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ADDRESS BY MR MIKE SMITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
UNITED NATIONS COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTORATE (UN CTED)

(Delivered at the Second Plenary Session held on March 6, 2008)

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- It is a great privilege and pleasure to be here at the Eighth Regular Session of CICTE. I want to address this morning a theme that I have heard throughout your deliberations yesterday, notably the issue of cooperation. And I do so because I am convinced that one of the fundamental lessons we have all learned in the CT field over the last few years is how critical cooperation, coordination and the sharing of information is to the successful implementation of counter-terrorism strategies.
- This is true nationally. The national police cannot be expected to be able to intercept and disrupt terrorist attacks without a regular flow of information from a dozen other government agencies. They also need the full cooperation of community groups.
- It is also most definitely true at the global level. We have seen unprecedented cooperation develop between countries and agencies across borders, in the years since the infamous attacks of 11 September 2001. This cooperation has occurred directly on a bilateral basis, as well indirectly through multilateral organisations and forums such as this.
- The cooperation has involved exchanging information on specific terrorist threats; it has involved exchanging ideas and experience on what counter-terrorism strategies work and what do not work; and it has involved assisting each other with training and technology.
- Now to call for cooperation or even to claim that it is happening is easy. To build it and maintain it is however incredibly difficult. It requires firstly a change of organisational or institutional culture. It requires us to admit that maybe we cannot do the job alone – to recognise that the threat is greater than any one agency or government can deal with on its own.
- Secondly it requires us to accept that other agencies or organisations have relevant competencies and may be better placed to undertake some aspect of counter-terrorism than we are.
- It demands that we recognise that the saying ‘information is power’ only applies if that information is shared in a timely fashion with the right people – not hoarded to give some imagined benefit only to one’s own organisation.
- And it requires an unsentimental assessment of our own agency’s capabilities and comparative advantage in the CT field.
- Now why am I saying all this? Well because we cannot just pay lip-service to idea of international cooperation and I fear perhaps in the past we have been guilty of that. If we are to be as effective as we should be in addressing the terrorism threat, we have to practice this daily.

- Coming to CTED just over three months ago, out of a national administration that had an active bilateral external cooperation program, I wanted to ensure that the UN was not simply trying to duplicate activities that were already going ahead successfully through bilateral or regional arrangements. I wanted to understand – and wanted the staff of CTED to understand – what the UN’s value-added in the counter-terrorism field was. Having established that, I felt sure it would be a lot easier to see what we should be concentrating on in our daily work.
- What is the special quality that the UN brings to counter-terrorism that no country or group of countries or regional organisations alone can bring?
- The answer to that question is that the UN, as the global political forum of the states that make up the international community of states, can articulate a position that is, if you like, a statement of the ‘world’s view’ on a particular issue. Now that can be an incredibly powerful tool, particularly if that statement has been adopted by a consensus of the member states of the UN.
- In the CT field, the UN, through a series of conventions, protocols and resolutions negotiated in its forums has unequivocally established a universal norm that terrorism is an outlaw crime that can never be justified and ought never be defended.
- Why is that so important? Because without a constant repetition of this truth, the propagandists for and inciters of terrorism would carry more weight and influence than they do. These people are ingenious at weaving current and historical events into a narrative that seeks to justify terrorism as a legitimate tactic to achieve their political goals. Without a strong and continuous counter-argument being put by the entire world community, I fear they would be even more successful than they are at muddying the waters of ordinary people’s understanding of what they are up to.
- It seems to me that the CTC and CTED’s mandate and role and value-added, derive from this broader UN contribution. This enables us, using the authority of the Security Council, to promote and reiterate that global norm in our dialogue with member states.
- On the back of that, and drawing on the various elements of Resolution 1373 (2001), we can then remind them what the international community expects of each and every member of the United Nations to address the threat of terrorism.
- Now just telling countries what they need to do – lecturing at them – does not seem to me necessarily to be a very productive exercise. If we are to have a real impact, if we are to really be of use to member states, CTED needs to be able to help countries fix the problems in their implementation of 1373 obligations that we identify. But we do not have the resources, the mandate or the expertise to deliver such assistance.
- This is where regional, sub-regional and international technical organisations can make a major contribution and where their cooperation with CTED is so critical for us. This is why CTED has had such a positive and extended relationship over the years of its existence with CICTE, indeed it is why I am here today.
- The particular value that regional organisations, such as yours, brings for us is firstly, that they often establish their own regional norms that buttress and strengthen the global norms, such as you have done through the counter-terrorism conventions and the various resolutions adopted in hemispheric forums.

- Secondly they have knowledge of, and deep familiarity with, the countries of their region, (including their societies, their cultures and their systems of government).
- Thirdly they plug into a network of national officials throughout the region that enables them to spread important messages widely and effectively. And finally they normally have a presence on the ground in regional centres.
- There is no way that the CTC/CTED could ever remotely match what the regional organisations have in these areas. Nor should we try. As I said at the start, one of the key principles of cooperation and coordination in the CT field is to respect the competences of other organisations and to work with, and through these, wherever it makes sense.
- Nowhere is the importance of this better illustrated than in the American hemisphere and nowhere has CTED cooperated more closely to such good effect, as with CICTE on issues in your part of the world. That cooperation has involved, amongst other things
  - A dialogue on the evolving terrorist threat
  - Exchanges on best practice
  - Participation in visits to countries
  - Involvement in seminars and training activities
  - And reliance on CICTE to get universal messages through to the members of the region in a language that they understand.
- I should add that CTED is in the process of adjusting its working methods in ways that will make the cooperation with CICTE even more important. In the future we will be approaching our visits to countries in a more flexible, more tailored way, looking at each country on its merits and addressing those aspects of their CT response that seems to make the most sense. We will be wanting to know what countries are doing well as well as where they are having difficulties. Because part of our value-added is getting a global birds-eye view of how countries are implementing their CT strategies and then spreading the best practice across regions.
- Secondly we be paying more sustained attention to facilitating technical assistance. As I said earlier, if all we do is identify weaknesses but cannot help countries address those weaknesses, we are only doing half the job. In order to be able to do that, we will engage much more actively with bilateral and multilateral donors, including international and regional organisations with the necessary expertise, to broker the necessary technical assistance.
- And thirdly we will be conducting more active outreach to countries what we do and how we can contribute to their efforts to combat terrorism.
- In all of these areas, the opportunities, indeed the imperative for, expanding our cooperation with CICTE are obvious. Happily, as I have mentioned, our interaction and cooperation with you is extensive so what we will be doing is simply accelerating and expanding the various activities that we have already begun doing in the past. Some of the new or expanded areas where we can contemplate working together include:
  - Sharing information on shortfalls or gaps in the region that we each identify
  - Working together to coordinate and facilitate the provision of technical assistance

- Strengthening our joint work on identifying best practice
- Assisting each other in training opportunities.
  
- It is my intention to do all I can during my term as Executive Director, to facilitate and encourage that expansion in cooperation.
  
- Again it is my great pleasure to be here today and to listen to your discussions. Allow me in closing to wish you every success in your consultations this week and assure you of our continuing interest in and support for your important work.