United Nations-designated terrorist groups continues to be a significant concern. Thousands of such individuals, mainly women and children with presumed family links to foreign terrorist fighters, remain stranded in crowded camps in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, with limited access to basic humanitarian and essential services, due process and fair trial, and subject to other violations of their fundamental rights and freedoms. Those concerns have grown only more acute with the restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Individuals associated with terrorist groups are suspected of being responsible for an increase in violence in the camps, including enforced disappearances and other human rights abuses.

45. Forced returns, the prevention of return and the discriminatory treatment of families with a perceived link to Da'esh also remain significant concerns and could have an impact on reconciliation and social cohesion efforts and result in secondary displacement. Further efforts are needed to create conditions under which Da'esh violence can be prevented, its appeal dampened and respect for human rights and the rule of law promoted.

46. The United Nations system has made progress in operationalizing the Global Framework led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United Nations Children's Fund to provide coordinated, "all-of-United Nations" support to requesting Member States on the protection, voluntary repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals with suspected links to United Nations-designated terrorist groups returning from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Deployment of the support mechanism has begun in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, while a scoping exercise has been undertaken to support Iraq.

### **2. Repatriation efforts**

47. United Nations entities have continued to engage with Member States to promote the safe, voluntary and human rights-compliant repatriation of their nationals from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Although some States have proactively repatriated hundreds of their nationals, predominantly women and children, the pace of repatriation from the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic remains slow, and many States continue to conduct repatriation on an ad hoc rather than comprehensive basis and to limit repatriation to orphaned or unaccompanied children. The consent of relevant Governments for any activity to be undertaken in territories under their control is a paramount importance in all repatriation efforts.

### **3. Investigation and prosecution**

48. Violations of the right to a fair trial remain a serious concern. They include ineffective legal representation, overreliance on confessions and allegations of the

use of torture in prosecutions, including to obtain statements, under counter-terrorism legal frameworks. The use of the death penalty in cases not reaching the threshold of most serious crimes required by applicable international human rights law<sup>7</sup> is also a matter of significant concern.

49. United Nations entities have continued to work with relevant stakeholders to address gaps in national legislation and strengthen criminal justice responses. In sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate continued to promote effective cooperation in investigations and prosecutions at the national and local levels in Nigeria and the Lake Chad basin. UNODC launched a new project to assist stakeholders in Morocco in conducting human rights-compliant investigations and ensuring appropriate trial management standards for young people, women and family members suspected of involvement in terrorist activities, including in relation to the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon. UNODC also concluded a regional project on strengthening criminal justice responses against foreign terrorist fighters in the Middle East, North Africa and South-Eastern Europe and assisted the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq by reviewing the compliance of a counter-terrorism law with international legal standards and international human rights law.

50. The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) finalized its initial case briefs addressing the attacks against the Yazidi community in the Sinjar region and the mass killings perpetrated at Tikrit Air Academy in 2014. The Team also increased its examination of internal Da'esh documentation extracted from digital devices formerly used by Da'esh, obtained through cooperation with the Iraqi authorities. UNITAD reached an agreement with the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq to support Iraqi investigative judges in developing case files for the prosecution of Da'esh members for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

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

51. United Nations entities have continued to promote comprehensive and tailored rehabilitation and reintegration strategies. In March, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and UNODC held a regional workshop in that regard, in cooperation with the Lake Chad Basin Commission, emphasizing the importance of gender-responsive approaches. Participants recommended that coordination be strengthened between criminal justice and non-criminal justice authorities, as well as between national and local authorities.

52. In January, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) released a report on “The Right to Education in Iraq, Part Two: Obstacles to Girls’ Education after ISIL” to assist the efforts of the Government of Iraq and the United Nations country team to strengthen child protection. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, through its United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, began the initial phase of a project on the management of violent extremist prisoners in Iraq. In March, the Institute delivered a training in Mali on the use of risk assessment tools for such prisoners, within the framework of a project on disengagement and reintegration.

53. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided assistance on reintegration to Member States, including the Government of Iraq, in the development and implementation of national action plans and a pilot project to promote the reintegration of returnees. IOM notably supported awareness-raising and registration efforts for families in need of tribal reconciliation, in partnership with the Tribal

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<sup>7</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 6 (2).

Affairs Directorate of the Government of Iraq. It also supported the Lake Chad Basin countries with developing and implementing disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration processes for men and women exiting terrorist groups, using virtual or hybrid workshops and training sessions.

54. There remain a significant need for mental health and psychosocial rehabilitation and reintegration support to address, inter alia, gaps in national capacity and a lack of comprehensive strategies, effective programmatic partnership and evidence-based methodologies, as well as challenges in ensuring compliance with international law and conformity with applicable international standards.

### C. Criminal justice and international legal cooperation

55. Since the previous report, Member States and United Nations entities have continued to demonstrate progress and develop good practices in international and regional counter-terrorism cooperation. It is encouraging that some Member States have continued to share information relating to judicial cooperation, including guidelines on domestic laws and procedures relating to mutual legal assistance and extradition in terrorism cases.

56. UNODC and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate held a series of workshops to strengthen international cooperation on investigations, following a request by the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The nexus between organized crime and terrorism remains an issue of concern. In that regard, UNODC delivered online trainings to criminal justice officials from the Middle East, East Africa and Nigeria on the international law frameworks for countering the linkages between terrorism and organized crime, based on its new publication entitled *Counter-Terrorism in the International Law Context*. UNODC produced several other publications, including *Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Manual for Judicial Training Institutes – Middle East and North Africa*, and a research study entitled “Strengthening the Capacity of Women Professionals Working in the Counter-Terrorism Sector in Iraq”. UNODC continued to strengthen gender mainstreaming and women’s rights in counter-terrorism, jointly with the Executive Directorate, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. In partnership with the National Association of Women Judges of Nigeria, UNODC delivered training to 51 Nigerian female judges on strengthening accountability for sexual and gender-based violence in the context of terrorism.

57. In February, the Office of Counter-Terrorism launched with the Sudan and the European Union the United Nations-European Union Counter-Terrorism Partnership for the Sudan, which is aimed at helping the Sudanese authorities and civil society to develop knowledge and capacity to prevent and counter terrorism in accordance with the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and international human rights law. The Office deployed a project team to Khartoum, in consultation with the Resident Coordinator and at the request of the Sudanese authorities, to facilitate engagement with national stakeholders and United Nations entities in the country.

58. In March, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism provided technical assistance to Maldives on enhancing the use of the Internet and social media in counter-terrorism investigations. The Executive Directorate and UNODC also continued to tailor their South Asia Regional Toolkit for Judges to the national contexts of Maldives and Pakistan.

59. The United Nations entities have continued to actively disseminate 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. There continues to be significant practical challenges,

especially in the Sahel, in increasing cooperation among military, investigative and criminal justice institutions, which can be instrumental to bring terrorists to justice.

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

60. Ensuring holistic approaches to transitional justice remain essential to upholding the rights of victims of terrorism in conflict settings, including through a focus on strengthening intercommunal initiatives, in particular in areas with mixed populations. To that end, the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and UNITAD launched an interfaith dialogue series, which is aimed at providing a forum for Iraqi religious communities to rebuild trust and understanding and address the challenges faced by survivors.

61. As part of its efforts to enhance psychosocial support to witnesses, UNITAD collaborated with Sesame Workshop, a psychoeducational resource and therapeutic material provider, to use storytelling in its engagement with vulnerable children. UNITAD also supported the establishment of the Witness Protection Department of the Government of Iraq and launched in May the *Trauma-Informed Investigations Field Guide* to promote a trauma-informed approach.

62. Children continue to be targeted by Da'esh in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and suffer from the impact of landmines left in areas previously occupied by Da'esh and the consequences of the atrocities committed by Da'esh, including abduction and sexual violence. The action plan signed between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the de facto authorities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic has facilitated dialogue on several issues, including improving access to children in displacement camps. UNODC assisted the authorities in Indonesia, Iraq and Nigeria with preventing and responding to terrorist violence committed against children, and also launched projects to enhance the capacity of the Iraqi authorities to support the right of victims of terrorism during criminal proceedings.

63. Iraqi nationals returning from the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, including Yazidi survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, have left behind children born from rape by Da'esh fighters, owing to stigma and the difficulty of obtaining identity documents. This challenge requires a coordinated and sustained response based on human rights and the best interest of the child, and should include health care, psychosocial support, socioeconomic reintegration measures and legal support.

64. The enactment of the Yazidi Female Survivors Law by the Federal Parliament of Iraq on 1 March, following the engagement of and support from UNAMI, IOM and the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, is a major step in addressing the gender-specific needs of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Further efforts are now needed to ensure the effective implementation of the law in a non-discriminatory and survivor-centred manner. In those efforts, Iraq would benefit from the international community support.

65. Finding missing persons, including individuals trafficked across borders, continues to be a significant concern. The lack of accountability for the enforced disappearances of individuals suspected of Da'esh affiliation from screening centres, at checkpoints and in displacement camps undermines protection and counter-terrorism efforts. UNAMI has worked closely with the United Nations treaty body mechanisms, including the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, to support the efforts of the Government of Iraq to meet its international human rights obligations in that area.

## E. Countering the financing of terrorism

66. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate's analysis suggests that the impact of counter-pandemic measures on money-transfer networks may push terrorists and terrorist groups, including Da'esh, into exploring alternative methods of moving funds.<sup>8</sup> The use of social media crowdfunding campaigns for Da'esh fighters and, ostensibly, their relatives in camps in the Syrian Arab Republic also remains an ongoing challenge (see S/2021/68).

67. Given concerns that the tightening of measures by some Member States for anti-money-laundering and combating the financing of terrorism during the pandemic could have a negative impact on non-profit organizations and emergency humanitarian aid, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities continued to cooperate on a joint initiative co-led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Global Counterterrorism Forum to identify and disseminate good practices for combating the financing of terrorism while safeguarding civic space.

68. Relevant United Nations entities also continued to cooperate under the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre Global Coordinated Programme on Detecting, Preventing and Countering the Financing of Terrorism launched in response to Security Council resolution 2462 (2019). The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and other United Nations entities continue to cooperate with the Financial Action Task Force and Financial Action Task Force-style regional bodies on global and regional anti-money-laundering/combating the financing of terrorism trends; investigating and prosecuting the financing of terrorism; the digitalization of anti-money-laundering/combating the financing of terrorism efforts and addressing the subsequent data-protection concerns; links between terrorism financing and illicit arms trafficking; and mitigating unintended consequences of Financial Action Task Force standards implementation.

69. Addressing terrorism financing through the illicit trade in natural resources in Africa remains a priority issue. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate supported the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group in implementing its regional operational plan for combating the financing of terrorism by delivering workshops and contributing to its meetings. The Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group notably launched a typologies project on illicit dealings in gold, diamond and rubies and associated money-laundering/terrorist financing in the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group region. The Executive Directorate participated in the Technical Commission/plenary meeting of the Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa.

70. UNODC launched a new project on the disruption of terrorism financing and targeted financial sanctions against terrorist entities in Mozambique and produced a manual for Morocco on effective financial investigations in terrorism financing cases. UNITAD has completed an initial case brief identifying entities that facilitated crimes by providing financial services to Da'esh, and it continues to investigate the group's "treasury department" through its analysis of Da'esh revenue generation from illicit markets.

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<sup>8</sup> Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism", June 2020, December 2021 (update) and June 2021 (update).

## F. Border management and law enforcement

71. United Nations entities continued to support efforts to increase the border management capacity of Member States. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, in partnership with relevant international and regional organizations and the private sector, have developed a joint initiative on maritime security, which will explore challenges posed by crimes committed at sea, including in relation to international and cross-border cooperation, national coordination, information-sharing and linkages between terrorism and transnational organized crime.

72. The multi-agency United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism continued to assist the implementation by Member States of advance passenger information and passenger name record systems, in accordance with Security Council resolutions [2178 \(2014\)](#), [2396 \(2017\)](#) and [2482 \(2019\)](#), relevant international standards and human rights and privacy safeguards. The Programme held three comprehensive virtual assessments for Djibouti, Mongolia and South Africa and interactive online trainings for Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Since January, Nigeria, Norway, the Republic of Moldova and South Africa have joined the programme, bringing the number of beneficiaries to 42, including Iraq, where engagement started on the basis of the findings of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate assessment that was carried out in 2018 on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee. IOM also assisted Iraq in its efforts to modernize its border infrastructure by equipping it with the Migration Information and Data Analysis System for identity verification and biometric collection.

73. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and its partners continued, through outreach and capacity-building activities, to support Member States in preventing terrorists from acquiring both conventional and non-conventional weapons. The Centre, together with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the Office for Disarmament Affairs and UNODC, continued to analyse the capacities of Central Asian States to prevent and combat the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and their illicit supply to terrorists, while also delivering related tailored workshops and training.

74. Within the framework of the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research continued to develop technical guidelines for Member States to facilitate the implementation of Security Council resolution [2370 \(2017\)](#) and related international standards and good practices on preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons.

75. In January, the Office of Counter-Terrorism launched the Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Threats against Vulnerable Targets, in partnership with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. The Programme will develop guidance materials and update the Compendium of good practices on the protection of critical infrastructures against terrorist attacks.

76. The global Programme on National-level Interagency Coordination Mechanisms (commonly known as “Fusion Cells”) of the Office of Counter-Terrorism completed a series of virtual study visits during which experts from counter-terrorism centres in Belgium, Colombia, Norway, the Russian Federation and Spain, as well as the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, delivered lectures to programme beneficiaries. The

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate also conducted virtual missions to Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and SADC. In Nigeria, UNODC and the Executive Directorate trained law enforcement officers in the application of international best practices regarding intelligence collection and analysis.

77. In Iraq, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre conducted a virtual tabletop exercise on a bioterrorism incident for Iraqi authorities and a training workshop using virtual reality exercises on countering clandestine chemical and biological threats.

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

78. United Nations entities continued to provide Member States with a range of capacity-building and technical assistance to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism. In June, UNDP organized the Oslo III virtual conference on the prevention of violent extremism to distil lessons for future research, policy and programming and to develop new prevention approaches. In Central Asia, South-East Asia, South Asia, Iraq and Mozambique, UNODC delivered a number of programmes on preventing and countering violent extremism, including on strengthening gender mainstreaming and women's rights and empowerment in preventing and countering violent extremism and counter-terrorism efforts. In Africa, UNODC partnered in those efforts with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

79. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre provided vocational training to young people in Fallujah, Iraq, as part of efforts to strengthen resilience to Da'esh ideology and recruitment attempts. In March, UNODC launched "STRIVE Juvenile", a technical assistance project to increase the resilience of children, families, communities and civil society to violent extremism and terrorist recruitment attempts in Indonesia, Iraq and Nigeria. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continued to implement its "Reviving the spirit of Mosul" initiative and launched a project entitled "Gendered approach to preventing violent extremism in Iraq through education".

80. In Africa, UNESCO continued to support Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger in preventing violent extremism through teacher development and initiated a study to identify mechanisms that could enable young people to act as peace agents in their communities. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali established networks of local civil society organizations to enhance the protection of international human rights and humanitarian law issues through training and capacity-building.

81. To address the increased risks, especially among young people, of exposure to online content inciting hatred or violence, UNDP provided support on the use of technology to identify hate speech content in Bangladesh, Georgia, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Sudan and Tunisia, assisting the authorities to adopt targeted and human rights-compliant responses to the risk.

82. In June, United Nations entities, in partnership with Member States and other stakeholders, hosted a range of side events on countering terrorist narratives, preventing and countering violent extremism and new technologies during the second Counter-Terrorism Week held at the United Nations, exploring such issues as transparency in content moderation and online and artificial intelligence tools for preventing and countering violent extremism, addressing and countering hate speech and violent extremism through education in a digital world and preventing the misuse of new communication platforms.

## IV. Observations

83. The three reports issued since the outbreak of COVID-19 on the threat posed by Da'esh, the reports of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team and the analytical papers from the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate<sup>9</sup> have illustrated how Da'esh and other terrorist groups have taken advantage of the disruption, grievances and development setbacks caused by the unprecedented global crisis, both online and on the ground. The further expansion of Da'esh in many regions of Africa since the beginning of 2021 is alarming. It highlights that the interplay between terrorism, fragility and conflict has grown stronger, and underscores the need for an urgent, global response to support African countries and regional organizations. Member States had already warned that Da'esh could regain the ability to orchestrate international attacks if either its core or one of its regional affiliates became strong enough. This scenario has only become more plausible.

84. I remain deeply concerned about the untenable situation in camps and detention facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, which hold individuals with suspected links to Da'esh and other terrorist groups designated by the Security Council. While recent actions by a few Governments to repatriate some affected children are welcome, I reiterate my call upon Member States for the voluntary repatriation of all concerned individuals, with a particular focus on women and children, in line with international law and with the consent of relevant Governments as a paramount consideration in all such efforts. The increase in violence in the camps, reported terrorist radicalization efforts and the risk of large, orchestrated escapes are a reminder that inaction is not an option to ensure either human rights, security or accountability.

85. Moreover, as pandemic-related restrictions gradually ease, there is an elevated, near-term threat of Da'esh-inspired attacks outside conflict zones by lone actors or small groups that have been radicalized, incited and possibly directed remotely online. This exemplifies the wider and evolving risks associated with the digital transition, which has accelerated during the pandemic, and the potential for new and emerging technologies to be used for terrorist purposes. Cybersecurity needs a robust reboot to face the next iteration of digitally enabled terrorism. International cooperation, effective governance in line with international law and innovative partnerships with the private sector and civil society will be decisive considerations to prevent and counter terrorism in the digital era. Rising to that challenge was the focus of the second United Nations High-level Conference on Counter-Terrorism.

86. I am encouraged by the adoption by consensus of General Assembly resolution [75/291](#), concluding the seventh review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. I welcome the comprehensive and forward-looking nature of that review, which took into consideration previous reports,<sup>10</sup> and the updated Strategy on its fifteenth anniversary. The United Nations system, through the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, will continue to support Member States in their efforts to tackle the scourge of Da'esh, guided by the updated Strategy and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> [A/74/677](#), [A/75/729](#) and [A/75/729/Corr.1](#).