

STATEMENT ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MANDATE OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS WHILE COUNTERING TERRORISM

Franziska Praxl-Tabuchi, Director of Civic Space and Multilateral Security Policy
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Excellencies, colleagues, and partners,

Thank you very much for the invitation to join you today to mark and celebrate twenty years of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism.

My name is Franziska Praxl-Tabuchi, I am the Director of Civic Space and Multilateral Security Policy with the Global Center on Cooperative Security. Our organization had the honor to work with the mandate for over a decade. In those years we have seen many developments within multilateral counterterrorism efforts, some strides, many setbacks, and ever evolving opportunities to improve the system. Throughout this time the Special Rapporteur's role has been and remains the principal UN post explicitly and exclusively dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights in relation to efforts to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism (PVE).

Although protecting and promoting human rights in counterterrorism and PVE efforts is discursively embraced by the General Assembly, in practice, measures to counter terrorism and its financing play a substantial role in the worldwide deterioration of civic space and perpetuation of serious, systematic human rights violations. Under the guise of fighting terrorism, member states ostensibly justify war crimes and crimes against humanity; employ arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances; systematically use torture against people suspected of terrorism, detain them in unofficial facilities, violate fair trial guarantees, allow admission of confessions obtained under duress, and violate rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

Despite being the direct target of these abuses, and some risking their lives on a daily basis, civil society continues to play the critical role of documenting human rights violations, advocating for the protection and promotion of human rights and civic space, and exhausting their capacity and resources to engage with the United Nations to ensure human rights are central to multilateral counterterrorism efforts.



We meet at a time when civil society and human rights bodies, including special procedures, are being systematically defunded. This is not happening in a vacuum or by chance. There has been a long-escalating attack on human rights and civil liberties around the world – and counterterrorism and related measures have been among the weapons of choice. While the mandate of the Special Rapporteur has been critical in bringing urgently needed attention to these challenges, it remains sorely insufficient when compared to the sheer magnitude of harms being perpetrated by states in the name of countering terrorism.

I would be amiss if I wouldn't use my time today to urge member states that do believe in the universality and centrality of human rights in effective security policy, and have consistently and publicly affirmed their commitment to international human rights and humanitarian law and the promotion and protection of civic space, to act now to ensure that the progress that has been made is not erased.

The Global Center's independent analyses of the UN's counterterrorism architecture - the Blue Sky reports - have stressed that centering human rights in the UN's counterterrorism agenda requires more than incremental, project-based, or piecemeal approaches. Civil society is under attack and is calling on the United Nations and like-minded member states to take a more proactive role in mobilizing the financial and political resources necessary to safeguard civic space. We need structural reforms, meaningful accountability and oversight mechanisms, strong leadership from the mandate and from civil society.

The Global Center remains committed to supporting and collaborating with the mandate, and we look forward to strengthened partnerships with you all in the fight to promote and protect human rights and civic space during this difficult time.

Thank you.