General Assembly Unanimously Adopts Text Creating United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office; Elects 18 Members to Economic and Social Council

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UN Meetings Coverage

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President Hails Action as New Secretary-General’s First Major Institutional Reform

In what its President called the first major institutional reform presented by Secretary-General António Guterres, the General Assembly unanimously decided today to establish the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, while also electing 18 members to the Economic and Social Council.

Introducing the Counter-terrorism text (document A/71/L.66), Assembly President Peter Thompson (Fiji) said “This resolution will enhance the United Nations capability to assist Member States in implementing the UN’s Global Counter-Terrorism strategy across its four pillars by ensuring greater coordination and coherence across the UN system.”

Through the resolution, the Assembly welcomed the Secretary-General’s initiative to transfer into the new Office the current Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Office and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, together with their existing staff and all associated regular and extra-budgetary resources, out of the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat.  The Assembly emphasized the need to ensure that the new Office, to be headed by an Under-Secretary-General, was provided with adequate resources for the implementation of its mandated activities.

Speaking in explanation of position, several speakers representing major groups took the floor to welcome the adoption, called for the text’s swift implementation and adequate resourcing, and stressed the need to focus on preventing violent extremism.  They also emphasized the importance of ensuring strong leadership in the form of an Under Secretary-General who had experience in a range of areas and was able to foster a balanced approach that included human rights, gender equality and development.

In similar vein, Michael Grant (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said the action had come after years of efforts by those countries to improve the counter-terrorism architecture.  He praised the Assembly for creating a greater focus on prevention.

On behalf of the MIKTA countries, comprising Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Turkey and Australia, Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey) stressed the importance of timely, adequate and effective delivery of counter-terrorism capacity-building assistance to Member States upon their request, while underlining that the new Office would have no competence to monitor, supervise or interfere with Member States to implement the Global Strategy and the rest of the international legal framework against terrorism.

Stressing the need for a strong and efficient United Nations that drove all pillars of the counter-terrorism and extremism-prevention strategies and extensive coordination of all actors, the European Union’s representative emphasized that the bloc would closely coordinate with the Office once it was established.

Representatives of Syria, Norway, India, Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia also welcomed the adoption of the resolution while emphasizing a need for effectiveness, coherence and adherence to all United Nations principles.  Syria’s representative called the establishment of the Office “a quantum leap” in the fight against terrorism, which he claimed was funded in his country by some Member States, including Saudi Arabia.  The Office must avoid politicization and financial polarization, he stressed.

India’s representative said the creation of the Office was a much-awaited first step to align the United Nations with the ever-changing global reality.  Terrorist networks, he stressed, were not bound by the bureaucratic inertia that bound the United Nations.  They used modern platforms, cyberspace and social media, and existed in a parallel world of hidden transnational networks.

Norway’s delegate, concurring that the Office would enable the Organization to implement all four pillars of the global counter-terrorism strategy in a more cohesive way, stressed that key qualifications of the Under-Secretary-General should be experience in development, as well as security, and an ability to work with a range of stakeholders.

While also welcoming the new Office, Iran’s representative said, however, that further work was needed to improve the efficiency, transparency, and impartiality of United Nations counter-terrorism efforts.  Without the provision of adequate financial resources, he noted with concern that most positions in the new Office would be funded by voluntary contributions, possibly affecting impartiality.

Citing a recent proliferation of horrific terrorist attacks worldwide, Israel’s representative stressed the urgency of measures to strengthen the fight against that scourge, adding that United Nations efforts would only succeed if the issue was not politicized and the entire international community was united in genuine commitment.

Saudi Arabia’s delegate meanwhile said he looked forward to a smooth transfer of resources devoted to counter-terrorism in the new arrangement.  He reiterated that terrorism could not be associated with any religion or ethnicity, and rejected any suggestion by Syria’s delegate that his country supported terrorism, calling on it to end its own terrorist support in the form of ties to Hizbullah.  Thanking Iran’s representative for his comments, he assured him that transparency and all United Nations principles would be respected in relation to the counter-terrorism centre.

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply, Syria’s representative called on Saudi Arabia to allow the Syrian people to exercise their rights, end interference in its domestic affairs and stop financing terrorist groups.  Syria would, in the meantime, continue to combat Wahhabi ideology.

Regarding the elections to fill vacancies on the Economic and Social Council — held by secret ballot — the successful candidates included Belarus, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Ireland, Japan, Malawi, Mexico, Morocco, Philippines, Spain, Sudan, Togo, Turkey and Uruguay.  They will hold three-year terms beginning on 1 January 2018.

The 18 outgoing members were:  Argentina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Estonia, France, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, India, Ireland, Japan, Mauritania, Pakistan, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

The new members were elected according to the following pattern:  five from African States; three from the Asia-Pacific States; one from the Eastern European States; four from the Latin American and Caribbean States; and five from the Western European and Other States.

As of 1 January 2018, the remaining States making up the 54-member body will be:  Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Benin, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Guyana, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Somalia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tajikistan, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela and Viet Nam.  That includes three members elected earlier to fill the unexpired terms of office for Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Sweden.

The Assembly will reconvene at a date to be decided.

Voting Results

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| --- | --- |
| African States |   |
| Number of ballots: | 188 |
| Number of invalid ballots: | 0 |
| Number of valid votes: | 188 |
| Number of abstentions: | 0 |
| Number of members voting: | 188 |
| Majority required: | 126 |
| Number of Votes Obtained |   |
| Malawi | 184 |
| Togo | 184 |
| Ghana | 183 |
| Morocco | 177 |
| Sudan | 175 |
| Tunisia | 1 |
| Zambia | 1 |
| Asia-Pacific States |   |
| Number of ballots: | 188 |
| Number of invalid ballots: | 0 |
| Number of valid votes: | 188 |
| Number of abstentions: | 0 |
| Number of members voting: | 188 |
| Majority required: | 126 |
| Number of votes obtained |   |
| Japan | 185 |
| India | 183 |
| Philippines | 182 |
| Democratic People’s Republic of Korea | 1 |
| Pakistan | 1 |
| Eastern European States |   |
| Number of ballots: | 188 |
| Number of invalid ballots: | 0 |
| Number of valid votes: | 188 |
| Number of abstentions: | 3 |
| Number of members voting: | 185 |
| Majority required: | 124 |
| Number of votes obtained |   |
| Belarus | 182 |
| Estonia | 1 |
| Montenegro | 1 |
| Ukraine | 1 |
| Latin America and Caribbean States |   |
| Number of ballots: | 188 |
| Number of invalid ballots: | 0 |
| Number of valid votes: | 188 |
| Number of abstentions: | 1 |
| Number of members voting: | 187 |
| Majority required: | 125 |
| Number of votes obtained |   |
| Ecuador | 182 |
| Mexico | 182 |
| El Salvador | 181 |
| Uruguay | 180 |
| Cuba | 2 |
| Western European and Other States |   |
| Number of ballots: | 188 |
| Number of invalid ballots: | 0 |
| Number of valid votes: | 188 |
| Number of abstentions: | 3 |
| Number of members voting: | 185 |
| Majority required: | 124 |
| Number of votes obtained |   |
| Germany | 182 |
| Spain | 181 |
| Ireland | 180 |
| Turkey | 179 |
| France | 177 |
| Israel | 1 |
| Liechtenstein | 1 |
| Switzerland | 1 |

Having obtained the required two-thirds majority, the following 18 States were elected members of the Economic and Social Council for a three‑year term beginning on 1 January 2018:  Belarus, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Ireland, Japan, Malawi, Mexico, Morocco, Philippines, Spain, Sudan, Togo, Turkey and Uruguay.