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Eighteenth 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 Levant¹ (ISIL, hereinafter referred to as “Da’esh”)² 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 eighteenth such report.³ 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,⁴ 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 reporting period, the threat posed by Da’esh and its affiliates to international peace and security remained high, with a significant impact on conflict zones. While continuing to face leadership attrition and financial setbacks, Da’esh and its affiliates retained their capacity to conduct terrorist attacks and project a threat beyond their areas of operations. The risk of resurgence of the group remained in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, and the activity of Da’esh affiliates contributed to a deterioration of the situation in parts of West Africa and the Sahel. The United Nations continued to support Member States in countering Da’esh and other terrorist groups, including in the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism

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¹ Listed as Al-Qaida in Iraq (QDe.115).

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

³ 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](#), [S/2022/576](#), [S/2023/76](#) and [S/2023/568](#).

⁴ The present threat assessment is based on the thirty-third report of the Monitoring Team ([S/2024/92](#)).



Strategy and relevant Security Council resolutions, and through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact.

II. Threat assessment

A. Overview and evolution of the threat

4. Attrition of the Da'esh leadership and the trend of greater devolution by the group and greater autonomy of its affiliates continued during the reporting period. The announcement of the new Da'esh leader months after the reported death of Abu al-Husain al-Husaini al-Qurashi on 30 April 2023 is possibly an indication of difficulties in the selection process and concern to ensure the new leader's security. While Da'esh was effectively suppressed in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, it remained a serious threat and continued to wage asymmetric attacks, which have increased since November. There remained a risk of resurgence of the group should a large number of detainees return to the battlefield or counter-terrorism pressure ease.

5. Member States expressed concern over three broad tactical trends during the reporting period. First, a localized détente has been established between Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (QDe.163) and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) (QDe.159) in the Sahel, with an impact on other areas, as both groups exerted significantly less effort to fight each other and allocated more resources to other targets. Second, in several areas, including the Sahel and West Africa, Da'esh appeared to be claiming responsibility for significantly fewer attacks than perpetrated. Member States assessed that these reduced claims were part of an effort to win the hearts and minds of the populations where Da'esh operated, without a commensurate actual reduction in their operations. Third, while acknowledging that empirical data were challenging to obtain, Member States noted that despite a broad reduction in the number and pace of Da'esh attacks in the four months up to November, some increase in the lethality of these attacks was observed, which might indicate improved capabilities in certain regions. Some regions witnessed an increase in attacks since November.

6. The evolution of the threat in conflict zones in Africa continued to cause Member States concern, particularly in West Africa and the Sahel, where a deficit in counter-terrorism capabilities has been exploited by Da'esh. The situation became more complex, with the conflation of ethnic and regional disputes with the agenda and operations of these groups, including by bringing into play dynamics involving local populations.

7. In Afghanistan, a decrease in attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) (QDe.161) likely reflected both the impact of counter-terrorism efforts by the Taliban and a change in strategy directed by the group's leader. Several Member States reported that recruitment of Afghans to ISIL-K was substantial, with Afghans often being used for operations.

8. Public communications by Da'esh in response to the events in Israel and Gaza since 7 October have been cautious and calibrated, aimed at exacerbating religious intolerance. Da'esh remained firmly antipathetic to Hamas, whose members it considers apostates. Da'esh media output has been focused on capitalizing on the situation in Gaza to mobilize potential lone actors to commit attacks. In consultations for the present report, no Member State reported any indication of involvement of Da'esh members or affiliates in the attack by Hamas on 7 October.

1. Da'esh leadership

9. On 3 August, Da'esh announced Abu Hafs al-Hashimi al-Qurashi as its new leader. Member States attributed the delayed acknowledgement of the death of its previous leader to internal divisions within Da'esh. Several Member States assessed that the level of leadership attrition and security challenges rendered a shift in the centre of gravity of the Da'esh core away from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic possible. Africa and Afghanistan were mentioned as viable locations for a new leader, with the former reportedly being more likely. Several attacks directed by the new leader to avenge Abu al-Husain's death, including some undertaken by individuals linked to ISIL-K, were reportedly disrupted in Türkiye by the national authorities.

10. Also on 3 August, a new spokesperson, Abu Hudhayfah al-Ansari, succeeded Abu Umar al-Muhajir after the latter's capture by Ha'yat Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) (alias Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant) (QDe.137) in March 2023. To avoid HTS offensives, Da'esh moved some leaders and operatives from the north-western Syrian Arab Republic towards the Badia desert.

11. Following the death of Ali Jasim Salman al-Juburi (alias Abu Sara al-Iraqi) in February 2023 (S/2023/568, para. 8), the Da'esh "general directorate of provinces" was reportedly reorganized (see S/2022/576, para. 5). One Member State noted the inclusion of the Bilad al-Rafidayn "office" (formerly Iraq "office") under the Ard al-Mubarakah "office" (formerly Sham "office"), led by Abdallah Makki Muslih al-Rafi'i (alias Abu Khadija) (not listed). Al-Rafi'i reportedly plays an important role in the "delegated committee" which exercises administrative control over the affairs of the group on behalf of its leader.

12. With the death of Bilal al-Sudani (S/2023/568, para. 7), several Member States noted that the disruption of Al-Sudani's network significantly damaged the strategic role of the Karrar "office" in Somalia, limiting its coordination capacity as a financial hub for Da'esh affiliates in Africa. Bilal al-Sudani, an Al-Qaida facilitator in East Africa prior to becoming a trusted money and material smuggler for Da'esh in Africa, was a close associate of Abu Talha al-Sudani, a senior Al-Qaida operative.

2. Da'esh finances

13. Da'esh core revenue continued to decline, with Member States reporting available reserves in the range of \$10 million to \$25 million. Costs reportedly continued to outpace revenue, with payments to family members of dead or imprisoned fighters remaining the largest expenses. Some Member States reported Da'esh finances to be more dispersed, with fewer transfers among Da'esh affiliates, since the death of Bilal al-Sudani, while the Karrar "office" remained important for transfers of revenue.

14. While Member States reported an increasing use of cryptocurrencies, the predominant means for financial transactions by Da'esh and its affiliates remained cash couriers and informal value transfer systems (hawala). Most Da'esh affiliates remained financially autonomous. Some affiliates reportedly used social media to raise funds by means of cryptocurrencies. A pro-Da'esh media group sought to raise funds from sympathizers by directing them to use a cryptocurrency known for being used for illicit purposes. Other Da'esh affiliates issued appeals in more than 20 languages for the use of the same cryptocurrency.

15. The sources of funding for Da'esh and its affiliates remained context-dependent. Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (QDe.162) continued to generate funds locally from criminal activities, including extortion of fishers and farmers, cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom, having more recently started to explore farming activities, such as growing red chillis for countries neighbouring Lake Chad. Reports

of poaching in Benin, the Niger and Nigeria to generate funds were also noted. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram) (QDe.138) and ISWAP were unable to raise sufficient funds to pay their fighters and consequently unable to attract foreign fighters.

16. In December, as part of a counter-terrorism investigation supported by 12 countries, the Spanish National Police dismantled a transnational Da'esh network accused of laundering funds and moving €200,000 worth of cryptocurrencies to conduct attacks in Europe. More than 10 individuals were arrested and two imminent attacks thwarted.

3. Da'esh access to weapons

17. Member States expressed concern about the proliferation of weapons in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa, in particular the continued increased use of unmanned aircraft systems and improvised explosive devices by Da'esh. Several Member States reported continued proliferation of weapons from stockpiles left in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover. Member States continued to report that ISIL-K sought and obtained such weapons from Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (QDe.132).

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

18. While the overall pace of repatriation efforts from camps in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic remained slow, significant progress was observed in the number of repatriations by a few Member States, notably Iraq. Without a meaningful change in the overall pace noted in previous reports, the risks associated with camps and detention facilities will persist for several years. Some Member States registered concern about the capacity of national authorities in some regions to manage a significant increase in the pace or volume of returns.

19. Da'esh remained focused on recovering personnel from detention facilities through attacks or other means to backfill both leadership roles and rank-and-file fighters, as evidenced by one recent disruption of a Da'esh cell responsible for planning attacks against detention facilities in the Syrian Arab Republic.

20. Member States occasionally reported movement of individual foreign terrorist fighters from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Some instances of individuals of North African origin returning to Africa were reported.

B. Regional developments

1. Africa

West Africa

21. The scale of Da'esh violence and related loss of civilian lives was higher in West Africa and the Sahel than in other parts of Africa. Despite a decline in the number of attacks conducted in the past year due to increased military offensives by national and regional forces and continued clashes with Boko Haram fighters, ISWAP remained the most active Da'esh affiliate in the region, with the ability to carry out complex attacks outside its usual areas of operations, such as in countries neighbouring Lake Chad, where it remained active. ISWAP fighters were reported to number between 4,000 and 7,000, with some Member States indicating that Abu Musab al-Barnawi (not listed) remained as the leader of the group. One Member State noted that Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Ali al-Mainuki (not listed) had replaced Abu Musab as the head of the Da'esh Furqan "office" operating in the Lake Chad basin.

22. ISGS enjoyed relative freedom of movement in the region, with Member States expressing concern about the risk of a possible increase in attacks in the future, particularly against Malian forces and their auxiliaries, targeting logistical convoys and isolating key northern localities controlled by Malian forces. In Mali, ISGS pursued a new strategy to reinforce its acceptance among local populations with a view to increasing its influence and funding and recruitment capabilities.

23. In central Mali and the south-west of Burkina Faso, a localized détente between ISGS and JNIM raised concerns about the possible establishment of a terrorist sanctuary. By implicitly dividing the territories where they operate, these groups have, in practice, been able to concentrate on targeting security forces and continue to embed within local communities, which enables them to conduct attacks and facilitate operations beyond borders and into neighbouring countries.

24. The Niger experienced a notable increase in violence following the unconstitutional change of government in July, as ISGS regained ground through increasingly complex attacks against both security forces and populations. Unlike its strategy in Mali, ISGS was extremely violent in the Niger, capitalizing on weakened national counter-terrorism capacities, especially along the border with Nigeria. Member States assessed that ISGS could further exploit these weaknesses to consolidate its logistical corridor to Nigeria for resupply and possible recruitment from other communities.

25. Member States expressed concern that, even without a formal alliance between ISWAP and ISGS, the operational, financial and logistical autonomy afforded by the Da'esh core could also enable them to project the threat beyond the region.

Central and Southern Africa

26. In Mozambique, sustained counter-terrorism efforts by regional forces continued to have a significant impact on Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (ASWJ) (not listed) and its leadership in Cabo Delgado Province. Since the previous report, the number of fighters of the group with battlefield experience was further reduced to between 160 and 200 individuals. The largest concentration of ASWJ fighters was located in the Catupa forest, in the Macomia district of Cabo Delgado Province. Fatalities remained low, with relatively few incidents of violence. Regional Member States maintained that there was no clear evidence of "command and control orders" from Da'esh over ASWJ.

27. In August, during Operation Golpe Duro II, forces deployed by the Mozambican Defence Force and the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique killed the operational leader of ASWJ, Bonomade Machude Omar (alias Ibn Omar). Omar's death is assessed by Member States to be a significant loss to ASWJ given his intimate knowledge of the area and oversight of the group. Member States noted that his likely successor was Farido Selemene Arune. Member States also noted the rise of an individual known as Ulanga, a spiritual leader and cleric of Tanzanian nationality within ASWJ, adding that he could assume a leadership role.

28. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Operation Shujaa continued to have an impact on the leadership of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) (Cde.001), with Member States assessing the group to have between 1,000 and 1,500 fighters, compared with between 1,500 and 2,000 in the previous reporting period. Congolese and Ugandan authorities recently expanded the mandate of Operation Shujaa to extend its area of operations in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. ADF forces were further affected by a bombing campaign conducted by the Uganda People's Defence Forces in September, which resulted in the death of more than 200 ADF fighters. Nevertheless, ADF remained resilient. Member States reported that Meddie Nkalubo, who was responsible for overseeing and funding the ADF bombing

campaign in Uganda, remained alive and was actively directing and participating in ADF attacks. Member States assessed that ADF commander Abu Akassi (alias Abwakasi) (not listed) was injured in September in an attack by the Uganda People's Defence Forces against a Tanzanian ADF commander. Member States assessed that Abu Akassi, having shifted his focus to Uganda, was responsible for several attacks in the country, including an attack on 17 October against two foreign tourists near the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

East Africa

29. The threat assessment remained relatively unchanged in East Africa. While the Da'esh affiliate in Somalia retained a presence in Puntland, its operational capacity did not change significantly as the group continued to face attacks from Al-Shabaab. The estimated number of fighters of the group remained relatively stable during the reporting period, at between 100 and 150 fighters. Member States continued to warn that, despite the conflict in the Sudan, the country remained a transit hub for fighters from North Africa to southern Libya, Mali and West Africa.

North Africa

30. Da'esh affiliates in North Africa faced significant counter-terrorism pressure. The capabilities of the Da'esh-affiliated Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (not listed) were effectively constrained by Egyptian security forces. The group's strength was assessed to be only a few hundred fighters. One Member State characterized the group as eradicated, with its remaining elements considered as fugitive violent extremists seeking refuge in desert areas. Some Member States reported that the group had relocated west of the Sinai, closer to the Suez Canal, where its operations were more opportunistic than strategic.

31. Morocco experienced a resurgence of the lone actor phenomenon. A cell comprising four individuals was dismantled in October, with one individual attempting to join groups in the Sahel. One Member State assessed that the situation in the Sahel was inspiring numerous individuals to build operational relationships with ISGS.

32. The Da'esh affiliate in Libya, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Libya (ISIL-Libya) (Qde.165), continued to operate in remote areas of southern and in south-western Libya. One Member State noted that some of the group's fighters had travelled to gold mining areas in Libya and the Libya-Niger border. According to the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, trafficking in persons and smuggling constituted the group's primary source of income. ISIL-Libya members from Tebu tribes and their leader, Abdul Salam Darak Allah (not listed), limited their movements to desert and mountainous areas to prevent detection. Some Member States assessed the group's strength at between 150 and 400 active fighters, including fighters from Chad, Nigeria and the Sudan, while noting that they did not conduct terrorist attacks. The Libyan Intelligence Service dismantled a Da'esh cell reportedly led by Sudanese elements who facilitated the transportation of individuals from Chad and the Sudan towards Libya for transit to other destinations. Another connected cell that handled the associated financial transactions was also dismantled.

2. Middle East

Iraq and the Levant

33. The Da'esh core continued to operate as a low-intensity insurgency with terrorist cells based mostly in remote and rural areas. While its military capabilities have been degraded in the region, the group persisted as a threat as it adapted to

counter-terrorism pressure by exploiting security gaps. Da'esh combined strength in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic was assessed at between 3,000 and 5,000 fighters.

34. In Iraq, Da'esh operations remained largely constrained. Iraqi forces succeeded in targeting operatives and disrupting sleeper cells and guest house networks, but the group persisted in conducting periodic attacks and replenishing leadership ranks. It maintained its leadership, management and provincial structures, led by Jasim Khalaf Dawud Ramiz al-Mazroui'i (alias Abu Abd al-Qader) (not listed), and selected new leaders for Salah al-Din and northern Baghdad Da'esh provinces following the elimination of their predecessors by Iraqi forces. Da'esh also enhanced its communications and security architecture, with the aim of limiting leadership losses and preventing infiltration.

35. Da'esh continued to concentrate operations around the outskirts of Baghdad and the Governorates of Kirkuk, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Ninawa, using small, decentralized cells. Kirkuk and areas around the Hamrin Mountains and Wadi al-Shay remained the group's main areas of operations owing to perceived gaps in security by Iraqi and Peshmerga forces. Attacks were carried out primarily with light weapons and explosive devices against government and security officials, community leaders, civilians and military facilities.

36. In the border areas west of Anbar Governorate, Da'esh activities displayed renewed momentum. The group continued its attacks, including in Rutbah, establishing temporary checkpoints and attacking military facilities. Da'esh cells continued to shelter in remote areas of western Anbar, including in Wadi Hawran, and near the Iraqi-Syrian border, where sporadic attacks continued.

37. In the Syrian Arab Republic, Da'esh has intensified attacks since November. The central desert (Badia) served as a logistics and operations hub, with between 500 and 600 fighters forming a triangle linking the Suwayda', Homs and Dayr al-Zawr Governorates. Da'esh conducted sporadic attacks, including in Sukhnah in the desert of Homs Governorate and in Rusafah in Raqqah Governorate. The group also launched an attack in August in the town of Ma'din Atiq in Raqqah, briefly controlling the town.

38. Exploiting tensions between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and local tribes that emerged in August, Da'esh was able to free some leaders and operatives held in detention facilities, intensify recruitment and expand the presence of small mobile cells along the Syrian-Iraqi border, specifically Mayadin in Dayr al-Zawr Governorate and Markadah in Hasakah Governorate. Da'esh continued to take advantage of the porous Iraqi-Syrian border, with several Da'esh leaders and operatives able to infiltrate into Ninawa Governorate in Iraq.

39. In the South, Da'esh maintained around 20 active cells in Dar'a and Suwayda', some of which opportunistically collaborate with other non-State armed factions in the area. Member States noted that the group underreported its attacks and aimed to expand towards the outskirts of Damascus to establish a stronger foothold.

40. Member States repeatedly noted the heightened risk of Da'esh-related violence spilling over into neighbouring countries, the threat posed by Da'esh elements in the southern Syrian Arab Republic and the possibility of terrorist attacks projecting across borders.

Arabian Peninsula

41. The Da'esh affiliate in Yemen, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Yemen (QDe.166), remained constrained. In August, fewer than a dozen members pledged allegiance to the new Da'esh leader. While the group claimed no attacks during the reporting period, it maintained logistical links with other branches, especially in

Somalia. Fighters were estimated to number between 50 and 100, mostly in the Ma'rib Governorate. The leadership cadre included Mithaq Thabit Haytham (alias Abu Gharib al-Radfani) and Khaled Ahmed Abu Faraj (alias Abu Ayoub) (both not listed). Member States remained concerned about the risk of the group's revival.

3. Europe

42. Formal threat levels rose across Europe following fatal attacks in October and December in Belgium and France, respectively, in addition to numerous non-fatal terrorist incidents and arrests in several European countries. Member States reported that triggering elements for self-initiated attacks included Qur'an-burning incidents and the exploitation by Da'esh of grievances to radicalize and recruit new followers within some communities in Europe.

43. Member States raised concerns that travel by some individuals of North Caucasus and Central Asian origin from Afghanistan or Ukraine towards Western Europe represented an opportunity for ISIL-K, which was seeking to project violent attacks in Western countries. Member States noted the existence of operational plots in European States planned or conducted by ISIL-K. In July and August, seven Tajik, Turkmen and Kyrgyz individuals linked to ISIL-K were arrested in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, while planning to conduct high-impact terrorist attacks for which they were obtaining weapons and possible targets.

4. Asia

Central and South Asia

44. Member States continued to report that the high concentration of terrorist groups in Afghanistan undermined the security situation in the region. Notwithstanding a decrease in the number of attacks perpetrated by ISIL-K and its recent loss of territory, casualties and high attrition among senior and mid-tier leadership figures, Member States continue to consider the group as the greatest threat within Afghanistan, with the ability to project a threat into the region and beyond.

45. ISIL-K attacks decreased as a consequence of counter-terrorism efforts exerted by the Taliban, which claimed to have defeated the group, although terrorist attacks continued. The Taliban remained divided to some extent over approaches in dealing with both the group and communities sympathetic to it. ISIL-K adopted a more inclusive recruitment strategy, including by focusing on attracting disillusioned Taliban and foreign fighters. ISIL-K increased its appeal within Tajik networks; for example, Khukumatov Shamil Dodihudoevich (alias Abu Miskin) (not listed) reportedly moderated an ISIL-K Telegram channel and was one of the group's most active propagandists and high-ranking recruiters. By exploiting grievances arising from being restrained by the Taliban, ISIL-K was able to recruit members of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (QDe.088), also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIM/TIP), in Afghanistan, some of whom had already reportedly defected to ISIL-K. Recently, several Jamaat Ansarullah commanders reportedly joined ISIL-K ranks in Nangarhar and Kunar Provinces.

46. Several Member States confirmed that Sanaullah Ghafari (alias Shahab al-Muhajir) (QDi.431) was still alive and remained the ISIL-K leader, reportedly located in Kunar Province. Ghafari was likely targeted while exiting a Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (QDe.152) training centre in Kunar, possibly leaving him injured.

South-East Asia

47. Some Member States continued to report that counter-terrorism efforts had reduced terrorist activities in Indonesia and Malaysia. Meanwhile, the Philippines

confronted increasing attacks, as demonstrated by the one carried out by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in South-East Asia (ISIL-SEA) (QDe.169) on 3 December on a religious service in Marawi City. Member States assessed that Da'esh-aligned groups might continue opportunistic attacks, especially in the southern Philippines. Member States assess that terrorist threats in the country are likely to increase around the upcoming elections in 2024 and 2025.

48. While ISIL-SEA operated in a decentralized manner, with no overall command and control through its leader, the group retained the capability to respond rapidly to counter-terrorism operations, as demonstrated by retaliatory attacks carried out since the killing of the former ISIL-SEA leader, Faharudin Hadji Benito Satar (aliases Abu Zacharia and Jer Mimbantas). Information on the identity of the group's new leader is unconfirmed, and reports of his surrender or death remained unclear.

49. While the threat posed by Abu Sayyaf Group (QDe.001) was degraded, the group retained the capability to conduct attacks, primarily using improvised explosive devices. On 2 December, Philippine security services killed one of the group's leaders, a bombmaker and 20 fighters in Basilan.

III. Updates on responses to the evolving threat

50. While terrorism continues to represent a significant global threat, it affects conflict zones disproportionately. The United Nations, including through the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, continued to support Member States in reinforcing their capacity to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism, including through addressing challenges stemming from terrorist groups exploiting conflict dynamics. To tackle the transnational nature of terrorism, efforts were focused on promoting multilateral cooperation, in particular to address terrorist and other crimes, supporting prosecution efforts, as well as repatriating individuals still stranded in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic.

51. On 19 October, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#) concerning counter-terrorism (the Counter-Terrorism Committee) held an open meeting on countering terrorist narratives and preventing the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes, focusing on emerging global trends and good practices in prevention and intervention, both online and offline. On the basis of recommendations contained in the Delhi Declaration on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, on 1 December, the Committee adopted a first set of non-binding guiding principles for Member States on threats posed by the use of unmanned aircraft systems for terrorist purposes, known as the Abu Dhabi Guiding Principles ([S/2023/1035](#)). On behalf of the Committee, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate conducted four assessment visits to Member States.

A. Suspected Da'esh members and their family members in conflict zones

1. Current situation

52. In the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, more than 48,500 individuals, including 31,600 foreign nationals, reportedly remained in the Hawl and Rawj camps and in detention and other facilities, including "rehabilitation" centres, for their alleged links to or family ties with Da'esh. The camps remained overcrowded, with inadequate shelter and limited access to food, medical care, clean water and other basic services. Access by humanitarian actors to detention and other facilities

remained limited. According to estimates, more than 60 per cent of the population in the camps are children, including more than 13,300 children from Iraq and approximately 6,000 children from more than 60 other countries. Some 73 per cent of the children in the camps are under 12 years of age, and 20 per cent are under 5 years of age.

53. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism continued to share information on the arbitrary way in which children in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic had been separated from their families and transferred to detention and other facilities. Following a six-day technical visit to the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic in July, the Special Rapporteur reported that none of the children in those facilities had seen any judicial authority or undergone any judicial process.

54. In Libya, some women were reportedly coerced into marriage with individuals allegedly affiliated with Da'esh, while others were compelled to accompany their husbands in travelling to Libya from abroad. During a visit to Judaydah women's detention centre in Tripoli, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) observed that women detained for their alleged association with Da'esh were being held with no judicial process, in dire conditions, and had reportedly been subjected to torture and ill-treatment. Both entities advocated for their transfer to non-prison environments and for the respect and protection of their human rights.

2. Repatriation efforts

55. The United Nations, through its Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees, continued to support Member States, upon their request, in developing responses to protect, repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate and, where applicable, prosecute their returning nationals. Between July and December, seven Member States (Azerbaijan, Canada, France, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) repatriated at least 2,385 individuals from the Syrian Arab Republic, including 34 Russian children, 274 Kyrgyz nationals and 1,994 Iraqi nationals.

56. Significant steps were taken to strengthen coordination to support the return of Iraqi nationals. The United Nations and the Government of Iraq, through the technical working group for the implementation of the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees, co-chaired by the Government of Iraq, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF, developed a plan to strengthen programme coherence and raise adequate resources. A steering committee was established to bolster coordination and governance among United Nations entities in Iraq. The Office of Counter-Terrorism established a new programme office in Baghdad to coordinate assistance on security and accountability, and the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) appointed two investigators to liaise with Iraqi investigative judges.

3. Prosecution and investigation

57. The United Nations continued to focus on prosecution and investigation as part of efforts to address crimes perpetrated by Da'esh. During the reporting period, three new States requested assistance from UNITAD to support national proceedings for prosecuting Da'esh members for international crimes. UNITAD continued to support the development of an Iraqi legal framework to prosecute international crimes

committed by Da'esh by providing advice on draft legislation and organizing an awareness-raising session for members of the parliament on the interplay between international and domestic criminal law.

58. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and OHCHR continued to engage with the judiciary in Iraq on upholding the right to a fair trial in criminal cases, including by monitoring the trials of 97 detainees suspected of terrorism offences who had been transferred from detention facilities in the Syrian Arab Republic to Iraq between July and October. Most of those individuals were prosecuted and convicted under broad provisions of the Iraqi anti-terrorist law rather than for specific acts of violence.

59. Collecting, preserving and storing evidence remained a core part of efforts to ensure accountability for crimes by Da'esh. UNITAD continued to enrich and digitize its evidence holdings on alleged crimes by Da'esh and presented Iraqi authorities an investigative report on one instance of use of chemical weapons by Da'esh members in Iraq. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) delivered technical assistance and capacity-building training to support national authorities in Mozambique, the Niger and Nigeria on effectively obtaining and managing evidence, including battlefield evidence, for terrorism-related investigations. UNODC organized a cross-regional meeting for South and South-East Asia on preserving and requesting electronic evidence across borders, resulting in the sharing of good practices and lessons learned.

60. The United Nations increased its efforts to promote and support the investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence linked to terrorism. In October, an expert deployed to UNITAD by the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict assisted Iraqi institutions with improving their technical and operational capacity to address conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. In December, UNITAD published a report presenting legal findings on sexual violence against women and girls committed by Da'esh in Iraq.⁵ UNODC and the United Nations Population Fund trained 100 criminal justice officers in Nigeria on the investigation of sexual and gender-based violence offences.

61. In November, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, with the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations, launched a report⁶ highlighting challenges in holding perpetrators accountable for sexual and gender-based crimes and the need for gender-responsive and victim-centred approaches. In December, the Executive Directorate issued its report entitled "Trends tracker on human rights",⁷ in which it was demonstrated that the number of recommendations made by the Counter-Terrorism Committee to States on prosecuting sexual and gender-based violence linked to terrorism had increased.

4. Rehabilitation and reintegration

62. The United Nations continued to support Member States in providing comprehensive, human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive programmes to address the challenges in rehabilitating and reintegrating returning nationals. IOM, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF arranged visits by Iraqi authorities to camps and organized awareness-raising sessions on the

⁵ UNITAD, "Report on sexual violence against women and girls committed by ISIL in Iraq", 3 December 2023.

⁶ United Nations, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, *Towards Meaningful Accountability for Sexual and Gender-based Violence Linked to Terrorism* (2023).

⁷ Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, "Trends tracker on human rights: recommendations by the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee following assessment visits to Member States (2017–2023)", December 2023

applicable law, counselling and representation in court for securing various legal documents for returnees. UNICEF provided community-based reintegration support to child returnees, including health, legal and education services.

63. Mental health challenges faced by returnees remained an important component of United Nations-supported reintegration efforts. With a view to promoting mental health and psychosocial support in the rehabilitation and reintegration of children with family ties to terrorist groups, specialized training was delivered to social workers and psychologists by UNODC in Indonesia and by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Morocco and Tajikistan.

B. International and regional cooperation

64. Promoting multilateral cooperation, including with international and regional organizations, to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism remained a priority for the United Nations. The Global Terrorism Threats Facility, launched in 2022 by the European Union and the United Nations and managed by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, started to deliver, upon request by Member States and on the basis of technical assistance needs identified by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, rapid and flexible capacity-building support on detecting, preventing, countering, responding to and investigating terrorist threats, including to Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Togo and Uganda.

65. As part of a joint project, UNODC and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) held a meeting in October to strengthen cooperation and increase communication and information exchange among national authorities in Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Togo with a view to resolving complex cases of terrorism and organized crime. Under the same project, three national workshops were held in Algeria, Benin and Mali between October and November to identify specific steps to increase collaboration and improve national-level coordination.

C. Coordination and coherence across United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities

66. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact continued to serve as an important vehicle for the coordination and coherence of counter-terrorism efforts by the United Nations. Through its digital platform, which currently connects more than 1,000 focal points from 137 Member States, 14 regional organizations and all of its 46 entities, the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact continued to promote, coordinate and share expertise, knowledge and best practices to address terrorism. In November, following an assessment visit conducted by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, efforts were initiated to develop a coordinated and prioritized United Nations technical assistance plan for Benin in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator's Office and under the auspices of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact.

D. Supporting the victims of Da'esh

67. Survivor-centred approaches remained central to United Nations efforts to support victims and survivors of violence committed by Da'esh, including sexual and gender-based violence. In August, in observance of the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, the Office of Counter-Terrorism organized a high-level event and launched an exhibition at United Nations

Headquarters to raise awareness about the long-lasting impact of terrorism. The Office also launched a virtual gallery⁸ to pay tribute to the victims of terrorism and disseminate their testimonies globally. With a view to empowering victims of terrorism in their communities and strengthening resilience, UNODC conducted an awareness-raising campaign with the Lebanese Association for Victims of Terrorism, which reached more than 23 million people across the Middle East and North Africa.

68. In Iraq, the United Nations continued to support the Government, including in the Kurdistan Region, in protecting and promoting the rights of survivors of crimes committed by Da'esh. IOM continued to support the Government in implementing the Law on Support to Female Yazidi Survivors through advocacy, funding and technical support. In October, IOM and Nadia's Initiative, an international non-governmental organization, inaugurated the Yazidi Genocide Memorial at the site in northern Iraq where Da'esh murdered and more than 100 women and children and buried them in a mass grave in 2014.

69. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF provided mental health and psychosocial support services to more than 430 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by a Da'esh affiliate and to more than 10,600 children and caregivers. In Cameroon, UNICEF assisted government partners in implementing positive parenting activities, including activities aimed at preventing sexual and gender-based violence committed by Da'esh, such as child marriage, and in providing mental health and psychosocial support services for children, including those participating in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

E. Border management and law enforcement

70. The United Nations continued to strengthen various capacities of Member States in border management and law enforcement. In September, IOM, UNODC, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) launched the Integrated Border Stability Mechanism, a coordination platform for strengthening border governance and security cooperation among Governments in West Africa and facilitating the management of internationally funded projects in the region. Under the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism with a view to preventing the international movement of terrorist groups and individuals, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate conducted national consultations in Algeria, Fiji, Kenya, Paraguay and Samoa to assess gaps and identify technical assistance needs for the implementation of advance passenger information and passenger name record systems.

71. The Global Programme to Counter Terrorist Attacks against Vulnerable Targets, led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in collaboration with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and UNICRI and in consultation with INTERPOL, strengthened the capacities of more than 100 national officials from Indonesia, Kenya, Tajikistan and Tunisia in protecting critical infrastructure and public places (soft targets) from terrorist attacks. Under the programme, a national action plan was launched for the Government of Tajikistan and a road map was submitted to the Government of Kenya with recommendations for strengthening security measures to protect soft targets from terrorist attacks.

72. Under the global programme on countering terrorist use of weapons led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, regional workshops were held in Kenya in September

⁸ See the website for the International Day of Victims of Terrorism 2023 (www.un.org/counterterrorism/2023-terrorism-victims-day).

and October with a view to strengthening the capacity of Member States to counter the acquisition and use by terrorists of small arms and light weapons, improvised explosive devices and unmanned aircraft systems and to prevent terrorists from using weapons of mass destruction and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear material and weapons. In December, a national workshop was held in Kyrgyzstan, at which the interlinkages between illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, transnational organized crime and terrorism were addressed. More than 120 participants from 20 Member States benefited from these workshops. UNODC held simulation exercises with relevant security branches in Kenya, Seychelles and Uganda to detect, prevent and disrupt the trafficking of dual-use items for terrorist purposes.

73. In October, the Office of Counter-Terrorism launched a second global project, implemented with UNODC, to support the universalization and effective implementation of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. As part of the project, in December, the Office of Counter-Terrorism trained more than 30 officials from the defence sector, law enforcement agencies, nuclear regulatory authorities and security institutions in Nigeria on critical infrastructure protection, with a focus on radiological and nuclear facilities.

74. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, through its Global Fusion Cells Programme, continued to provide technical assistance to Member States to develop and establish national inter-agency counter-terrorism coordination mechanisms or fusion centres. Between September and November, 50 law enforcement and security officials from 17 countries in Africa were trained on analysis and threat assessment, ethical decision-making and open-source investigation. UNODC supported the Regional Counter-Terrorism Centre of Excellence of the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization in developing and publishing a threat perception analysis of law enforcement efforts to counter foreign terrorist fighters in East Africa.

F. Countering the financing of terrorism

75. United Nations entities continued to support, including through analysis, efforts to curtail the ability of Da'esh and its affiliates to generate and access resources for terrorism purposes. In December, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate issued an analytical brief on strengthening public-private partnerships to counter the financing of terrorism.⁹

76. The United Nations continued to cooperate with the Financial Action Task Force and its Global Network, including through the participation of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team in expert meetings and projects on terrorism financing and crowdfunding, protecting the non-profit organization sector from terrorism-financing abuse and regular updates on Da'esh financing. On 16 November and 21 December, the Counter-Terrorism Committee was briefed by the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America and the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, respectively, on their activities.

77. UNODC provided legal and operational support to Member States in countering the financing of terrorism, including through the drafting of mutual legal assistance requests in Burkina Faso and the Niger and the gathering of intelligence in terrorism financing-related investigations in Ghana. Following technical support provided by UNODC in implementing domestic and international sanctions regimes and

⁹ United Nations, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, "Establishing effective public-private partnerships on countering the financing of terrorism", December 2023.

preventing the financing of terrorism, the Government of Mozambique published a national sanctions list in July with 43 individuals and three groups.

78. In September, in cooperation with the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team and the national authorities in Morocco, UNODC held a regional workshop to train officials from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Morocco in implementing sanctions measures pursuant to Security Council resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities. In consultation with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, UNODC developed a search tool for financial institutions and reporting entities to apply measures and actions in line with applicable legislation related to assets freezing, including by persons or entities designated under sanctions regimes established by the Security Council, including resolution [1267 \(1999\)](#).

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

79. United Nations entities continued to assist Member States in addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities provided by new technologies to prevent and counter terrorism in a human rights-compliant manner. Between September and November, the Office of Counter-Terrorism held, as part of its joint initiative on cybersecurity and new technologies with the European Union and INTERPOL, five regional workshops in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kenya, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago and Uzbekistan aimed at strengthening the capacities and raising the awareness of more than 130 law enforcement officials from 29 Member States on policy and operational issues with a view to countering the use of new technologies for terrorist purposes. Through training workshops in Albania, Kenya, the Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania, the Office strengthened the capacity of more than 75 officials from 24 Member States in Africa, Europe and South-East Asia on the use of facial recognition and open-source investigation techniques in the investigation of terrorist offences. At the Regional Cybersecurity Week held in the United Arab Emirates in October, the Office delivered an interactive open-source investigation training and conducted a drill on responding to a simulated terrorism-enabled cyberattack against critical infrastructure; both events were attended by 180 officials from 55 Member States.

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

80. With a view to designing and implementing effective counter-narratives and strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism, the United Nations continued to adopt a whole-of-society approach and promote cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. The Office of Counter-Terrorism continued to engage in dialogue with civil society, including through its Connect and Learn Platform, which hosts more than 5,900 users from Member States, international organizations and civil society. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children facilitated peer exchanges to share promising practices for the prevention and countering of online recruitment, hate speech and disinformation among Member States. UNODC supported the establishment of a network of youth-led civil society organizations working to prevent violent extremism and terrorism, which will serve as a forum for sharing good practices and building capacity.

81. United Nations entities developed guidance, knowledge and analytical products for designing effective strategies to prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism. As part of efforts to integrate context-specific gender perspectives in the design of initiatives to prevent violent extremism in Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, UNICRI published an analysis¹⁰ in which a direct correlation was found between key resilience factors against joining violent extremist groups and the needs and demands reported by women and men of local communities in those countries.

82. In July, UNDP launched a project to support authorities in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo in implementing initiatives to prevent violent extremism and strengthen the resilience of communities. Under the project, UNDP held training activities in Mali and Somalia for religious leaders, scholars and educators on the prevention of violent extremism. In Iraq, IOM provided grants to 50 civil society organizations to implement initiatives that identify and address drivers of violent extremism in conflict-affected communities, in line with plans of action adopted by the Government of Iraq on preventing violent extremism at the district and governorate levels.

83. As part of efforts to address the divisive and violent narratives of Da'esh, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continued to make progress in rehabilitating monuments and historic houses destroyed by Da'esh in Mosul, Iraq. During the reporting period, 75 historic houses were rehabilitated and handed over to their owners. Emphasizing youth and community involvement, UNESCO continued to provide training for heritage professionals and craftspeople, with a particular focus on women and young people, contributing to urban recovery, cultural heritage preservation, the regeneration of cultural life and employment in Mosul. UNESCO also continued to address illicit trafficking in cultural property in the Sahel region, support the rehabilitation of heritage in Mali and combat violent extremism through teacher development in Burkina Faso and the Niger.

IV. Observations

84. Da'esh remains a serious threat to international peace and security. Notwithstanding the steady progress by Member States in curtailing the group's operational capacities, including by inflicting leadership losses and curbing its finances, Da'esh and its affiliates remain capable of conducting attacks with significant civilian casualties and human suffering. I am concerned in particular about women and girls affected by sexual and gender-based violence committed by Da'esh in Iraq. The degraded military capabilities of Da'esh in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic have neither eliminated the risk of the group's resurgence nor prevented it from projecting a threat in the Middle East and beyond. I call upon Member States to continue to work together in their efforts to counter Da'esh and to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation.

85. I remain concerned about the threat of terrorism in parts of Africa, in particular West Africa and the Sahel, where the situation is deteriorating and becoming more complex. There is a risk of terrorist groups creating a vast area of instability, possibly stretching from Mali to border areas of Nigeria, should Da'esh affiliates continue to be afforded greater operational, financial and logistical autonomy. Terrorism often intertwines with ongoing conflicts in these areas, with Da'esh and affiliates exploiting and aggravating intercommunal tensions and local grievances, operating across national borders and rendering conflict resolution more difficult. In this regard, I

¹⁰ UNICRI, *Voices of Resilience: A Gender Needs Analysis on Preventing Violent Extremism in the Sahel* (2023).

welcome the unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution [2719 \(2023\)](#) on the financing of African Union peace support operations authorized by the Council as an important step in bolstering international efforts to address peace and security challenges in Africa. Moving forward, should the Council authorize, under the resolution, operations for deployment in contexts where designated terrorist groups operate, the United Nations will work with all relevant stakeholders to ensure full compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

86. I remain deeply concerned about the dire and tragic situation in camps and other facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. Individuals, mostly women and children, with alleged links to Da'esh and other terrorist groups continue to be held in the most precarious conditions, facing significant challenges relating to their human rights and access to humanitarian assistance. Despite notable progress in the past year, the overall pace of repatriation of these individuals remains slow. Such challenges are exploited by Da'esh, with serious implications for regional and international security. I reiterate my call for Member States with nationals in these facilities to consider the medium- and long-term implications of the situation and to significantly boost their efforts to facilitate the safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation of all those individuals, in line with the Member States' respective obligations under international law, including having the best interests of the child as a primary consideration.

87. The persistence of the threat posed by Da'esh despite the significant progress achieved as a result of counter-terrorism efforts highlights the limits of security-centred approaches. Addressing the threat requires comprehensive, multi-tiered and multi-stakeholder responses, including a primary focus on preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism. I encourage Member States to consider developing and adequately investing in national and regional prevention strategies that are aimed at addressing all forms of violence, centred on the rule of law and human rights and based on all-of-government and all-of-society approaches, as proposed in my policy brief on A New Agenda for Peace. While Member States retain the primary responsibility for countering terrorism, including through implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the United Nations remains committed to supporting their efforts in designing and implementing human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive programmes to address their counter-terrorism capacity gaps.