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A SERIES OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS ON:

“COVID-19, CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE PRIORITIES: A SPOTLIGHT ON VULNERABLE GROUPS”

30 November – 3 December 2020
03:00 – 05:00 p.m. CET

Rationale

During the COVID-19 pandemic, responding to the health crisis has been a priority concern worldwide. Its impact, however, has had a much wider range of implications with unprecedented effects on the global economy and on a broad range of human, civil and labor rights, as well as rule of law and security-related issues, posing serious questions about what states need to prioritize next and how responses should be tailored to the current situation.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic is also hampering the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals jeopardizing decades of progress and improvements in living standards and conditions. Despite the global impact of the crisis, which affects all segments of the population, all sectors of the economy, and all regions of the world, the pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities of certain groups. Indeed, it is making inequalities in our societies even more evident, with severe disparities within and across countries, with respect to access to basic goods, health care, social protection, employment opportunities, education and justice.

In the context of this complex situation, vulnerable groups including minors, women, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, elderly, people with disabilities, detainees in correction facilities, people with substance use disorders or affected by mental illness, etc. are exposed to additional risks. Such risks are not only derived from the exposure to the virus itself, but also related to the different forms of discrimination, exploitation and violence, which can even be generated by the measures implemented by the states in an effort to contain the spread of

the virus, as well as by the lack of necessary policy responses, due to the priority need of the governments to allocate and commit specific resources to manage the health crisis. In order to protect such groups, it is critical to identify these risks and properly address them. Examples include, the unprecedented increase in violence against women and girls since the beginning of the pandemic, as reported by UN Women,¹ and the impact that COVID-19 has had on trends and threats of online and offline offences of child sexual exploitation and abuse around the world, as analyzed and assessed by INTERPOL.²

Another key challenge Member States face relates to non-state actors (including violent extremist groups and criminals) that are taking advantage of the crisis to jeopardize the efficacy of governments' responses, as well as undermine the safety of citizens through a wide spectrum of malicious activities. The effects of this are likely not be limited to the present crisis but will continue in its aftermath.

The pandemic offers new opportunities for radicalization and violent extremism as well. A greater usage of internet by an increased number of young people is a condition which might be exploited for propaganda and recruitment purposes. As reported by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) a wide range of terrorist groups have already integrated COVID-19 into their narratives and propaganda. Major risks are also posed by the distraction of the security forces, engaged in supporting COVID-19 responses, and by the possible loss or reduction in foreign financial resources allocated to

1 <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>
<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/brief-covid-19-domestic-violence-in-the-world-of-work-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5715>

2 <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2020/INTERPOL-report-highlights-impact-of-COVID-19-on-child-sexual-abuse>

support counterterrorism capabilities in certain countries, providing terrorists opportunities to expand.

A key concern are the new scenarios that the multifaceted nature of this crisis is opening to organized crime, considering the ability and speed at which criminal groups have adapted to maximize opportunities for move into new sectors³.

Serious concern is also expressed regarding the COVID-19's profound impact on the functioning of the criminal justice systems worldwide, which is posing enormous risks of human rights violations, including the right to access the justice in a timely and fair way. At the same time, the increased length of judicial and administrative procedures put certain groups, including women and children at risk of violence, undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum

seekers, etc. at further risk of discrimination and victimization.

Human rights, rule of law, justice and security-related concerns exacerbated by COVID-19, are undoubtedly even more acute in transitioning, conflict and post conflict areas.

In this context, it is becoming even more urgent for Governments to intensify the efforts to combat the pandemic, but at the same, to develop and put in place strategies and measures to mitigate the risks posed by the crisis, seeking the protection of the most vulnerable populations. In this regard, United Nations entities have collaborated and strengthened collective efforts to provide Member States with expertise, advice and resources to deal with the above-mentioned challenges, encouraging the use of creative and innovative solutions, especially needed in times of crisis.

3 <http://www.unicri.it/index.php/news/how-organized-crime-expanding-during-covid-19-crisis>

Objectives of the virtual meetings

The 75th anniversary of the United Nations is an opportunity for reflection: with 10 years remaining to fulfill global commitments to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the effects of COVID-19 pandemic – an unparalleled event in human history – rippling across the globe, now more than ever is a time to stop, think and reflect on how the international community can build back better, ensuring a more peaceful and just world.

In this context, thanks to the support of the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) will hold, a series of virtual meetings to discuss the implications of COVID-19 under a crime prevention, justice, human rights protection and development perspective, with a specific focus on vulnerable populations. In particular, the meetings aim to serve as a platform to:

1. Discuss emerging threats, trends and possible solutions to mitigate risks associated to the broad range of implications of the COVID-19 pandemic as they impact on vulnerable groups;
2. Identify priority areas of intervention to help ensure vulnerable communities are more protected in the post-COVID-19 world.

For the purposes of this event, reflections and discussions will be framed around the six priorities set by UNICRI in its 2019-2022 Strategic Programme Framework⁴, namely:

1. Preventing and countering violent extremism
2. Countering organized crime and fighting all forms of illegal trafficking and illicit financial flows;
3. Reinforcing the rule of law in post-conflict countries;
4. Security through research, technology and innovation;
5. Threat response and risk mitigation: security governance;
6. Preventing crime through the protection and empowerment of vulnerable groups.

UNICRI's priorities are particularly aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 16 on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice and building effective and accountable institutions.

Permanent Missions of Member States to the United Nations, as well as Embassies are invited to attend the virtual meetings with the possibility to share a brief presentation (max. 5 minutes) or a statement regarding specific issues relevant to the addressed topics and contexts.

⁴ http://www.unicri.it/institute/about_unicri/strategic_framework_2019_2022

AGENDA

Meeting 1

Strengthening efforts to protect vulnerable people from violent extremism and radicalization in times of crisis

**MONDAY 30
NOVEMBER**

**03:00 - 05:00
p.m. (CET)**

Moderator

Leif Villadsen, Senior Programme Officer and Deputy Director of UNICRI

03:00-03:05 - Opening remarks

Antonia Marie De Meo, Director of UNICRI

03:05-04:00 - Presentations:

- **How crisis can increase the threat of violent extremism and radicalization among vulnerable groups.**

Speaker: David Wells, Head of Research and analysis at UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED)

- **The importance of engaging civil society in preventing violent extremism: lessons learned from the Sahel-Maghreb region.**

Speaker: Manuela Brunero, Programme Manager, UNICRI

- **The effective communication strategies to counter violent extremism propaganda to protect vulnerable targets in times of crisis.**

Speaker: Julie Coleman, Senior Programme Manager, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)

- **Valuing the role of women and improve their inclusivity in decision-making processes for the prevention of violent extremism during crisis.**

Speaker: Iman Sayed Taha, Peace and Security Specialist, UN Women.

- **Juvenile justice and counter terrorism: international protection of children and the rule of law.**

Speaker: Duccio Mazarese, Programme Manager, UNICRI

04:00-04:55 - Open discussion

04:55-05:00 - Wrap-up and closing of the meeting

Leif Villadsen, Senior Programme Officer and Deputy Director of UNICRI

Meeting 2

Pandemic profiteering: how organized crime is exploiting vulnerabilities to expand its influence and business

**TUESDAY 1
DECEMBER**

**03:00 - 05:00
p.m. (CET)**

Moderator

Leif Villadsen, Senior Programme Officer and Deputy Director of UNICRI

03:00-04:00 - Presentations:

- **COVID-19 pandemic and new opportunities for organized crime: counterfeiting and infiltration into the legal economy.**

Speaker: Marco Musumeci, Programme Manager, UNICRI

- **New corruption risks as a result of COVID-19: good practices on measures to safeguard vulnerable groups in future crises.**

Speaker: Kari Ann Rotkin, Associate Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer, Corruption and Economic Crime Branch, UNODC

- **Using big data analytics to monitor organized crime.**

Speaker: Francesco Marelli, Head of the Knowledge Center SIRIO on Technology and Security, UNICRI

- **COVID-19 and Human Trafficking: the amplified impact on vulnerable populations.**

Speaker: Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

04:00-04:55 - Open discussion

04:55-05:00 - Wrap-up and closing of the meeting

Leif Villadsen, Senior Programme Officer and Deputy Director of UNICRI

Meeting 3

Social and security implications of COVID-19 pandemic: strengthening resilience, mitigating risks and upholding the rule of law to protect vulnerable groups

**WEDNESDAY
2 DECEMBER**

**03:00 - 05:00
p.m. (CET)**

Moderator

Leif Villadsen, Senior Programme Officer and Deputy Director of UNICRI

03:00-04:00 - Presentations:

- **The impact of COVID-19 on tourism-based economies: the relationship between crime, unemployment and social welfare.**

Speakers: Duccio Mazarese, Programme Manager, UNICRI

Callixtus Joseph, Regional Crime and Security Strategy Coordinator CARICOM IMPACS

- **Promote the rule of law and ensure access to justice in times of crises.**

Speaker: Lara Deramaix, Policy and Programme Specialist Rule of Law, Security and Human Rights, UNDP

- **Involving youth in CBRN risk communication.**

Speakers: Marian de Bruijn, Programme Manager, UNICRI

Lela Bekanidze CBRN On-site Assistance Expert Central Asia

- **The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the risk of youth substance use and the importance to address family needs for its prevention.**

Speakers: Prof. Betsy Thom, Middlesex University, London

Alice Rena, Associate Programme Officer, UNICRI

04:00-04:55 - Open discussion

04:55-05:00 - Wrap-up and closing of the meeting

Leif Villadsen, Senior Programme Officer and Deputy Director of UNICRI

Meeting 4

COVID-19 and cyber threats: leveraging technology and innovation to prevent crime and safeguard vulnerable groups

**THURSDAY 3
DECEMBER**

**03:00 - 05:00
p.m. (CET)**

Moderator

Odhran McCarthy, Liaison Officer, UNICRI New York Office

03:00-04:00 - Presentations:

- **The malicious use of social media by violent non-state actors during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Speaker: Francesco Marelli, Head of the Knowledge Center SIRIO on Technology and Security at United Nations, UNICRI.

- **The impact of COVID-19 on threats and trends in child sexual exploitation and abuse.**

Speaker: Captain Hamad Khatir Al Hammadi, Director of International Partnership Department (IPD), International Affairs Bureau, UAE Ministry of Interior

- **Virtual fireside chat about the potential of AI to safeguard children from sexual exploitation and abuse, with:**

Irakli Beridze, Head of UNICRI Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics

Yalda Aoukar, President of the Bracket Foundation

Anna Borgström, CEO, NetClean Technologies

04:00-04:55 - Open discussion

04:50-05:00 - Closing remarks

Leif Villadsen, Senior Programme Officer and Deputy Director of UNICRI