SPECIAL PROCEDURES
UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Ben Saul

Activities in 2025: Highlights

Annual Report to the Human Rights Council: "Protection of human rights by regional organizations while countering terrorism: civil society engagement, sanctions and military cooperation" (A/HRC/58/47), including interactive dialogue with 50 States and various civil society organisations, numerous side events (including to mark the mandate's 20th anniversary) and bilateral meetings.

Annual Report to the General Assembly: "Protecting Human Rights while using Administrative Measures to Counter Terrorism" (A/80/284), including interactive dialogue, numerous side events (including the launch of the mandate's artificial intelligence position paper) and bilateral meetings.

Country Visit Report to the Human Rights Council: Benin (A/HRC/58/47/Add.1).

Official Country Visit: Somalia, May 2025, with End of Mission Statement, news release and press conference.

Communications: 151 individual and legislative communications sent to States and other actors.

Other Significant Publications:

- Briefing Note: Israel's International Legal Obligations to Protect UNRWA from 'Terrorist' Activities and Armed Interference, June 2025;
- Briefing Note: UN80 Reforms to United Nations Counter-terrorism Activities – Strengthening Human Rights, Gender Equality, the Rule of Law and Prevention, August 2025;
- Principles on the Human Rights-Based Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Syrian Nationals from Detention in North-East Syria, September 2025;
- Position Paper on Protecting Human Rights while Using Artificial Intelligence to Counter Terrorism, December 2025;
- Recommendations on Human Rights, Gender and Civil Society for the Ninth Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, December 2025.

Amicus Interventions to Courts: European Court of Human Rights (Grand Chamber); High Court of England and Wales; Constitutional Court of Ecuador; and Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Advisory Opinion).

Events: Delivered remarks at over 80 high-level and other events.

News releases and statements: Issued 105 public statements

Media interviews: Hundreds of appearances

Academic Visits: Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, Denmark, Switzerland, United States, and United Kingdom.

Other Activities: Numerous bilateral meetings with State representatives in Geneva, New York and capitals; and consultations with many civil society groups worldwide.

Detailed List of Activities in 2025

Country Visit to Somalia

The Special Rapporteur undertook a country visit to Somalia (10 to 20 May 2025), publishing an end -of-mission statement with preliminary findings and recommendations[1] and a news release[2] and held a press conference in Mogadishu.[3] The final report will be presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2026. He provided briefings on his findings to diplomatic missions and stakeholders, including the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) and other United Nations entities. . In preparation for Somalia, he completed the United Nations Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments (SSAFE) and Individual First Aid Kit (IFAK) courses in Copenhagen.

Academic Visits

The Special Rapporteur undertook a regionally-focused academic visit to Ecuador, Peru, Argentina and the United States (1–16 September 2025) primarily to examine legal links being drawn between organised crime and terrorism. During the mission, he engaged with civil society organisations and universities (including the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Quito, the University of Lanús in Buenos Aires and the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru), professional associations, State representatives, and UN country teams. The series of academic engagements concluded with an invitation from the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru to participate as keynote speaker in the Annual Conference of the Association of Human Rights Institutes held on 12–14 September under the theme "Protecting Human Rights in the Context of the Global Expansion of Organised Crime." In Denmark, Switzerland and the United States, the Special Rapporteur met with a range of Government and United Nations officials and civil society representatives, including delivering remarks to the European Union Working Party on Terrorism (International Aspects) (COTER) and at Columbia University in New York.

Interventions / Amicus Briefs in Courts

- European Court of Human Rights (Grand Chamber), third-party intervention in *Yasak v. Türkiye* (Application No. 17389/20), April 2025: concerning legality and foreseeability in relation to the proscription of organizations as terrorist
- High Court of England and Wales, third party intervention in *Ammori v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2025] EWHC 1708 (Admin) and judicial review, July-November 2025: concerning the proscription as terrorist of the "direct action" protest group Palestine Action
- Constitutional Court of Ecuador, Amicus Brief, September 2025: Organic Intelligence Law
- Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Request for an Advisory Opinion on Democracy and Its Protection Before the Inter-American Human Rights System, November 2025: endorsed the Written Observations of the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers

Other Significant Publications

- Briefing Note: Israel's International Legal Obligations to Protect UNRWA from 'Terrorist' Activities and Armed Interference, June 2025
- Briefing Note: UN80 Reforms to United Nations Counter-terrorism Activities - Strengthening Human Rights, Gender Equality, the Rule of Law and Prevention, August 2025
- Principles on the Human Rights-Based Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Syrian Nationals from Detention in North-East Syria, September 2025

[1] https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/terrorism/sr/statements/20250521-eom-somalia-sr-terrorism-en.pdf.
[2] https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/05/un-expert-urges-international-community-not-leave-somalia-behind.
[3] https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d339/d3399392.

- Position Paper on Protecting Human Rights while Using Artificial Intelligence to Counter Terrorism, December 2025
- Recommendations for the Ninth Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, December 2025

The Special Rapporteur also published legal blogs on various issues:

- "The Council of Europe's Proposed Definition of Terrorism", EJIL: Talk! The Blog of the European Journal of International Law, 18 February 2025
- Australia's Compensation Scheme for War Crimes in Afghanistan, Articles of War – Lieber Institute West Point, 14 March 2025
- "Gaza-related amendments to Israel's "Unlawful Combatants Law", Opinio Juris, 8 April 2025
- "Boycott, Divestment, Sanction as an "Extremist Threat": German Intelligence Overreaches and Threatens Fundamental Rights", Symposium on "Knowledge Under Occupation: Academic Freedom and Palestine on the Global Stage", Völkerrechtsblog in collaboration with Opinio Juris, 8 September 2025
- "The United States' Dirty War on "Narco-terrorism", Just Security, 22 September 2025

Remarks at High-Level Events[4]

- "The Pact for the Future and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact", Eleventh Meeting of the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Committee, 11 February 2025
- G7 Kananaskis Dialogue on Transnational Repression, "Turning Collective Experiences into Actionable Solutions", Ottawa, 26 February 2025. Remarks of the Special Rapporteur: "The Misuse of Counter-terrorism Laws and Narratives to Transnationally Repress Civil Society".
- UNOCT Ambassadorial-level Briefing to Member States on Key United Nations Counter-terrorism Activities and Achievements in 2024, New York, 4 March 2025. Remarks of the Special Rapporteur: "Highlights of the Special Rapporteur in 2024".
- UNOCT – Global Sports Programme and the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations, Securing the Legacy: Debriefing from Paris 2024 for Future Major Sporting Events, New York, 5 March 2025. Remarks of the Special Rapporteur (published but not delivered): "Human Rights Lessons from the Paris Olympics".
- Presentation of the Special Rapporteur's annual report to the Human Rights Council, 58th Session, Geneva, 11 March 2025.
- Conference on National and Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategies, Malta, 12-13 March 2025, Co-hosted by the Government of Malta and CTED. Remarks of the Special Rapporteur: "Strengthening Human Rights in the Proposed Valetta Principles on National and Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategies".
- Second Roundtable of Counter-Terrorism, Centres of Excellence, The Impact of New Technologies on Countering the Financing of Terrorism, Riyadh, 29-30 April 2025. Remarks of the Special Rapporteur: "Regulating New Payment Technologies to Prevent Adverse Human Rights Impacts".
- International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law and CTED, Strengthening the Oversight and Accountability of National Security Agencies in South and South-East Asian countries, Jakarta, 5-6 May 2025. Remarks of the Special Rapporteur: "The Role of International and Regional Human Rights Mechanisms".
- Networked Multilateralism – Strengthening Partnerships: A Rule of Law and Human Rights-Based Approach to Counter-Terrorism in Support of Peacebuilding, Hosted by Austria, DPPA and UNOCT, Vienna, 4-5 June 2025. Remarks of the Special Rapporteur: "Reconciling Human Rights and Security Responses to Terrorism".
- United Nations Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Retreat, Strengthening Partnerships between Regional Organizations and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, New York,

[4] Many remarks are available on the mandate website: https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-terrorism.

25 June 2025. Remarks of the Special Rapporteur: “Embedding Human Rights in Cooperation between the United Nations Global Compact and Regional Organizations”.

- “Education as a tool to prevent violent extremism and empower victims”, Inter-Parliamentary Union High-level Webinar: International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, 21 August 2025
- United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, Quarterly Briefing to Member States, New York, 8 September 2025
- “From Bogotá to Valletta: Charting the Path Forward for Effective Counter-Terrorism Strategies”, General Assembly High-Level Week, side event hosted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism of Malta, 23 September 2025
- New Technologies and Parliamentarians: The Role of Parliamentarians in the Regulation and Prevention of the Misuse of Spyware, High-level Side-Event, UN HQ NY, Organized by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), with the support of the PAM Centre for Global Studies (CGS), and in coordination with the CTED of the United Nations Security Council, 24 September 2025,
- High-Level International Conference on the Repatriation of Persons from Al-Hol, Surrounding Camps and Places of Detention, United Nations Secretariat, New York, 26 September 2025
- “Definition of Terrorism”, The Global Parliamentary Conference on Counter-Terrorism and Prevention of Violent Extremism, hosted by UNOCT and the Shura Council of the State of Qatar, 7 October 2025
- Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, Plenary Session 4: Rule of Law I, Protection of Human Rights while Combatting Terrorism, hosted by the OSCE 2025 Finnish Chairperson, with support from ODIHR, 9 October 2025
- Presentation of the Special Rapporteur’s annual report to the Third Committee of the General Assembly, “Protecting Human Rights while using Administrative Measures to Counter Terrorism”, and interactive dialogue, 22 October 2025
- “Understanding the Lives of the Women, Men and Children of Al-Hol”, High-Level event hosted by UN Women, 22 October 2025
- “The Global Counterterrorism Architecture”, European Union Working Party on Terrorism (International Aspects) (COTER), Informal Meeting, Copenhagen, hosted by the Danish EU Presidency, 27 October 2025
- “The Gaza Peace Plan and International Law”, Special Briefing on “Safeguarding Human Rights, Ensuring Accountability and Ending the Unlawful Occupation of Palestine”, United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, New York, 30 October 2025
- Launch Event for the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum Brussels Memorandum on Good Practices for Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms in Counterterrorism, hosted by the European External Action Service, Brussels, 10 December 2025

Other Remarks

- “The Gaza Conflict and International Law”, University of Ulster Seminar, 12 February 2025
- Asymmetrical Haircuts podcast, February 2025
- “The Abuse of Counter-Terrorism: Trends in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)”, Side Event, Human Rights Council 58th Session, Hosted by MENA Rights Group, Geneva, 10 March 2025
- “Preventing and Suppressing Nuclear Terrorism while Respecting Human Rights”, High-level Side Event, Human Rights Council, 58th Session, hosted by UNOCT and UNODC with the support of the European Union, Geneva, 12 March 2025
- Press Conference on Gaza, Palais des Nations, Geneva, 12 March 2025
- “The Definition of Terrorism”, hosted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, Geneva, 12 March 2025
- “More Rights, Less Terror: Marking the 20th Anniversary of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism”,

Side Event, Human Rights Council 58th Session, hosted by the Permanent Mission of Mexico and the Special Rapporteur, 14 March 2025

- "The Role of Regional Organizations", Dialogue on Independent Civil Society Engagement in Counter Terrorism, hosted by the Global Center for Cooperative Security, International Service for Human Rights, Geneva, 13 March 2025
- Lecture on Protection of Civilians in Counter-Terrorism Contexts, Australian Civil-Military Centre, Civil-Military Police Course: Protection of Civilians, Canberra, 1 April 2025
- Training Webinar on United Nations Special Procedures, hosted by the Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) and the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors, Sydney, 3 April 2025
- Conference on "The Draft Comprehensive Convention against Terrorism: 25 Years Later", Allameh Tabatabaei University Faculty of Law and Political Science, 15 April 2025
- Lectures on Terrorism and International Law, Executive Master – Master of Advanced Studies in International Law in Armed Conflict, "Preventing and Combating Terrorism" course, with Professor Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 24-25 April 2025
- Conversation on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights, National Chengchi University, International College of Innovation, Taipei, 5 June 2025
- Briefing to a United Nations Resident Coordinators in Asia and the Pacific on the Human Rights Implications of the Cybercrime Convention, 31 July 2025
- "The Crime of Aggression: Its Nature and the Liability of Perpetrators", Iranian Association of Women's Studies, 6 August 2025
- "Definition of Terrorism", Launch of the Review of Australia's Defintion by Terrorism by Australia's Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, Australian National University, Canberra, 11 August 2025
- "The Role of United Nations Special Procedures", Seminar for the NSW Young Lawyers International Law Sub-Committee, Sydney, 12 August 2025
- "Proscription of Palestine Action; and UN80 Reforms", Rebel Justice podcast, 14 August 2025
- "International Sanctions; the Gaza Conflict", Just Cause podcast, 14 August 2025
- "Human Rights and the United Nations Counter-terrorism Agenda", Consultation with United Nations Entities by the Global Centre for Cooperative Security, New York, 18 August 2025
- "Definitional Debates and Current Challenges on Counter-terrorism and (Violent) Extremism", Keynote Lecture, Advanced Summer Programme on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and the Rule of Law, Asser Institute of the University of Amsterdam, in cooperation with the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 25 August 2025
- "UN80 Reforms, the Ninth Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and Independent Oversight of United Nations Counter-Terrorism Activities", Greentree Estate Retreat, New York, hosted by the Global Center on Cooperative Security, 9-11 September 2025
- "Protecting Human Rights from the Global Spread of Organised Crime", Conference of the Association of Human Rights Institutes (AHRI), Lima, 13 September 2025
- "The Financial Crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Safeguarding Liquidity and Stability", General Assembly High-Level Week, New York, co-hosted by Colombia, Charity and Security Network, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Oxfam International, and the UN NGO Working Group on Israel-Palestine, 17 September 2025
- "World on Fire: Is the 'Rules-based International Order' Disintegrating – and What Does it Mean for Australia?", International and Comparative Law Cluster, La Trobe University Law School, Melbourne, 18 September 2025
- "Palestinian Statehood – Necessary but Insufficient", Televised National Address to the National Press Club of Australia, Canberra, 1 October 2025

- Seminar on United Nations Special Procedures, University of Oslo, 8 October 2025
- "Genocide in Gaza", Sydney Law School Seminar, 9 October 2025
- Launch of the Special Rapporteur's Position Paper on Artificial Intelligence, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 20 October 2025
- Presentation on Mandate Activities to the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Compact Working Group on Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and the Rule of Law while Countering Terrorism and Supporting Victims of Terrorism, New York, 21 October 2025
- Press Conference, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 22 October 2025
- "The Definition of Terrorist Acts and International Human Rights Law", Side Event, New York, co-hosted by CTED, the Special Rapporteur, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 22 October 2025
- "The Role of United Nations Special Procedures", Seminar with the Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic, New York, 22 October 2025
- "More Rights, Less Terror: Marking the 20th Anniversary of the Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism", side event co-organized by Australia and Mexico, 23 October 2025
- Briefing on Mandate Activities for the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (OCT), 24 October 2025
- "Extrajudicial Killings in the context of the fight against terrorism in Africa", Panel Discussion, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Banjul, 24 October 2025
- Civil Society Briefing and Exchange, hosted by the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights & Counter-Terrorism, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 24 October 2025
- Civil society consultations on administrative measures, co-hosted by Charity & Security International, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 24 October 2025
- Briefing to staffers of the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary on the US' illegal military attacks on alleged "narco-terrorists", 24 October 2025
- "Every War is a War on Children: Children's Rights and Counter-terrorism", Doughty St Chambers London, Children's Rights Group Annual Lecture, 29 October 2025
- "Terrorism Proscription and the Rule of Law", Seminar at Doughty St Chambers, London, 30 October 2025
- "United Nations and Multilateral Efforts and Civil Society Engagement on Counterterrorism and Preventing and/or Countering Violent Extremism in South-East Asia: A Landscape Assessment", Launch and Discussion, Bangkok, 4 November 2025
- In conversation with Ms. Navi Pillay on global human rights challenges, Sydney Peace Prize Dinner, The University of Sydney, 5 November 2025
- "Current challenges in the international law on the use of force", New South Wales Bar Association International Law Committee Seminar, Sydney, 11 November 2025
- "Briefing on the Mandate's Work on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights and Counter-terrorism", United Nations B-Tech Project, B-Tech Community of Practice Dialogue, Geneva, 12 November 2025
- "International Law and Armed Conflict: Issues for the NSW Parliament", Sydney, co-hosted by the Australian National University Law School, International Commission of Jurists and Amnesty International, 18 November 2025
- "A Lawless Space: Foreign Men Detained in Northeastern Syria", Counter Extremism Project, 18 November 2025
- "Silencing Dissent in the Name of Fighting Terrorism: Administrative Measures as a Tool of Repression in the MENA Region", Webinar, hosted by MENA Rights Group, 20 November 2025
- "Regulating Artificial Intelligence in a Changing World: Oversight and Enforcement", Information Law and Policy Centre, Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, University of London, 21 November 2025

- International Conference on Governing Surveillance in the Counterterrorism Era: Legal Architectures and Global Perspectives, hosted by the Centre for Law as Protection at Deakin University, Melbourne, 24 November 2025
- Senior Executive Service Executive Development Programme, National Security College, Australian National University, 27 November 2025
- "Silenced Dissent: The Human Rights Situation in Algeria Today", hosted by SHOAA for Human Rights, London, 28 November 2025
- Civil society consultation on the MENA region, 27-30 November 2025
- "Briefing on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights and Counter-terrorism", United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact Working Group on Border Management and Law Enforcement relating to Counter-terrorism, Quarterly Meeting, New York, 2 December 2025
- Briefing on the US' illegal military strikes on "narco-terrorists", "The Weaponization of Counterterrorism: Human Rights in the Crosshairs", American Bar Association Webinar, 4 December 2025
- "The 'Narcoterrorism' Threat: Exploring Avenues to Uphold Human Rights amidst a New 'War on Drugs'", International Drug Policy Consortium, 9 December 2025

The mandate also attended various events, including UNOCT's Launch of the Victims of Terrorism Associations Network (VoTAN) in New York on 28 April 2025 and the Expert Meeting on the Rule of Law and Human Rights Aspects of Using Artificial Intelligence for Counter-Terrorism Purposes in Geneva on 8 May 2025 (hosted by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy in cooperation with Switzerland and CTED).

Inputs to Other Entities

The Special Rapporteur provided inputs to various processes and documents by other entities, including:

- OHCHR's Guidance Note on Defining "Terrorism" in National Legislation
- Multiple consultations on a unified results-based framework to measure the collective contributions of the United Nations to the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy
- OHCHR's consultation on the proposed human rights cluster under the Secretary-General's UN80 reforms
- UNOCT Training of Trainers' Manual on Gender Mainstreaming in Counter-Terrorism and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
- National Counter-Terrorism Strategy of Nigeria, through the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Working Group on National and Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategies
- Operational Guide on Crowd Management for Major Sporting Event Security of UNOCT's Global Sports Programme
- A United Nations country team proposal
- To a stakeholder for a thematic hearing of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on "The Situation of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the United States of America", 24 July 2025
- A meeting with Commissioners of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 31 July 2025
- Consultation with the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, 11 June 2025
- Consultation on the proposed human rights cluster under the Secretary-General's UN80 reforms, June 2025
- Policy advice on gender and intersectionality in counter-terrorism
- Consultation with UNODC
- Consultation with UNOCT on the Global Programme on Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
- Tajikistan Draft Counter-Terrorism Strategy, through the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, August 2025

- Consultation on UN Women proposed strategy/policy on counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism, August 2025
- Policy advice on engagement of civil society organisations in counter-terrorism
- Iraq's National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2026–2030), September 2025
- Secretary-General's Report on the Human Rights of Migrants, September 2025
- European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and the European External Action Service (EEAS), Review of the Complementarity of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum with other international organisations/platforms/actors in the field of counter-terrorism and preventing/countering violent extremism, 3 November 2025
- Global Center for Cooperative Security's Blue Sky report 2026

Other Activities

The Special Rapporteur was an active member of the Global Counter-terrorism Coordination Compact and its Working Groups and met frequently with relevant United Nations entities.

The Special Rapporteur engaged actively with a broad range of stakeholders, issued numerous communications and press releases, held bilateral meetings with diverse States, and engaged with the media globally to raise awareness of human rights concerns.

Acknowledgements

The Special Rapporteur highly appreciated support from:

- The University of Sydney and Sydney Law School
- Fordham Law School's Leitner Center for International Law
- Human Rights Clinic at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law
- Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, LLM International Law Clinic
- Columbia Law School externship programme
- Pro bono legal assistance of Hickman & Rose Solicitors in London and barristers Adam Straw KC and Rabah Kherbane from Doughty Street Chambers, London

The Special Rapporteur acknowledges the extrabudgetary contributions of China, Spain and Switzerland in 2025.

He reiterates that greater resources are required from Member States to effectively carry out his mandate and to enhance protection for victims.