

**The Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations
and the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation**

**The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Regional and Subregional Bodies:
Strengthening a Critical Partnership**

Tuesday, 16 December 2008

PANEL DISCUSSION

INFORMAL SUMMARY

On 16 December 2008, the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations hosted a discussion on regional cooperation and the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The discussants were **Mike Smith, Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED); Carol Fuller, Secretary of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE); and Eric Rosand, Senior Fellow at the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation.**

The meeting was organized to allow representatives from UN member states, the UN secretariat and nongovernmental organizations to discuss the recommendations from the Center's report, *The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Regional and Subregional Bodies: Strengthening a Critical Partnership*. The report highlights the critical role that regional and subregional organizations (RSRs) play in countering terrorism, not only within the framework of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, but more broadly as well. The point was made that there is still insufficient awareness of the Strategy in many regions and that the Strategy's provisions are quite broad and must be contextualized and adapted to accommodate the unique circumstances in different regions. RSRs have an important role to play in addressing these issues across all four pillars of the Strategy and the United Nations should focus more attention on deepening existing and establishing new partnerships with RSRs, as part of an effort to develop more region-specific approaches to engagement on counterterrorism (CT) issues.

In his opening remarks, **Thomas Matussek, German Ambassador to the United Nations**, stressed the need for the United Nations to develop and strengthen structures that make the best use of its convening power, noting that the framework for such activity has already been set in the Strategy. He added that member states must continue to work towards shaping Strategy implementation and focus on the role of RSRs particularly as they relate to capacity building and lending political support to Strategy implementation efforts.

During the course of the discussion a number of points were made on the issue of RSR-UN engagement on CT and the impact of the UN Strategy on efforts to combat terrorism.

First, since the Strategy covers such a broad array of issues, RSRs have a variety of ways to contribute to implementation of its four pillars. For example, RSRs can build support for and ensure political awareness of the Strategy among local actors. It was noted that many have already done so and that a number of ongoing programs and initiatives are already furthering Strategy implementation on the ground.

Second, although RSRs have much to offer in theory, the practical realities, which often include limited resources, mandates that can be narrowly interpreted to restrict certain activities, and higher priorities than dealing with terrorism, have resulted in uneven contributions from different RSRs. Many are underfunded, providing few if any dedicated resources for CT. For some, the proliferation of CT initiatives at the global level has led to overload, with a resulting need to prioritize, given limited available resources. The structure of RSRs differs significantly from region to region, resulting in spotty coordination among bodies within and between regions. It was suggested that CTED and the United Nations' Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) could promote a cross-fertilization of ideas and objectives through organization of international meetings to share best practices and experiences in specific areas among RSRs.

Third, operationalizing the many contributions that RSRs can make so that they enhance and sustain implementation of the Strategy requires a certain level of resources and political commitment, which is lagging in some organizations, as well as more focused engagement between RSRs and the UN system, in particular the CTITF. Suggestions were made for ways in which RSRs can enhance their contributions to Strategy implementation, including by:

- a. formally endorsing the Strategy, preferably at the ministerial level and developing implementation plans;
- b. working with their member states to articulate their needs and priorities to the CTITF and ensure that discussions in New York and within the CTITF are rooted in the on-the ground realities, needs, and priorities of each region and are responsive to them;
- c. asking the CTITF to find ways to allow them to participate more regularly in the activities of the CTITF working groups; and

- d. providing their secretariats with the mandate and resources to engage with member states and the UN on Strategy issues. If resources are an issue, the necessary funding and expertise could be sought from partner countries or appropriate NGOs.

Fourth, given the minimal CT resources available to the United Nations relative to bilateral players, the United Nations needs to constantly be looking for ways to improve its ability to influence CT efforts at regional and national levels. Supporting the work of RSRs is one way to do this. The point was made that CTED has actively engaged with a number of RSRs, such as the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe, the Organization of American States' Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Financial Action Task Force and its subregional bodies. CTED has participated in workshops and trainings organized by these bodies, a number of which have joined on CTED country visits.

Nevertheless, it was emphasized that CTED has yet to establish strong ties to a number of RSRs, some of which are in areas where the threat may be significant. As a result, one of the priorities for CTED in the coming year will be to engage more with the African Union (both its centre in Algiers and the Peace and Security Commission in Addis Ababa), the Economic Community of West African States, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

In addition to more CTED outreach to individual RSRs, the point was made that consideration should be given to altering the format of the CTC special meeting involving international, regional, and subregional bodies, of which there have been five so far. Some 70 organizations now participate in these meetings, a number which may be too large to allow for the necessary focused discussions. In addition to suggesting more region-focused meetings of this sort, the point was made that the CTITF could be asked to assume responsibility for organizing such events so as to limit the involvement of the 15 members of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee in the organization of what is intended to be a technical meeting.

Fifth, UN system engagement with RSRs on the Strategy should be more coherent and better coordinated. The point was made that a common strategy for engagement by the three UN Security Council CT-related expert groups, which is in the process of being negotiated among the groups, will help in this regard. However, it was also noted that a flexible approach is probably necessary to allow each group to continue to engage informally through the contacts it has developed over the past few years.

With respect to the Security Council's engagement with RSRs, it was also suggested that the report writing workshops that the three expert groups have organized in Africa have been a successful means of outreach to that continent. In this vein, it was proposed that the scope of the workshops should be expanded to include other issues beyond reporting, e.g., the sharing of experiences in implementing UN CT mandates among practitioners within a region. In addition, it was suggested that these workshops be organized outside of Africa as well.

It was noted that efforts to deepen engagement between the United Nations and RSRs on CT issues should be part of a CTITF-led effort to develop a broader strategic approach for each region. Part of the UN's strategic thinking in this area should emphasize the need to strengthen the capacity of RSRs to contribute to Strategy implementation and support the creation of regional CT mechanisms in regions where none currently exist. Currently, too much of the UN's focus is on how RSRs can help the relevant UN body implement its mandate. A more symbiotic relationship between the United Nations and RSRs is thus needed.

The point was made that the ability of the CTITF to serve as a strategic interface with RSRs and regions and subregions more broadly is largely dependent on it receiving the necessary human and financial resources to allow it to do so.

In this context, it was suggested that the CTITF could designate a field-based representative from an appropriate CTITF entity to serve as its focal point in each region or subregion to help transport Strategy implementation into a local context and make it more in tune with national priorities on the ground. The view was also expressed, however, that it might be more appropriate to rely on the UN resident coordinator to serve this function.

Sixth, it was stressed that the United Nations should not shy away from engaging in those regions where political differences have inhibited relevant regional bodies from developing effective CT mechanisms, for example in South Asia. In some instances, the UN's political distance from a region, and neutrality and universality, as well as its technical expertise, may make it better suited than an existing regional body to assume an active role in promoting regional cooperation. Given the recent attacks in Mumbai and widespread recognition that a regional response to the terrorist threat in South Asia is both needed and lacking, it was suggested that the CTITF could explore whether it could play a role in developing a strategic plan for engagement with South Asia on the UN Strategy.

The view was shared that South Asia should be one of the key regions to work with on Strategy implementation. However, some questioned whether engagement with the

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation would be productive as training and capacity building programs only help regional bodies when member states are on the same page. It was argued that as long as member states have a different agenda then there is little that a regional body can usefully do. However, it was argued that there are a number of ways the United Nations could still seek to promote technical cooperation among countries in a region where the regional body is unable to contribute to this objective.

On a separate but related point, it was noted that the United Nations needs to recognize there is resistance from some regional bodies to engaging on CT issues and therefore the United Nations may wish to identify those that have a mandate to implement the Strategy and further build awareness for the goals of the Strategy among these bodies. Rather than creating new regional or subregional programs, the focus should be to “latch onto” and expand existing ones.

Seventh, it was noted that the Strategy’s greatest impact in the Americas has been the growing recognition of its holistic approach and that CT is not just a law enforcement issue. Among the issues raised in the Strategy that deserve attention in this region are: cyber threats, victims, biological threats, radicalization, and security threats to tourism, as well as the need for increased information sharing on technical assistance. It was also stressed that there needs to be greater outreach to civil society organizations and an emphasis put on prevention and not just law enforcement. The additional point was made that the “best practices” methodology is beneficial at the regional level, but that the CTITF and CTED could be doing a lot more to focus attention on specific thematic areas between regions.

Eighth, it was noted that more information sharing between CTED, the CTITF, and other UN entities with RSRs on workshops and other training events, such as through newsletters or email notices, would promote greater coordination and involvement in implementation of the Strategy. Participants noted that this information is especially important to the technical agencies in capitals most responsible for Strategy implementation.

Finally, it was emphasized that in fighting terrorism the United Nations has the most legitimacy; however, it is member states that have the leading role to play in implementing the UN Strategy. Moreover, the Strategy must be implemented in a way that preserves its original spirit, which was adopted by consensus and includes four pillars of equal importance. UN engagement with RSRs and the wider Strategy implementation process should align with these notions.