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Jehangir Khan will now share the view of the UN on this.

Jehangir Khan

I feel honoured to speak after such a distinguished panel of experts, and speaking on behalf of the UN, first of all, I would like to convey the very warm greetings of His Excellency the Secretary-General of the UN, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, who has participated in this forum in the past, and so it is an honour for the UN to be able to participate and to speak today on this very important subject. I would like to thank the Government of the State of Qatar for their very warm hospitality, which provides a lot of very warm support for our UN Counter-Terrorism Centre, and in fact it has just announced a very generous contribution to the Centre. This reflects the leadership of Qatar in fighting terrorism. I also want to thank the sponsors of this forum, in particular the French Institute of International Relations, for inviting us.

Distinguished friends and colleagues, why are we speaking about terrorism today? Let me start with the preface that the reason we are concerned about terrorism is that it has a human face. What is that human face? It is the face of the victim, who is too often forgotten in the wide intellectual policy debates that take place around the world. We should reflect that on this very day terrorist attacks occurred in Mali where people were killed, in Afghanistan where people were killed, and even over the past week in my own country, Pakistan, there was a huge attack. Almost every single day, individuals, men, women and especially children are being killed. Looking at what is happening in Syria, in Aleppo, or in Iraq, in Mosul, we have a duty and a responsibility not just to talk about terrorism, not just to hypothesise, but the time has come for action, and not just action. The time has come for unity in action.

There is a lot of rhetoric about terrorism and the manipulation of terrorism for many different reasons which I will not address here, but I wish to submit a number of propositions to you as friends who are concerned about terrorism. First of all, not only does terrorism have a human face, but it is also a phenomenon in which the primary victims today are Muslims, and the primary forces that are fighting against terrorism are indeed here in the Muslim world, here in the State of Qatar and around the world. We are all in it together, and at the UN there is one principle that we believe in, that terrorism and violent extremism have no religion, no faith, no ethnicity, no culture – it is purely evil and every society throughout history has experienced extremism and terrorism, so let us not malign any particular religion or any particular region of the world.

That is why I am saying that this is a call to unity and a call to action, and if we reflect today on the quality and nature of terrorism, it is an evolving phenomenon, a dynamic phenomenon, and it is at the epicentre of conflicts. We see, in fact, a vicious vortex developing today between protracted conflicts, the exploitation of those conflicts by terrorist groups, and the further proliferation of violent extremism around the world. Here is a very damning statistic. Today there are more than 30,000 foreign fighters coming from more than 100 countries – that tells us that terrorism is not located in one region, that terrorism is a global phenomenon, and that we are and have to be looking at this and taking a global approach to this spreading global disease.



Looking at what is happening in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Somalia or Afghanistan, the conflict has been going on for more than 30 years. So, distinguished friends, let us ask ourselves whether we are in a better place since 9/11 or in a worse place. I think you know the answer to that, when you see pitched battles going on in the second largest city of Syria, Aleppo, and the second largest city of Iraq, Mosul, which are cities of millions of people and where thousands of innocent civilians, children, women and men are dying.

The answer, if I say so, to the question whether we are worse off or better off since 9/11, is clear. The question is what we do about it. Looking at the response of the international community since 9/11, that response has been centred on one word, 'counter' – counter-terrorism, counter-extremism, counter-radicalisation. I submit to you that this word has been a response, we are reacting while the terrorists have the initiative, and that that reaction has been mostly a military, security response, and that clearly has its limits. Therefore, the Secretary-General of the UN, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, has worked over the last year to mobilise the whole UN system to present a new approach, and that approach is centred on one word, the antidote to the counter approach – it is the word 'prevention'.

It is common sense that we should be taking a preventative approach, but the time has come to mainstream the prevention approach, not to make it a lip service but to take action on it. Therefore, a few months ago the Secretary-General of the UN presented to the UN Assembly a UN global plan of action to prevent violent extremism, what we call PVE. This is because we see that insidious ideologies like those perpetrated by ISIS, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and many other groups, are fuelling terrorism, so the time has come for us to look upstream at the drivers of violent extremism, at the root causes. Here the Secretary-General has underlined the importance of a number of strategic priorities.

First of all, we need to look at our youth. Today, the world has 1.8 billion young people. It is the largest population of young people in the history of mankind. The 16- to 24-year-old demographic is the primary prey of terrorist groups such as Daesh, and we must look at how we engage with the youth, not negatively but positively. I submit to you that most young people are not ticking time bombs. They aspire to the very same things that all young people have, which is to pursue a dream, a dream to change the world, and we must respond to the call of young people today, because today they have a new Molotov cocktail which is carried by social media. Between the aspirations of youth and social media, they have the means to change the world, and that is why Daesh is ahead of us in targeting young people and mobilising them to create disorder in the world.

We are now looking at taking an inclusive approach. When we look at the youth we need to look at other aspects – gender, employment, skills development, engaging local communities – all of these are outlined in more than 70 recommendations that the Secretary-General has presented to the UN General Assembly, which resoundingly responded with a consensus resolution in July. The UN Counter-Terrorism Centre is now moving to work with governments around the world to look at how we can respond by promoting the development of regional and national plans of action to prevent violent extremism. Here I will tell you that we as the UN also have to be extremely humble in recognising that there is no clear pathway to defeating terrorism or mobilising the prevention of violent extremism. Every society, every country must have national ownership.

Even the most powerful countries in the world do not have a clear answer on how to deal with this, but what we may need to look at is our methodologies and our political approaches. Ultimately, terrorism is not a military problem, it is not a technical problem, but a political problem in the first instance. We must look at what political policies we, collectively, as an international community, and each government individually, are pursuing, because ultimately terrorism must have a political solution. Many of the countries where there is disorder and conflict are the places where terrorism spreads, so we must look at inclusive political solutions in which all groups, especially marginalised groups, those who feel disenfranchised, foremost of which are the youth, must feel that they can participate and contribute in a constructive way.



Let me just say that I would like to end where I started, at the point about victims. Why is the issue of victims important? Today we see children, babies, washed away in the seas of the Mediterranean, on the shores of Europe. We have a moral responsibility not to see children floating in the seas of the Mediterranean and others seas, and therefore we must look at our own actions before we look at the actions of others and see how we are contributing to the global effort. The UN stands ready to work with you to mobilise that global effort, and that is, in a very small way, why the UN Secretary-General has presented his plan of action. However, a plan by itself means nothing – it must have resonance and more importantly impact. Where does that impact matter? It matters in terms of victims. Why does it matter? We must ultimately prevent victims – that is what prevention is all about.

We must measure how we are doing in fighting terrorism by the number of victims that we are preventing, and if today the number of victims is growing exponentially, then we must look at our policies again and ask what we are doing.