CONCEPT NOTE

I. Rationale and background

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a persistent and transnational threat. The COVID-19 pandemic swept the whole world and affected all spheres of social life and economic activity in an unprecedented scale, causing fear, disruption and socio-economic grievances that terrorists continue to seek to exploit to advance their destructive agendas. The crisis phenomena in the economy and social life can aggravate inequality and create risks of exacerbation of various conflicts of a social, ethnic, religious and other nature. These and other challenges have a damaging impact on the lives and prospects of the younger generation and can create a fertile ground for the spread of violent extremism and terrorism. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms strengthens the trust between citizens and state institutions and that deprivation of human rights fuels a sense of alienation and exclusion that is often exploited by terrorist groups. In the context of the increasing security risk environment and the evolving global terrorism landscape, coupled with regional uncertainties, such as the situation in Afghanistan, it is necessary for the international community to join efforts more than ever before.

The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS), unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006 (A/RES/60/288), and its subsequent review resolutions, including the seventh review of the Strategy adopted in June 2021, provide a unique and comprehensive framework to strengthen national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism.
The adoption of the GCTS marked the first time that the UN Member States agreed on a common strategic framework on counter-terrorism. The GCTS is the first comprehensive, collective and internationally accepted institutional and legal framework aimed at taking action to combat terrorism. By endorsing the GCTS, States made it clear that terrorism is unacceptable in all its forms and manifestations and demonstrated the political will and commitment to take collective and individual measures to prevent and counter the phenomenon.

The GCTS is composed of four pillars, namely:

- Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism;
- Measures to prevent and combat terrorism;
- Measures to build states’ capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard;
- Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.

Central Asia was the first region where a comprehensive and integrated implementation of the GCTS was launched. In 2010, the Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), the predecessor of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), launched an initiative to assist countries in developing a plan of action to implement the GCTS in Central Asia in order to strengthen regional counter-terrorism cooperation and assist Central Asian countries to address and respond to emerging challenges of countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism in the region. With the support of UNRCCA and the CTITF, a Joint Plan of Action (JPoA) for the implementation of the GCTS in Central Asia was developed on the basis of multilateral consultations and consensus, which was adopted by the countries of the region on 30 November 2011, in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

At the ‘High-Level United Nations-Central Asian Dialogue on Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia’ in June 2017, during which Central Asian States adopted the Ashgabat Declaration on Countering Terrorism, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres noted, "Central Asian countries are leading by example in the joint implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy at the regional level." The Secretary-General added that the JPoA is the first of its kind in the world. The document, since its adoption, has been followed by the development of other regional strategic documents on counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism in different parts of the world, including South and Central Africa as well as the Middle East and North Africa.
Recognizing the leading role of the United Nations in the international efforts against terrorism, OSCE participating States, to which all five Central Asian states belong, are committed to the balanced implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The OSCE Consolidated Framework for the Fight against Terrorism, adopted in 2012, reiterates the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to the fight against terrorism and identifies strategic focus areas for OSCE counter-terrorism efforts. In addition, the OSCE participating States through the 2015 Belgrade Ministerial Council Declaration call for a holistic approach to preventing and countering violent extremism.

Year 2021 marked the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the GCTS and the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the JPoA on the implementation of the GCTS in Central Asia. It is therefore befitting for the United Nations and Central Asian States, and their international and regional partners to use this landmark momentum to convene a high-level international conference to discuss and assess the results of the counter-terrorism cooperation among Central Asian States within the framework of the implementation of the JPoA and to approve the updated version of the JPoA.

II. Goals and objectives of the Conference

- Summing up the results of 10 years of cooperation within the framework of the JPoA for Central Asia on the implementation of the GCTS;
- Discussion of current and emerging trends and prospects of regional and international cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism;
- Endorsement of the updated JPoA, which is based on the recommendations of the Central Asian States and the latest seventh review of the GCTS;
- Exchange of practical experiences on the implementation of the GCTS in the countries of Central Asia and in the world;
- Discussion of specific issues related to the process of countering terrorism and considering the ideological, organizational, legal, psychological and technical aspects of counter-terrorism as well as the issues that emerge in the implementation of the GCTS in the States of Central Asia;
- Showcasing the importance of gender and human rights aspects of the GCTS as both stand-alone and cross-cutting topics;
- Application of an integrated approach in countering terrorism based on the GCTS;
- Presentation of successful examples of regional policy in Central Asia in ensuring security and combating the threats of international terrorism, including the contribution of civil society organizations, think tanks and independent researchers;
- Raising awareness among the representatives of foreign countries about the efforts of the United Nations, Uzbekistan and other Central Asian States in the field of counter-terrorism.

III. Format, logistics and participants

**Organizers:** The Conference is co-organized by the Government of Uzbekistan, UNOCT, UNRCCA and OSCE, with the administrative and logistical support of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ISRS).

**Date and format:** The Conference will be held on 3-4 March 2022 as a hybrid event, (both in-person and online) to allow remote participants to participate and interact. If COVID-19 restrictions continue and prevent the Conference from being held in-person, then the Conference may be held entirely online.

**Venue of the event:** Tashkent (Congress hall of Tashkent City International Business Center).

**Working languages:** Russian and English.

**Participants:** Approximately 200 participants are expected to attend. They will include representatives from UN Member States, regional and international organizations, Counter-Terrorism Compact entities, representatives of the private sector and civil society. This number includes representation from the Uzbek side to include approximately 70 representatives from relevant government ministries and departments, as well as expert circles.

IV. Conference sessions

The Conference will consist of:

- Plenary session;
- Four sessions in the form of panel discussions (on the each of the four pillars of the GCTS);
- Concluding session.
V. Plenary session

A welcome address is expected on behalf of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev. A video message by the UN Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, is also planned.

At the opening ceremony, there will be opening remarks from Ms. Helga Maria Schmid, Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), as well as heads of delegations from Central Asian States.

The following persons may be invited to the plenary session:

- High-ranking representatives of the UN and other international organizations (in coordination with UNOCT, UNRCCA, OSCE);
- Heads of delegations from Central Asia States at the ministerial level and;
- Representatives of international and regional organizations, and academia, civil society and think tanks involved in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism.

The plenary session is expected to include:

- A presentation of the 10-year review of the implementation of the Strategy in Central Asia;
- Endorsement of the updated version of the JPoA;
- Adopt a Tashkent Declaration, which will reaffirm the commitment of Central Asian countries to cooperation within the framework of the new JPoA.

Breakout sessions (simultaneously, but two at a time)

The first session: “Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism”, with the participation of experts from state agencies, civil society and leading think tanks in Central Asia and around the world.

Issues to be discussed:

- the importance of the role of the diaspora and youth in preventing threats of violent extremism
• elimination of marginalization and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender and religion;
• implementing initiatives in the areas of education, sustainable development, social justice, including poverty reduction and social inclusion in order to reduce vulnerability to violent extremism and terrorist recruitment;
• strengthening inter-religious dialogue with religious leaders on issues related to preventing and countering violent extremism;
• developing partnerships with civil society, women organizations, academia, the media and the private sector to address the conditions conducive to terrorism and violent extremism.

Second session: “Preventing and countering terrorism”, with the participation of representatives of law enforcement, state agencies, civil society, private sector, academia and media.

Issues to be discussed:
• combating the financing of terrorism;
• strengthening the capacity of the security sector and law enforcement agencies in line with the international human rights law;
• increasing the understanding of the role of gender in preventing and countering terrorism and the need for gender-sensitive responses to terrorism.
• border management in the region;
• preventing and countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes;
• introduction and use of improved mechanisms of cooperation and coordination in the fight against terrorism;
• establishing the joint use of databases and analysis by regional cybersecurity organizations;
• increasing the resilience of young people to online propaganda and hate speech by developing critical thinking skills, as well as media and information literacy.

The third session: “Building states’ capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard” with the participation of representatives of donor countries and UNOCT, other UN entities, implementing partners and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities, regional and international organizations, civil society, academia, think tanks, the private sector (technology companies) and media representatives.
Issues to be considered:

- cooperation with UN specialized agencies, including the UNOCT, UNODC, UNICEF, UNRCCA, UNDP, as well as with the OSCE, the SCO RATS, the CIS ATC on combating terrorism;
- creation of institutional mechanisms for cooperation, including national structures, civil society organizations, the private sector (technology companies) and the media, including within the framework of public-private partnership;
- increasing the understanding of the role of gender in preventing and countering terrorism and the need for gender-sensitive responses to terrorism.
- introducing measures to prevent radicalization to violence and violent extremism in prisons in line with the international human rights law. Development of rehabilitation programs, involving psychologists, social and religious actors.

The fourth session: “Ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism” with the participation of the heads of delegations of Central Asian States, Counter-Terrorism Compact entities, academia, think tanks, the private sector (technology companies) and representatives of civil society.

Planned activities:

- analyze the measures taken to counter terrorism, in compliance with the international human rights law;
- discuss issues of strengthening the criminal justice system and ensuring access to justice, including with regard to fair trial, compliance with judicial procedural guarantees, anti-torture, procedures for the principles of extradition or prosecution, protection of victims and witnesses;
- ensuring the protection of the rights of women in counter-terrorism legislation as well as gender-sensitive approaches within all discussion points.
- consider the problems of ensuring the compliance of national, regional and international counter-terrorism regulations with international norms and standards in the field of human rights, humanitarian and refugee law;
- analyze the role of national human rights institutions and the ombudsperson in the protection of human rights in the context of countering terrorism;
- study the experience of Central Asian countries in repatriating citizens from zones of armed conflict, their further rehabilitation and reintegration;
- consider ensuring that foreign terrorist fighters are prosecuted and held accountable in accordance with international legal standards, including due process and fair trial guarantees;
• analyze the work with the public in order to reduce the stigmatization of returnees, to achieve broad public support for reintegration and rehabilitation.

Concluding session

• Endorsement of the JPoA for the implementation of the Strategy in Central Asia.
• Closing remarks by co-organizers.

VI. Expected results:

• Endorsement of the updated JPoA for the implementation of the Strategy and its coordination with all stakeholders, including representatives of Central Asian States and the UN.
• The signing of the Tashkent Declaration confirming the commitment of the Central Asian states to further cooperation within the framework of the new updated JPoA.

VII. Communications

A Joint communications plan will be developed to increase the visibility of the event in close collaboration with the co-organizers. The plan will cover communications activities that may include press statements, press releases, press conferences, social media, event page, branding and visual identity and presentation materials, media access and live streaming. It will also include the development of key messages and a list of questions and answers for the Conference.

Subject to approval by co-organizers, envisaged activities would include: a media briefing on the Conference outcomes and dissemination of the final Conference outcome document.

VIII. Cultural programme

It is also planned to organize a cultural programme, including (at the request of participants) a trip to Samarkand or Bukhara.
IX. Funding:

The costs associated with holding the Conference will be financed by Uzbekistan as well as co-organizing partners, including UNOCT, UNRCCA, and OSCE.

- Uzbekistan will provide the conference premises and logistical support, including technology (ZOOM platform).
- UNOCT will cover conference costs related to travel and DSA of regional and international experts and representatives of the civil society organizations.
- UNRCCA will cover conference costs related to travel and DSA of regional participants, representing the Governments of the Central Asia.
- OSCE will facilitate the participation of European experts and cover expenses for the interpretation, equipment, and catering.