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**Promotion and protection of all human rights,
civil, political, economic, social and cultural
rights, including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Organisation internationale pour les pays les moins avancés (OIPMA), a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 January 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the spread of terrorism

The COVID-19 pandemic poses both challenges and opportunities for terrorists. While the dangers of disease and destruction in society are impeding some of their actions, terrorists are adapting and quickly using conditions of uncertainty and instability to achieve their goals in the least developed countries (LDCs). Terrorist groups are praising the economic impact of pandemic in the West that resulted in millions of job loss and trillions in spending. The pandemic is clearly threatening global solidarity in the fight against extremism and counterterrorism, allowing radical Islamist groups to better organize and plot future attacks.

While government leaders are focused on fighting COVID-19, the threat of terrorism has not gone anywhere. In fact, violent extremists are taking advantage of the fear and unrest surrounding the pandemic to advance their agenda and recruit new members. This fast and dangerous spread of terrorism is related to the fact that their propaganda focuses more on the vulnerability of government opponents distracted by the pandemic and the opportunities it provides for attacks. Terrorist groups are using ideology, bribery and threats in the crisis-affected LDCs to form new fundamentalist societies where there is no modern education, development and human rights. The absence of a state support in rural areas is the main basis for the formation of extremist fundamentalism in the conflict-affected LDCs. The extremist groups blame governments for their inability to cope with the pandemic, and thus win the favor of poorly educated people to join their forces.

Further, the violent Islamist groups in the Sahel region are associated with the terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. If in the Middle East these organizations are at war with each other, then in the Sahel region these groups operate together in states such as Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso. They attack military bases, destroy cities and establish control over territories. They all have common tasks, which are the elimination of governments and local authorities and the appointment of extreme Islamist governments in the LDCs. Militants are exploiting the pandemic, transforming the Sahel into one of the most conflict-ridden regions in Africa. It is therefore not surprising that violent Islamist groups in Mozambique, Nigeria, Chad, Burkina Faso and Somalia refuse to cease fire in response to the United Nations Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire.

Despite the long-term struggle of international peacekeeping forces in the Sahel against violent Islamist terrorist groups, the situation in the area remains very tense. Change can only happen when governments in the region begin to eradicate poverty, tackle unemployment, provide youth with access to education, and tackle community and religious issues. In fact, all of these challenges fueled the emergence of extremism and terrorism in the region.

Weakness and inefficiency of government decisions, unresolved problems of healthcare and education, unemployment, interethnic conflicts create a breeding ground for the development of violent Islamist extremism in these countries. Terrorist groups often replace the state and provide services for the safety and protection of the population, maintain public order and provide food and healthcare care, and administer justice in exchange for the loyalty of the population of occupied cities and regions.

The worsening situation with the development of the pandemic in the conflict-affected LDCs may lead to the fact that the limited resources used by governments to fight extremist groups will have to be directed to maintaining health systems and fighting the virus.

The fundamental solution to the problems of combating Islamist groups in Africa lies in security-based approaches. However, as noted in the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change Global Extremism Monitoring Reports, "strengthening communities and their relationships with governments remain key issues in addressing this issue in the long term." It can be added that the basic issues of the development of terrorism and extremism, such as poverty, lack of education, corruption and ignorance, do not have military solutions.

Therefore, we request the United Nations (UN) and all the concerned stakeholders to prioritize the security-based approaches in combating violent Islamist groups in the LDCs. We ask the international community to strengthen the capacity building on eliminating the new trend of counterterrorism. Lastly, we ask the UN to reinforce the implementation of 4 pillars of Counter-Terrorism Strategy.
