

Session I: Multistakeholder Engagement in Countering Terrorism while Ensuring Compliance with Human Rights and the Rule of Law

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Dear excellencies, colleagues, and partners,

I am honored to be with you here today to reflect on the future of multistakeholder engagement in efforts to counter terrorism. I am the Executive Director of the [Global Center on Cooperative Security](https://www.globalcenter.org), an organization that works to achieve lasting security by advancing inclusive, human rights-based policies, partnerships, and practices that address the root causes of violent extremism.

We partner with community leaders and global experts to prevent and counter violent extremism, advance financial integrity and inclusion, promote and protect the rule of law, and inform rights-based approaches to complex multilateral security challenges.

For nearly two decades, our work has consistently shown that the most effective measures to advance peace and security are anchored in [meaningful collaboration between governments and civil society](#). Put simply, no single actor can fully address the multifaceted and interconnected security challenges that face the world today. We need to work together.

But what does meaningful, consistent, and lasting multistakeholder engagement in counterterrorism look like?

It, in fact, begins by decentering the counterterrorism agenda and embracing the complexities of our societies. To understand terrorism, we need to first understand the unique environments in which conflict and violence manifest, sustain, and spread. Past harms inform current grievances; corruption and economic injustice fuel instability; the climate crisis reshapes global inequities; failures to repatriate, rehabilitate, and reintegrate lead to humanitarian and security crises; and marginalization and disenfranchisement continue to disempower and harm people around the globe. The complex and ever-evolving threat of terrorism demands a multi-layered solution that draws from – and integrates with – existing fields of practice without subsuming the foundations of peacebuilding, conflict prevention, good governance, and sustainable development.

To be meaningful and impactful, multistakeholder engagement requires an [enabling environment for civil society](#), whose participation must occur at all stages of counterterrorism policy and program processes: from diagnosing the problem; to designing, developing, and implementing policy measures and community-centric programming; and evaluating the impact of policy and practice on communities affected by terrorism and counterterrorism alike, to understand both its positive and negative impacts.

To be inclusive and lasting, multistakeholder engagement requires welcoming debate and discourse, having tough conversations, and identifying and working towards shared goals. When done well, it contributes to promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. It demands procedural

and cultural shifts to create diverse, safe, and sustained engagement with civil society in policy discussions, meetings, programs, and evaluation efforts.

The reality for civil society is that it is not just terrorism that poses a threat to them; [it can be counterterrorism measures themselves](#). Violations of human rights and the rule of law under the auspices of preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism are widespread and well-known. The [lack of a universally agreed definition of terrorism](#) allows governments to apply this term broadly, often to the detriment of the most vulnerable communities. Measures intended to combat the financing of terrorism – intentionally and unintentionally – constrict freedoms of association and expression, hinder access to financial services, and disrupt and discourage critical charitable and humanitarian activities. The potential for abuse only becomes greater and more complex as we see the evolution and widespread adoption of new and emerging technologies across different sectors.

Many civil society organizations have sought to [raise these issues in international forums](#), including at the United Nations, only to face undue state scrutiny and reprisals at home. Their work to address the underlying drivers of radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism and bolster resilience in their communities frequently gets instrumentalized and securitized. Human rights defenders, particularly women, are harassed, charged, and convicted under the very laws that should protect and promote their work. Although our multilateral counterterrorism efforts benefit greatly from their participation, civil society put their lives and livelihoods on the line to engage in them.

The threat of terrorism is real. But we cannot also restrict and restrain our societies' rights and freedoms. In our efforts to address any threat to peace and security, we must seek to strengthen the rule of law, ensure increased accountability, promote reconciliation, and build sustainable peace.

As we gather here this week to discuss the many facets of counterterrorism and the prevention of violent extremism – with an [extra emphasis on “violent”](#) – at the threshold of the adoption of the eighth biennial review resolution of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, we have a critical opportunity to produce better peace and security outcomes by rightsizing our responses and ensuring an enabling environment for civil society. Now is the time to realize that.

We invite you to join the Global Center and its partners tomorrow morning at our [side-event](#) to discuss in more detail how inclusive civil society engagement can support rights-based counterterrorism efforts at the United Nations.

Thank you.
