

**Remarks by Alison August Treppel,  
Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism  
(CICTE) of the Organization of American States  
during the Virtual Open Briefing of the Counter-Terrorism Committee on  
“The threat of terrorism in Latin America and the Caribbean”**

December 14, 2020

Ambassador Ladeb,

Executive Director Coninx,

Distinguished Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives and delegates,

On behalf of the Organization of American States, let me express our sincere thanks for the invitation to participate in this important and timely briefing on “The threat of terrorism in Latin America and the Caribbean”.

Chair, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a particularly devastating impact on the Western Hemisphere. Now more than ever we need to be better prepared to prevent and respond to the challenges that could create the conditions ripe for terrorist exploitation.

It is publicly known that various non-state actors are present throughout the region, including Lebanese Hezbollah, but fortunately, any imminent threat of terrorism, perhaps relative to other regions in the world, remains relatively low. Nonetheless, consistent with our goal of ensuring that Latin America and the Caribbean has a higher degree of preparedness and resiliency, we believe there are 5 areas that demand our continued and focused attention:

**Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction**

First, our region must renew efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). As the pandemic has clearly demonstrated, an incident involving the introduction and potential spread of a pathogenic biological agent, whether by an actor intending harm to a target population or by naturally occurring means, has the potential to cause significant human, economic, and political harm. In light of that threat, and in line with UNSCR 1540 (2004), CICTE is working with its Member States to increase biosafety and biosecurity awareness, and also to strengthen effective national strategic trade control systems.

## **Cybersecurity**

Secondly, the cybersecurity threat landscape is evolving with our increased dependence on the Internet. Ransomware, phishing and doxxing are just a few of the threats that people and governments are facing during this pandemic, but they are not new. Hackers are adapting their tactics and messaging to this new reality, so protective measures are more necessary than ever. Despite good and important advances by governments in recent years, we need to continue to raise awareness at all levels of the many and evolving cyber threats affecting the region, strengthen policy frameworks, and build much greater capacity to detect threats and to mitigate the impact of an incident or attack, particularly against our critical infrastructure.

## **Terrorism finance**

Money laundering (ML) and terrorism financing (TF) are another significant and evolving challenge that needs to be addressed at both the national and regional levels. The adaptability of terrorist organizations, and the new threats posed by foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and small cell terror networks, requires authorities to more closely monitor fundraising through social media, new payment products and services, and the exploitation of natural resources.

Member States have made good progress towards complying with their international legal obligations, but implementation of international standards to counter terrorism financing remains uneven. We must continue to strengthen our region's capacities to prevent terrorism by detecting and eliminating terrorists' funding sources and by criminalizing the financing of their activities.

## **Border controls (air, land and sea)**

Third, while direct terrorist threats to many of our Member States may be low, their location within the hemisphere and the volume of trade and tourism they generate, could position these countries as indirect targets. The vulnerability increases if these countries lack the level of security, threat identification and crisis preparedness/response capacity that higher-threat countries have in place. By addressing the vulnerabilities susceptible to exploitation by terrorism and transnational organized crime, our region's air, land and sea borders can and must be more effectively protected.

## **Violent extremism**

And finally, the pandemic has also forced us to take a harder look at the issue of violent extremism. As the draft concept note for this meeting highlights, and as we were reminded throughout a series of virtual dialogues CICTE organized around this topic this year, our region currently has “low capacity to counter online radicalization and violent extremist propaganda conducive to terrorism”. As the reliance on the Internet increased opportunities for telework and tele-education around the globe, it also increased opportunities for the spread of misinformation and disinformation, and for online recruitment and radicalization. We therefore must increase our awareness and understanding of violent extremism and how it affects our region in particular.

### **Information sharing**

Chair, there is a common denominator among the five threats I have just identified: and that is the need for increased coordination, cooperation and information sharing. And this is perhaps the area that requires our greatest attention.

In response, CICTE is developing the Inter-American Network against Terrorism, a flagship initiative that responds to the needs expressed by OAS Member States to facilitate operational information sharing in real time to prevent and counter terrorism in the region. This platform, similar to the 24/7 Network established by the Council of Europe, will be fully operational at the beginning of 2021 and will facilitate contact between established national focal points so as to expedite the exchange of information around potential terrorist threats with the goal –and hope— of preventing incidents or attacks.

### **Closing Remarks**

Chair, next year will be the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. Many of us remember the attacks of that day as though it were just yesterday. Those events led not just to the creation of this UN committee, but also led OAS Member States to take collective regional action, by establishing a Secretariat to support the work of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism and also by approving the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism, the first and only regional legally binding instrument to prevent and counter terrorism. We continue to seek full ratification of the treaty, but more importantly seek wide and full implementation of its provisions, as well as those of the many related international instruments in place to guide our Member States in taking appropriate action in this area.

In conclusion, we firmly believe that cooperation and collaboration among all stakeholders –government, civil society and industry -- continues to be the most practical and strategic response to countering terrorism across the globe, during and after this pandemic. CICTE, under the Chairmanship of the Dominican Republic and Guyana, will continue to actively support global, regional and sub-regional efforts to prevent and counter terrorism, so that together we can contribute to a more peaceful and secure world.

Thank you.