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Ninth Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy 2026: Recommendations on Human Rights, Gender and Civil Society

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Introduction

The Ninth Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2026 is an opportunity to renew and refresh the international consensus on protecting human rights while countering terrorism, in view of developments since the Eighth Review (A/RES/77/298) in 2023. The Special Rapporteur presents the following suggestions for States to consider, building on the mandate's contributions to earlier reviews, and stands ready to provide further advice upon request. The Special Rapporteur is mandated by the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/60/288, Pillar IV, OP8) and Human Rights Council resolutions to support and advise States, liaise and dialogue with UN entities, and participate in the Global Counter-Terrorism Compact.

Recommendation 1: Maintain and strengthen commitments to human rights, gender and civil society
Existing language on human rights, gender and civil society in the Eighth Review (A/RES/77/298)[1] should be preserved as a baseline for the Ninth Review. Such references reflect the international consensus over time and it is important to ensure the continuity and stability of global human rights commitments. The Ninth Review should also seize fresh opportunities to strengthen human rights. Whereas the Eighth Review elaborately details counter-terrorism measures and terrorist threats, its references to human rights are comparatively sparse and often generalised. The Ninth Review should identify how particular counter-terrorism measures endanger specific human rights, for example in relation to new technologies (see below), border management, PCVE, incitement, administrative measures (see A/80/284),[2] and military operations. More concrete commitments are needed to strengthen gender analysis and gender equality and non-discrimination in State counter-terrorism activities and to prevent the instrumentalisation of women (see OP11).[3] The Ninth Review should also condemn grave State violations in countering terrorism that are not addressed in the Eighth Review, such as arbitrary deprivation of life, enforced disappearances, child recruitment, sexual and gender-based violence, and targeting of civil society.
Recommendation 2: Enhance implementation of Pillar IV – human rights and the rule of law
Pillar IV is not adequately implemented, institutionalized, or resourced in UN counter-terrorism, with human rights overshadowed by the law enforcement focus under Pillars II and III of the Global Strategy. Despite the Eighth Review's aspiration for balanced implementation (OPs 2 and 89), only 15% of paragraphs (18) in the resolution are devoted to Pillar IV.[4] In 2024, a paltry 1% of UNOCT's extrabudgetary funding supported human rights, gender and victims of terrorism. There are only a handful of dedicated human rights and gender staff in UNOCT and CTED, and even fewer in OHCHR, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, and the Ombudsperson to the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee. The UN liquidity crisis is undermining these limited capacities, while UN80 reforms pose further risks. Human rights are also not sufficiently mainstreamed in Pillars II and III. The Ninth Review is a chance to concretely pursue a balanced approach, so that human rights are "core business" and funded proportionately, including in UNOCT's programmes, as recommended by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluation in 2025.

Recommendation 3: Enhance implementation of Pillar I – conditions conducive to terrorism

Pillar I receives insufficient attention relative to its importance in preventing terrorism, addressed by only 11% of paragraphs (13) in the Eighth Review and dwarfed by Pillars II and III. The conditions conducive to terrorism under Pillar I[5] are essentially human rights concerns and are closely connected to Pillar IV. Despite their sensitivity, States and the UN must boldly confront, not neglect, these structural violations that can fuel terrorism. UN counter-terrorism efforts in these fields should also be more integrated into, and subordinate to, the wider UN mission to promote peace and security (including peacemaking and peacebuilding), human development and the Sustainable Development Goals, climate justice and human rights, rather than being an autonomous security space and instrumentalising, competing with, or undermining these wider UN goals (see A/77/345). Development and inclusion must be seen as "goals in themselves" (Pillar I, OP 6).

Recommendation 4: Mandate rigorous human rights due diligence

The Ninth Review should require States, regional organisations, the UN and the private sector to conduct rigorous human rights due diligence impact assessments during the design, implementation and monitoring of all counter-terrorism and PCVE activities, not limited to the security sector. These should identify, prevent and mitigate human rights risks and remediate violations. Measurable human rights and gender indicators, benchmarks and conditionalities should be built into activities. The UN and donors should refrain from providing technical assistance or capacity building which would equip States with new counter-terrorism powers, tools or technologies that would jeopardise human rights, including where the beneficiary lacks human rights protections, independent oversight, judicial safeguards, effective remedies and a rule of law culture, or is known to habitually abuse counter-terrorism laws. The Security Council should also seek expert, independent human rights assessments of proposed binding counter-terrorism resolutions.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen information transparency

The flow of public information about counter-terrorism activities should be enhanced by States, regional organisations and the UN. Transparency strengthens public confidence that counter-terrorism actors respect and protect human rights. For example, States should agree to mandatory publication of CTED country assessments; the UN should condition assistance for developing national and regional counter-terrorism and PCVE strategies on prior public consultation and the publication of strategies; and UN counter-terrorism budgeting, including conditionalities, should be fully and regularly disclosed and comprehensible.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen independent oversight and accountability of States

The lack of independent checks and balances on counter-terrorism activities facilitates rights violations. The Ninth Review should encourage States to strengthen independent oversight and accountability of counter-terrorism, including by reference to the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum's Brussels Memorandum on Good Practices for Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms in Counterterrorism and the Special Rapporteur's good practices on oversight of intelligence agencies (A/HRC/14/46). The role of regional organisations in protecting human rights should also be highlighted (see A/HRC/58/47 and A/79/324).

Recommendation 7: Strengthen independent oversight and accountability of the United Nations

The Special Rapporteur and civil society have long called for an independent and sufficiently empowered and funded human rights oversight office to monitor and evaluate UN counter-terrorism activities, to ensure they promote and comply with human rights and other key standards. Oversight should involve complementary internal and external mechanisms. Existing processes, including the OIOS, and self-reporting by UN entities and through the Global Compact and a unified results framework – proposed in 2023 but still not implemented – are insufficient.[6] An oversight mechanism could be a new body or augment an existing mandate such as the Ombudsperson or Special Rapporteur, as long as sufficient independence, powers and resources were guaranteed. It could review the UN's consistency with human rights in counter-terrorism, including the conduct of due diligence, policy development and standard setting, design and implementation of programmes, and civil society engagement, as well as handling complaints. Existing monitoring by the Human Rights Council, OHCHR and the Special Rapporteur must also be adequately supported (as recommended in Pillar IV, OPs 6–8, but not achieved in practice), as must the Ombudsperson.

Recommendation 8: Ensure assistance and remedies for victims of terrorism and counter-terrorism

The Global Strategy and the Eighth Review rightly emphasise the needs and rights of victims of terrorism. The Ninth Review should do more to operationalise assistance to victims, including by endorsing the comprehensive approach recommended in the UN Model Legislative Provisions to Support the Needs and Protect the Rights of Victims of Terrorism, and encouraging support for cross-border victims and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. There is also an urgent need for a more balanced approach by giving equal attention to victims of State violations while countering terrorism,[7] who receive little attention in the Strategy or Eighth Review. International standards on victims of terrorism acknowledge that all victims should be treated equally. State violations of human rights while countering terrorism are frequent and severe. The Ninth Review should categorically reject impunity and prioritise effective remedies and accountability, including for large scale violations in armed conflict or other emergency settings. It should empower all relevant UN entities to take stronger protection action. It should also urge the Security Council to proactively combat the instrumentalisation of its counter-terrorism resolutions to violate rights, to robustly prevent and suppress State violations, and to avoid using the veto power to facilitate impunity.

Recommendation 9: Prevent human rights violations from the abuse of new technologies

Attention to State and corporate abuses of new technologies while countering terrorism has been overshadowed by the focus on terrorist misuse of new technologies, including in the Eighth Review, Pact for the Future, Delhi Declaration, Abu Dhabi Guiding Principles and Security Council resolutions. Abuses have included targeting civil society, discriminatory profiling, violations of the rights to privacy and data protection, and flow-on violations of the rights to life, liberty and civil and political freedoms. The Ninth Review should take a balanced approach by combating the risks of State abuses of new technologies, including through mass surveillance, biometrics and facial recognition, spyware, traveller information, online content moderation, new financial technologies, drones, lethal autonomous weapons systems and artificial intelligence. The risks to specific rights should be recognised, and States should be urged to respect the requirements of legality, legitimate aim, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination. Human rights due diligence assessments should be mandated for States, business, and the UN, and consider the cumulative impacts of multiple technologies. States must effectively regulate new technologies and ensure remedies for violations. The Ninth Review should draw on human rights standards in relevant General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions and the work of UN human rights mechanisms.[8]

Recommendation 10: Ensure terrorist financing measures are risk-based and proportionate

The adverse human rights impacts of terrorist financing measures and sanctions are well known, including violations of the rights to freedom of association and expression and political participation, the targeting of civil society, over-regulation, de-risking and financial exclusion, and inadequate due process, judicial safeguards and effective remedies. The Eighth Review only partly confronts these concerns. To combat over-reach, the Ninth Review should: (1) urge stronger implementation, monitoring and remedies concerning the need for a risk-based, proportionate approach to regulating non-profit organisations (NPOs) (see OP62), as per FATF's revised Recommendation 8, recognising most NPOs pose little risk; (2) reaffirm FATF's revised Recommendation 1 and Guidance on financial inclusion; (3) reference guidance on respecting rights in countering terrorist financing, such as from the Global Compact and Special Rapporteur; (4) ensure measures to combat the terrorist misuse of financial technologies (as under the Algeria Guiding Principles) do not violate rights;[9] and (5) urge States to trigger FATF's procedure on unintended consequences.

Recommendation 11: Safeguard humanitarian action

The Ninth Review should reaffirm the permanent humanitarian exemption from sanctions in SC/RES/2761 in an operative paragraph (such as OP78), not merely in the preamble as currently. It should also call for stronger implementation, monitoring and remedies to ensure terrorist financing and other counter-terrorism measures (see SC/RES/2482) *do not affect* (not merely "take into account") exclusively humanitarian activities, including medical activities, that are carried out by impartial humanitarian actors in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law (mentioned in OP63, citing SC/RES/2462; see also OP113). There should accordingly be a humanitarian exemption also from terrorist criminal offences, including financing offences, as recommended by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Recommendation 12: Ensure effective regulation of the private sector
The UN has increasingly promoted private sector engagement in counter-terrorism, including through public-private partnerships and in the technology and travel sectors. Less attention has been given to ensuring that such private actors respect human rights, in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The UN must rigorously assess the human rights impacts of any UN activities that promote or engage with private sector actors in counter-terrorism. The Ninth Review should reiterate that business must conduct human rights due diligence of any counter-terrorism activities, but also recognise that laissez-faire industry self-regulation is not sufficient and that States have a duty to effectively regulate private sector involvement in counter-terrorism to ensure respect for human rights.
Recommendation 13: Rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees
The Global Strategy and Eighth Review resolution minimally call for respect for refugee law and raised concerns about arbitrary deprivation of nationality. Yet, counter-terrorism laws have been starkly abused in migration contexts. Counter-terrorism practices have violated *non-refoulement* and the right of asylum, the prohibitions on arbitrary expulsion, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance, freedom of movement (including the right to leave and re-enter one's State of nationality), the right of family unity and children's rights, and non-discrimination. States have also failed to protect and repatriate their nationals from arbitrary detention involving inhumane treatment, including sexual and gender-based violence. These violations of migrants' rights in the name of counter-terrorism demand a stronger collective response in the Ninth Review.
Recommendation 14: Protect civil society against reprisals and transnational repression
Counter-terrorism laws and narratives are too often misused as tools of reprisal and transnational repression against civil society, including for human rights advocacy and engaging with the UN. States, regional organisations and UN entities, including the Security Council and UN counter-terrorism bodies, must take stronger, more consistent action to prevent and suppress reprisals against civil society. The Ninth Review should endorse prevention and protection measures based on the UN Agenda for Protection 2024, the Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space 2020, and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders 1999 (A/RES/53/144).
Recommendation 15: Meaningfully engage diverse civil society actors in counter-terrorism
The Ninth Review should build on the Eighth Review by ensuring that States, regional organisations and UN entities adopt, publish and adequately resource best practice policies for engaging with independent civil society actors when designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating counter-terrorism activities. Such engagement advances human rights and the effectiveness of counter-terrorism, and the UN's wider commitments to civil society and its Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space. Engagement should be meaningful, geographically balanced, and involve diverse stakeholders. It should not be limited to those who partner with authorities on counter-terrorism, PCVE, victims or humanitarian action, but must include those focused on human rights protection, advocacy and accountability.
Recommendation 16: Reform of UN architecture and funding to enhance human rights
Any reforms to the UN counter-terrorism architecture must centre human rights, including by mainstreaming them in the work of all UN entities; rebalancing activities under the Strategy's four pillars; ensuring UNOCT refocuses on coordinating the Global Compact and not competing in capacity building with better placed UN entities (including in human rights, gender, rule of law, victims and addressing conditions conducive to terrorism), as recommended by the OIOS evaluation; and strengthening human rights and gender staffing and resources in other relevant UN entities. In areas central to their mandates, the specialised UN entities within the Compact must retain the lead on human rights and protection issues,[10] and the Global Compact Working Groups, its Secretariat and UNOCT should support them. States should increase regular budget funding of UN counter-terrorism, to reduce the neglect of human rights stemming from extrabudgetary donor preferences and ensure that the UN can pursue an objectively balanced approach across all pillars.

Recommendation 17: Define "terrorism", review "violent extremism" and avoid "extremism"
State UN counter-terrorism activities may stimulate or enable human rights violations, and impede effective counter-terrorism, as long as there are no agreed, right-respecting international definitions of terrorism and violent extremism. Many States, the Secretary-General, the Special Rapporteur and civil society and have long urged agreement on definition. In the interim, States and the UN should be guided by best practice international standards that are consistent with human rights, as reflected in the Special Rapporteur's model definition (A/HRC/16/51, paras. 26-28), Security Council resolution 1566 (2004), and OHCHR guidance, with exceptions for protest in a democratic society, humanitarian activities by impartial organisations, and the activities of armed forces in armed conflict governed by humanitarian law (see here at paras. 15-17). The Ninth Review should also encourage review of the Secretary-General's 2015 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism to examine whether it, and the undefined terminology of "violent extremism", remain fit for purpose and human rights compliant. It should reject any operative use of the term "extremism" without the qualifier "violent"; discourage conflating organised crime and racial and religious hate crimes with terrorism; and refrain from addressing any "new threats" in ways that risk new assaults on human rights.

Website: https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-terrorism.

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Notes

[1] E.g. PPs 12, 19, 26, 27, 31, 43, 44 and OPs 8–11, 63, 79, 89, 96, 101, 105-116 and 117–121.
[2] Such as restrictive orders, terrorist listings and sanctions, security detention, and coercive PCVE interventions.
[3] Including by reference to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and relevant UN resolutions (e.g. A/RES/64/168 and SC/RES/2242); stronger efforts to prevent, suppress and remedy sexual and gender-based violence; greater support for UN Women; addressing gender in relation to the conditions conducive to terrorism; and acknowledging gendered harms to men and boys and gender diverse persons.
[4] Whereas 44% of paragraphs (54) address Pillar II and 20% concern Pillar III (24 paragraphs) – or 70% on Pillars II and III – and 11% of paragraphs (13) address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.
[5] Namely, prolonged unresolved conflicts, dehumanization of victims, lack of the rule of law, violations of human rights, discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and lack of good governance.
[6] The OIOS covers the whole UN and is not dedicated to counter-terrorism and human rights, and its audits are too infrequent. Annual self-reporting by the Global Compact is valuable but not independent, nor is the proposed Unified Results Framework (Eighth Review, OP96), which has yet to become operational after almost three years. The Framework risks focusing on quantitative not qualitative impacts and not being adequately resourced. The Eighth Review's call for "internal advisory or monitoring and evaluation capacity" (OP89) on human rights, gender and the rule of law was a legacy provision from the Seventh Review and has since been defunct.
[7] These include victims of violations of international human rights law, international refugee law, international humanitarian law, international criminal law, the international law on the use of force and the international law of the sea.
[8] E.g. see A/RES/78/265 (2024) and A/RES/79/325 (2025) on artificial intelligence; A/RES/79/175 on the right to privacy in the digital age; A/HRC/59/11 on new and emerging digital technologies and human rights; A/HRC/58/23 on human rights defenders and new and emerging technologies; A/HRC/60/63 on new and emerging technologies in the military domain; relevant annual Human Rights Council and General Assembly resolutions on terrorism and human rights; relevant OHCHR reports; and the Special Rapporteur's reports on new technologies, including A/HRC/52/39.
[9] Including privacy, due process, civil and political freedoms, non-discrimination, the right to an adequate standard of living, and family rights.
[10] E.g. OHCHR, UN Women, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, and the Departments of Peace Operations and Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.