



**The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya
United Nations Security Council
2021-2022**

**STATEMENT AS DELIVERED BY AMB. MARTIN KIMANI, DURING THE LAUNCH
OF THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME ON COUNTERING TERRORIST THREATS
AGAINST VULNERABLE TARGETS:**

***(BEST PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE
APPROACHES TO PROTECT RELIGIOUS SITES)***

TUESDAY, 19TH JANUARY 2021 (09:00 - 12:00) -10 minutes btn 10:40-10:50

**Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

1. The reason we fight terrorist groups as Kenya is primarily because they carry out vicious attacks against innocent Kenyans. It is also because we are a free people who fought hard for the freedom of religion and association at the heart of our democracy. These liberties, which are rooted in our 10-year-old Constitution, reflect our enduring African cultures that have lasted for many generations.
2. You will recall that Al Qaeda and ISIS groups have destroyed sites considered sacred by billions of people, and World Heritage Sites that are humanity's collective heritage. Their acts of attempted erasure have included Sufi shrines, tombs, the Buddhist of Bamiyan, churches and monasteries, and ancient artifacts of great religious significance to past civilisations.
3. In 2013, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb burnt manuscripts in Timbuktu that included some in African languages such as Songhai, Tamashek and Bambara, and dating back to the 13th century. These groups claim that by taking these actions, they are expressing their religious conviction to fight polytheism.

4. What instead they are doing is assaulting our collective history, and, as an African who has been subjected to extensive cultural thefts through the colonial era, I consider their actions nothing less than an assault on our identity and history.
5. You can then see that terrorist attacks on religious sites and other places that express our freedom to congregate with one another are not merely opportunistic. They are not chosen only because they have a lot of people using them. Their selection is a direct expression of the beliefs and the dystopian aims of groups like Al Shabaab and other Al Qaeda affiliates and splinter groups.
6. For this reason, I must insist to this audience that the very best practice in developing collaborative approaches to protect religious sites is to recognise and respond to the bigotry and religious extremism of these groups. And to treat our confrontation with them as lacking the space for compromise. They cannot live with our freedoms and we cannot live with their refusal to respect our freedoms and our lives.
7. We are therefore confident in asserting that counter terrorism must rise to the urgency of this profound moral collision. If it does not, then the best practices we promote and seek to implement will be too timid and lacking the commitment it takes to sustain our civilisations against this enemy.
8. I commend the Security Council members who in 2017 passed Resolution 2347 on the protection of cultural heritage. I urge action on implementing this resolution by UN bodies such as UNESCO, and making this a broad, collaborative effort that includes museums, cultural and religious leaders, and governments. We should also push for the ratification of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, as well as the UNESCO 1970 Convention against illicit trafficking of cultural property and other relevant instruments.
9. There is also value to link this work with the escalating demand for the return of Africa's cultural heritage seized by European collectors and museums during colonialism. This would send a worldwide signal that our religious heritage must be respected as integral to our dignity.
10. I commend H.E. President Emmanuel Macron of France for taking the initial steps to respond to the demands of Africa. I also commend and recognise the groundbreaking work of the Senegalese scholar and artist Felwine Sarr and his colleagues in cataloguing and promoting this urgent African agenda to protect Africa's heritage by ensuring its return.

11. The specific counter terrorism practices that I will promote today require collaborative approaches between religious communities and institutions, civil society, the private sector and government. They draw from the experience of Kenya.
12. The terrorists must be made to pay a deeper reputational price for their attacks on religious sites. It is not enough to condemn their violence, we must uncover the deep incompatibility of their ideas with our faith, our constitutions, and our ways of life. That means deploying a powerful counter narrative capability against them.
13. The ideological pillar is key to Kenya's counter terrorism and prevention of violent extremism, specifically promoting cohesion, religious and ethnic respect. Our CVE work embraces inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue: civil awareness and the embrace of our diverse cultures and heritage. Its foundation is the Kenya Constitution, 2010.
14. This sustained work limits the spread of the terrorists' radicalising message. It further lays the groundwork for the public, and more importantly the audiences the terrorists are trying to sway, to regard the attackers with contempt. This will limit recruitment and their cultural and political appeal.
15. Religious congregations and leaders have also been encouraged to join the National and County level CVE work. The response has been enthusiastic and successful.
16. Kenyan security services also deploy to protect religious sites in areas where the risk is assessed to be high. In parts of the country bordering Somalia where Al Shabaab has carried out cross-border attacks, police officers have been stationed at places of worship, for instance at churches and mosques to deter and protect the congregations. This layer of visible security is accompanied by its intelligence and counter terrorism counterparts. This is a priority deployment that reflects the government's conviction that the centre of gravity in countering terrorism is the people and their freedoms.
17. An important practice is to protect those brave individual voices or religious communities that visibly, and sometimes loudly, condemn the terrorists. Often, they take a risk of being targeted in retaliation because terrorists live in great fear of the public aggressively turning against them. It is therefore a crucial security goal that we protect such voices. We have not always succeeded but we want these voices and communities to know that the security structure stands with them.

18. The government, through the National Counter Terrorism Centre, also actively promotes a protective security culture in the management of religious sites and other highly trafficked institutions. We are happy to offer security risk assessments and advise on adjustments in the institution's security-enhancing practices.
19. These can include adoption of security by design (SBD) standards of architecture, effective partnership with CT certified private security companies, awareness creation and training of religious leaders and administrators. In countering terrorism and violent religious extremism, we should count religious spaces as critical infrastructure. *(Recall UNSC Resolution 2341 of 2017 that called for a need to have a critical infrastructure protective security mindset and practices.)*
20. Further, through the NCTC, we are working closely with private sector security firms to insert protective security and terrorism awareness into their training and supervision of guards. These companies are often on the frontline of protecting these sites. The NCTC and the Kenya Private Sector Alliance have worked on curriculum development and delivery.
21. My final point is that we must not allow religious sites to be ideologically captured by violent extremists and their ideologue partners. In Kenya, we have experienced some instances of Al Shabaab or Al Qaeda sympathisers trying to capture the pulpit and certain mosques. To the point of their hiding weapons inside a mosque a few years ago, and using the pulpit to advocate for crime and terrorism.
22. Religious sites must be protected against being captured and used as platforms for terrorist radicalisation and recruitment. To not do this is to kick the can down the road to a time when their poison will have spread into many minds, with the consequence being greater levels of violence and terrorism against the innocent.
23. These are some of the major steps that Kenya has taken that add to our strong and coordinated counter terrorism infrastructure.
24. Kenya is committed to sharing its experience with the world, and I encourage you to get in touch with our Mission, or the Kenya government office most accessible to you, with requests for collaboration and capacity building. We have a lot to share that we have learnt at great cost, and we welcome you to learn from us.

Thank you.