

[PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Open meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee on

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Excellencies, distinguished representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

This is the first open meeting of the Counter Terrorism Committee on countering terrorist narratives and preventing the use of the Internet for terrorist since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. By now, we have all learned to adapt to, and live with, this pandemic. So have terrorists.

In fact, terrorists have yet again demonstrated how opportunistic, flexible, and adaptive they are to new circumstances, taking advantage of changing realities online and on the ground.

Overall, the pandemic has reinforced and accelerated existing trends. This is true also for terrorist narratives, propaganda, and recruitment efforts. Terrorists keep exploiting heightened vulnerabilities, loneliness, and extreme frustration of people all over the world, including children and youth, who spend more time online even after the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions.

Over the past two years terrorists have exploited pandemic and related grievances through conspiracy theories, the spread of misinformation, and disinformation campaigns, thereby continuing to fuel societal divisions, a rise in sectarian hatred and anti-democratic movements, and distrust in Governments and State institutions.

In this changing landscape, understanding the links between online narratives and offline effects remains a priority because only with strong evidence-based findings that inform interventions can we effectively counter the narratives of terrorist groups. I also emphasize that terrorists need not be directly or physically involved in attacks as they can incite terrorism by creating and sharing hateful and violent content online around the globe. However, terrorists who incite violence also play a role in these attacks and should be held accountable.

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