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UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

United States Statement at the 76th General Assembly Sixth Committee
Agenda Item 111: Measures to eliminate international terrorism

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Thank you, Chair.

I would first like to take a moment to remember the heinous terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, now 20 years ago. The world remembers the nearly 3,000 lives taken so brutally, and honors the courage of those who put themselves in harm's way to save others, and the many who continue to suffer from injuries sustained that day.

One of the United Nations' founding purposes was the promise of collective measures to prevent and counter threats to international peace and security. Terrorism in all forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations. The United Nations plays a critical role in strengthening the capacity of Member States to prevent and counter terrorism, while highlighting the value of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, and the importance of respecting human rights and the rule of law. As we remember 9/11, the international community must come together and commit ourselves to meaningful action in the months and years to come.

Over the last twenty years, we have had significant success in diminishing terrorist threats, building effective partnerships to dismantle terrorist networks by targeting their financing and support systems, countering their propaganda, preventing their travel, as well as disrupting imminent attacks. But just last month, the loss of 13 Americans and almost 200 innocent Afghan civilians in the terrorist attack at the Kabul airport demonstrated that terrorism remains a serious concern. Al-Qa'ida and ISIS have metastasized through branches and affiliates in Africa and Asia. Violent white supremacists and other Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists, or REMVE [*pronounced rem-V*] actors are exploiting the internet to spread their corrupt ideologies and to encourage attacks; and State Sponsors of Terrorism like Iran continue to pursue their interests through terrorist proxies and partners, including Hizballah.

The international community must recommit to multilateral efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism. We must also remember that successful counterterrorism and prevention of violent extremism efforts respect human rights, including freedom of expression, and the rule-of-law. Indeed, efforts to counter terrorism are counterproductive when used as a pretext to stifle

freedom of religion or belief and other human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, we cannot avoid mentioning Xinjiang. The United States strongly objects to China's mass detention of Muslim Uyghurs and members of other minorities, repressive surveillance, and use of coercive population control like forced sterilization and abortion. These are not counterterrorism efforts. They are abuses.

Reflecting over the past year, there have been a number of achievements in the counterterrorism space, most notably the adoption of the General Assembly resolution that reviewed the Global Counterterrorism Strategy. The four pillars of the GCTS – including addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and upholding human rights and the rule of law – remain as relevant today as when the Strategy was adopted. The resolution adopted earlier this year provides Member States with useful guidance on these pillars; that we managed to adopt this Strategy by consensus, once again, is a notable achievement.

In particular, the United States welcomes new language in the resolution that recognizes the threat of terrorism and violent extremism based on racism. We believe that REMVE is one of the most pressing counterterrorism challenges facing the international community today, and we hope that further cooperation and conversation on how to address this scourge will be forthcoming.

On June 15, 2021, the United States released its first-ever National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, which reflects a culmination of the 100-day review of U.S. government efforts to respond to domestic violent extremism ordered by President Biden. With the threat of domestic terrorism brought into sharp relief by the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol, this strategy seeks to reflect upon the long history of domestic terrorist activity in the United States, and highlights that we must all be united in our efforts to prevent and counter the rising and changing threat posed by REMVE. Through multilateral efforts led by the United Nations, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the Aqaba Process led by Jordan, and regional organizations such as the OSCE, we are also leveraging our respective tools and capabilities against REMVE challenges.

We also note that the United States has joined the Christchurch Call to Action, pledging with other member governments and technology partners to work together, while upholding the freedoms and protections of speech and association afforded by the U.S. Constitution, as well as reasonable expectations of privacy. Continuing to engage the technology sector to enhance information sharing and identify and counter often vague or coded language and symbols in terrorist and violent extremist propaganda and messaging is also vitally important. We continue to strengthen and expand our voluntary collaboration and partnerships with private technology companies to counter terrorism online, including through improving information sharing and by companies' strengthening and enforcing their terms of service. Member States also should continue to seek to build long-term resilience to terrorist messages through partnerships with all stakeholders—particularly youth—to cultivate critical thinking skills and online public safety awareness through education. Positive narratives to counter terrorist propaganda are an important element of these efforts.

While the Global Counterterrorism Strategy review includes many critical elements, we are disappointed by several flaws in the resolution. For example, foreign terrorist fighters in inadequate detention facilities and their associated family members living in overburdened camps in Syria and Iraq pose a serious security threat and constitute a dire humanitarian crisis, raising human rights concerns. Unfortunately, many of the States that pushed for adding human rights language throughout the Strategy review refuse to address the inhumane conditions of their own citizens languishing in Syria and Iraq. Repatriation of Member State citizens, combined with rehabilitation, reintegration, and prosecution, as appropriate, of foreign terrorist fighters would prevent a resurgence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and the uncontrolled return of FTFs to countries of origin in the future. Similarly, the best way to support the short- and long-term relief and rehabilitation of associated family members – particularly the thousands of children who remain in displaced person camps like al-Hol – is to repatriate them and reintegrate them into their local communities.

We urge all Member States to assist and sufficiently resource UN system actors and other relevant implementers in order to deliver needed technical assistance.

Concerning a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, we will listen carefully to delegates' statements. However, it is critical that the United Nations send united, unambiguous signals when it comes to terrorism, otherwise we risk some of the progress that we have made.

To close, the United States reiterates its firm condemnation of terrorism in all forms and manifestations.

We invite listeners to review a full version of our statement, posted online.