

Closing Remarks by Mr Carlo Chiaromonte

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International Conference on the Roles of Women and Children in Terrorism

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Excellencies, distinguished speakers and moderators, participants, ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to express my sincere appreciation for your participation in this two-day International Council of Europe Conference on the Roles of Women and Children in Terrorism.

It has been an honour to witness such remarkable participation in this Conference. I warmly welcome and respect the wide range of expertise here today and the willingness of all our speakers to share their insights, experience and work in these areas of critical importance.

I am also very pleased to have many of our partner organisations here today, including the United Nations, OSCE, EU and Interpol, with whom we work very closely on counter-terrorism matters. I am sure that our discussions have greatly benefitted from such an international dimension and I strongly welcome and congratulate this level of collaboration and coordination. It is extremely positive for our upcoming work in counter-terrorism matters.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to speak briefly about why we at the Council of Europe have organised the event on these topics. For one, the dire conditions in camps in North-East Syria for women and children has been emphasised throughout this event – these are pressing issues that require sustainable and meaningful international responses. As we have also heard, there are many more other areas of concern. Women and children can have many roles in different situations and in relation to different terrorist organisations, and equally the impact of such situations on women and children can vary greatly.

It has thus been a great privilege to witness the multidisciplinary and extensive geographical scope of the Sessions that have taken place over the last two days. All of our speakers have shared extremely valuable and informative insights on the issue of the roles of women and children in terrorism and the consequences for women and children, and their families, communities and societies.

In that regard, I wish to take this opportunity to briefly highlight some of the key takeaways and points throughout the course of this event:

1. The key role played by the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other regional international organisations in supporting national authorities in engaging in these challenging societal issues.
2. The importance of understanding women's involvement in terrorism and terrorist groups at all levels. Whether involved in Daesh or their affiliates, or violent far-right movements, or QAnon, there are numerous ways women can be recruiters, fighters, fund raisers, or influencers.
3. There is an important positive role that women can play as front-line defenders and as providers of early warnings against terrorism.
4. The seriousness and lasting impact that terrorism has on children and young people. These traumatic experiences can result in extreme harm to their psychological, physical and social development, as well as perpetuating the risk of continued cycles of violence.
5. Children are mostly victims. Children should not be punished for what their parents did or do. There is, therefore, a need to prevent children from becoming normalised to violence, either by witnessing terrorism, or by being trained to perpetrate horrific acts of violence. However, in order to develop suitable policies, we must recognise the different levels of involvement of children and ensure that we carefully apply a range of measures to address these nuances.
6. The need to strengthen the positive role of children too, and to improve their resilience. We need to be listening to them and giving them a voice, as well as involving them in designing and monitoring solutions.
7. As regards women and children with presumed links to Daesh, concern for the humanitarian situation facing women and children in the detention camps in Syria was expressed, while, at the same time, it was also acknowledged, the security risks posed by fanatic adherents of Daesh using these camps as incubators for further radicalisation leading to terrorism, and hence the need for States to mitigate these risks.
8. Many authorities within and outside Europe are charged with responding to these ongoing challenges, no one country can solve this alone. Now, more than ever, greater international co-operation to tackle these issues needs to be encouraged, and to develop comprehensive and effective approaches that emphasise gender and child-sensitive dimensions.
9. There is a clear need to stress the vital work of those operating directly in these priority societal issues. The continued importance of civil society organisations operating in this area is critical, and it was highlighted how civil society is

working to provide humanitarian assistance and aid to those women and children in need.

- 10.** Future work in this field must be founded on solid research and evidence, and facilitated by an in-depth understanding of the impact on, and the roles of, women and children in terrorist organisations. However, as many speakers indicated, we need more data and more empirical research to understand the motivations behind women's involvement in these groups and to empower women to prevent violent extremism and terrorism in all forms. We don't have enough knowledge – we need more knowledge.
- 11.** The efforts made by those involved in the reintegration and rehabilitation of women and children affected by terrorism. The main challenges in this area and how implementing strategies requires careful coordination with a range of communities and local government actors were stressed.
- 12.** And finally, we are very grateful to the speakers at the Parliamentary Roundtable, who addressed many of the challenges faced by legislatures and policymakers in responding democratically to these sensitive needs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For many years, the Council of Europe has helped to develop and reinforce key legal standards to prevent and suppress acts of terrorism. We are ready as the Council of Europe, as a human rights-oriented organisation, to work hand in hand with the relevant national authorities and with our international partners and organisations to respond to these problems and issues.

The recent Council of Europe Recommendation on measures aimed at protecting children against radicalisation for the purpose of terrorism adopted by the Committee of Ministers in October this year is a good example of this.

We are also in the process of preparing a collection of good practices with regards to deradicalization, disengagement and social reintegration, which will also draw from and expand on some of the issues raised here.

And of course, I should recall the Council of Europe Convention on violence against women (Istanbul Convention) that also stands as a vital instrument to support the protection of women and to fight violence against women in all its manifestations.

Whilst this list is by no means exhaustive, it is a great honour to mention some of the Council of Europe tools that have been developed to help State authorities in their efforts to address these issues. This Conference has further highlighted that we need to continue to develop our forward-looking efforts to address the involvement of women and children in terrorism.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to close this conference by expressing my sincere appreciation to all people and the bodies of the Council of Europe for their support throughout the organisation of this Conference. I would like to thank in particular Ambassadors Esener and Meuwly, the Gender Equality Commission (GEC), the Steering Committee for the rights of the child (CDENF) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Without their support and fruitful contribution, we would not have been able to put together such a quality line-up of speakers.

I would also like to extend a warm thanks to Mr Luis Leite Ramos, Mr Raffi Gregorian, Ambassador Ferrer and Mr Irfan Saeed for their opening remarks. At the Council of Europe, we greatly value our international partnerships and the mutual support for our respective bodies and organisations in our collective efforts to combat terrorism.

I would also like to offer my thanks to all the moderators who have helped guide us throughout the Conference - we are very honoured to have had you facilitate these discussions.

And I would like to again thank all the distinguished speakers for their invaluable and extremely informative interventions, we are very grateful that you have taken the time to share with us all your expertise and perspectives. I look forward to continued coordination and collaboration in the future.

I would like to thank all of our participants for listening and joining us in this event.

Finally, I want to thank our interpreters and technicians for their excellent work.

On this note, I close this international Conference on the Roles of Women and Children in Terrorism.

I wish you all a very good evening, excellent holidays and my very best wishes for the New Year.

Thank you.