

Combating Terrorism: The Pursuit of Justice Through Cooperation

By Mike Smith, Executive Director, United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate

It is an unacceptable reality that thousands of lives are lost each year due to terrorism. The most immediate impacts are felt by families and communities, often our most vulnerable populations, as individuals cope with the trauma of losing loved ones and the imposing sense of insecurity in day to day activities. Members of the international community are equally threatened. Indeed, the United Nations family has lost many of its own members while serving in various regions around the world. Based on the belief that no cause can justify the murder of innocent people, the United Nations condemns terrorism in all its forms.

More than any other region in the world, South Asia has suffered the greatest consequences of terrorism. At the national scale, these attacks undermine political stability, economic progress and national security. The rich histories, vibrant cultures and desires of those hoping only to build a better future for themselves and their loved ones, are threatened daily.

The challenges of deterring and bringing terrorists to justice are large in scope and the complexities often discouraging. Furthermore, in regions connected by history, kinships and shared borders, what happens in one State cannot fail to impact its neighbours. Terrorism, therefore, affects not just individual states but entire regions.

Efforts to thwart terrorist activities and to bring perpetrators to justice are both of paramount importance. One of the main functions of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), which I lead, is the facilitation and delivery of technical assistance to States to support these efforts.

The United Nations also strongly advocates that all counter-terrorism efforts comply with international human rights law, refugee law and humanitarian law. This is essential not only due to the obligations that States have assumed under international law, but also because counter-terrorism measures that violate human rights run a serious risk of being self-defeating and counter-productive. Measures that do not comply with international human rights and rule of law deprive governmental efforts of legitimacy and may inadvertently foment support for terrorist violence and extremism.

As part of an effort to promote greater regional cooperation to combat terrorism and other forms of serious crime, CTED has helped to organize a series of workshops that have been held throughout the region for the past four years. To date, workshops have been held in Dhaka, Colombo, Semarang, Thimphu and New Delhi. We are about to embark on the sixth such workshop, which will be conducted with the support of the Governments of Australia and Denmark, in Kathmandu from 18 March.

Police, prosecutors and judges from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, along with observers from the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) will attend the three-day workshop in Kathmandu. The goal of the workshop is to continue the

conversations which began four years ago and explore specific issues identified by the participants that present the greatest opportunity to enhance efforts to combat terrorism.

Developing the capacity of States in their efforts to deal with the pervasive issues associated with terrorism requires a cooperative, sustained approach - one to which CTED is committed. We at the United Nations are ready to continue to support the States of the South Asian region to prevent terrorist attacks before they happen and to bring the perpetrators to justice.