



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Philippe KRIDELKA, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations

United Nations Security Council Open “Arria Formula” Meeting

“The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the international efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism”

New York, 16 June 2021

Mister President,

I would like to thank Tunisia and the cosponsors for organizing this meeting as well as Ms. Coninx, Mr. Brown and Mr. Eelco Kessels for their comprehensive briefing to the Security Council.

As the Secretary-General has underlined in his last report on the activities of the United Nations system in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, several trends have accelerated and new challenges have emerged in the field of terrorism due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through **social media** posts and propaganda leaflets, terrorist groups like ISIL, Al-Qaida and their affiliates have sought to use the virus to support their narratives. Like in other countries, we have also noticed in Belgium the **emergence of protest movements** which can take the form of violent demonstrations against COVID measures or threats against virologists. These have neither political nor ideological affiliation, but are directed against decisions taken by the government and constitute an important reservoir in which existing classical extremist ideologies can draw. The cyberspace is in this case again one of the first means used to spread fake news, misinformation, propaganda or conspiracy theories to which people become more receptive in times of crisis and uncertainty.

Technological developments of all kinds are forcing security services to adapt, innovate and develop their skills. Professional capacities should therefore be strengthened through appropriate courses and recruitments, but also thanks to cooperation between security agencies as well as with civil society. It is further important to raise awareness within all segments of society of what can be found on the internet and the need to remove hate speech or terrorist content online.

To address these issues, a clear legal and regulatory framework is needed. It must ensure the **respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms** like freedom of expression or the right to be heard and to have access to effective remedy. Yet, we have noted with concern during the pandemic that too many States have resorted to restrictions and emergency measures which had an impact on human rights, fundamental freedoms and civic space.

It is our firm conviction that human rights have to be our yardstick at all times. Security and human rights are not a trade-off. Rather, human rights compliant responses to terrorism are the cornerstone of effective and sustainable security policies.

Finally, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate Ms. Coninx and her team at the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (**CTED**) who managed to review and adapt their working methods during the pandemic in order to continue their activities in an efficient way. The continuation of the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) assessment visits is probably one of the best examples of these efforts. In this regard, Belgium is looking forward to being the subject of a hybrid visit by CTED next fall in order for the CTC to assess the implementation by my country of relevant Security Council resolutions in the field of counterterrorism.

Thank you.