

**Remarks**

By

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Delivered on behalf of the High Representative for UNAOC

**The United Nations Global Programme to Counter Terrorist  
Threats Against Vulnerable Targets**

**Launch event of Five Thematic Modules to Protect Vulnerable Targets  
Against Terrorist Threats**

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Your Excellency , Under-

General Assembly called on member states to *“strengthen efforts to improve the security and protection of particularly vulnerable targets, including religious sites ... as well as to enhance their resilience to terrorist attacks, in particular in the area of civil protection”* and in para 74 *“encourages the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities to “work closely with Member States and relevant international, regional and subregional organizations to identify and share best practices to prevent terrorist attacks on particularly vulnerable targets, including critical infrastructure and public places (“soft targets”).”*

The UN Alliance of Civilizations is very pleased for being part of this exercise through our partnership with UNOCT, UNCTED and UNICRI in the UN Global Programme on Vulnerable Targets, concretely on the area of the protection of religious sites against terrorist attacks.

I would like to take this opportunity to convey my gratitude and appreciation to the partners in the Programme, and in particular to the UNOCT team in Madrid and New York for their tireless efforts to make progress on the different component of this important initiative.

As you are aware , UNAOC is the focal point for the implementation of the UN Plan of Action to safeguard religious sites, developed by UNAOC in 2019 at the

request of the UN Secretary-General given the rise in attacks against places of worship and more specifically after the ChristChurch attacks in New Zealand.

One important dimension of the implementation of the UN Plan of Action is to partner with organizations inside and outside the UN to make sure that, on the one hand, the Plan is the overarching policy framework on the safeguard of religious sites, and, on the other, its concrete recommendations on the areas of prevention, preparedness and response, are tested and implemented.

Following an overview of key terrorism-related threats and vulnerabilities affecting religious sites, the module “Protection of Religious Targets Against Terrorist Threats” explores the specific role that individual stakeholders can and should play in a complex – and often volatile – security environment by acting within the conceptual framework of a risk and crisis management approach. It contains a selection of case studies illustrating how key security-related principles – including internationally endorsed recommendations – have been operationalized by Governments, private-sector actors, operators of religious sites and civil society organizations. The module also summarizes the content of several tools (manuals, handbooks, compendiums), providing guidance for the establishment of sound policy and operational settings to reduce religious sites’ vulnerabilities and increase their resilience.

Our participation in the Global Programme on Vulnerable Targets offers us two key opportunities in this respect:

To include the Plan in knowledge products like the modules we are launching and discussing today, and

To explore with beneficiary countries of the Global Programme, the inclusion of some of the recommendations of the Plan in the respective national roadmaps, should beneficiary countries request assistance on the area of the protection of religious sites.

In this context, the specialized module on the protection of religious sites represents an innovative tool to raise awareness and offer concrete ideas about what is at the core of the UN Plan of Action: how to better **Prevent, Prepare and Respond** to attacks on religious sites.

In my remarks today I will highlight two key features of module:

- The importance of an **inclusive approach to safeguard of religious sites including all relevant stakeholders**. This is a key component of the UN Plan of Action which is mirrored in the module on religious sites and an issue that needs further work and attention. Three years after the UN Plan was officially launched by the UN Secretary-General in September 2019, we

still witness a tendency by different stakeholders involved in the safeguard of religious sites to approach the issue in silos or independently. We need to continue to build trust and dialogue among all stakeholders, as stressed by the UN Plan of Action and the module. Only through a collective action respective of different mandates will progress on the protection of religious sites be possible.

- The second issue is the **prolific tools, case studies and best practices** included in the module. The module is first and foremost a helpful instrument to elicit dialogue, exchanges and outreach; foster a better understanding of the nature of the threat to religious sites and promote dialogue and collaboration amongst all those involved in this crucial issue.

I would like to invite you all to explore this module thoroughly as well as the other three modules on tourist sites, urban centers and unmanned aircraft systems. From our side, UNAOC will continue to work very closely with all relevant actors to keep the protection of religious sites high in the agenda of the international community so worshippers can exercise their right to conduct their rituals in peace.

Thank you .