

# National Counter Terrorism Centre



NCTC Newsletter - Volume 37: April 2020

## Enhanced Multi-Agency Emergency Response During COVID-19

A DEDICATION TO THE FRONT LINE  
TASKFORCE OF COVID-19

Healthcare Professionals in Front Line

"What the world needs  
now is solidarity. With  
solidarity we can defeat  
the virus and build a  
better world."  
United Nations

Customs and AVSECOM Supporting Public

Security Forces Supporting Public Delivery Services

Maldives Red Crescent

...continued on page 2



Following the announcement on the morning of 15th April 2020, by the Health Protection Agency (HPA), regarding the first positive local case of community spread COVID-19 in Male' city, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih announced that, under the advice of the National Security Council at a meeting held that morning, Male' city would be held under lockdown for the following 24 hours. Kaafu Atoll Kaashidhoo had also been brought under monitoring due to the discovery that a person who had direct contact with the new COVID-19 patient had travelled to the island.

Further extending the lockdown to 14 days on the 16th of April, the Health Protection Agency advised the public to be more cautious and stay at home. With the people expected to be most vulnerable due to the economic impact during the COVID19, the government of Maldives is doing its best to maintain a level of sustenance with respect to all economic needs to the people, and small to medium and large businesses.

“President Solih urged the public to remain calm, be patient and cooperate fully with the health care professionals, while they do ...continued on page 3

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their jobs to contain the community spread in Maldives. President Solih reassured the public that the Government of Maldives had been adequately prepared for such a scenario and that all of the most efficient measures to minimise the spread of the disease, in the event of even a single positive case, had been previously prepared and the measures had been put in place”.

Flattening the curve is the ultimatum to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and the nation's lockdown is further extended to support the national efforts.

The Maldives Police Service and Maldives National Defense Force (MNDF) have said they are on standby for any situation that may arise during COVID-19 in the Maldives. MNDF readiness is in place to prevent and counter any national security threat that may arise during COVID-19, and urged to the public to refrain from any violent extremism which may harm the national interest of Maldives.

pandemic.

Maldives Police Service asserted that they will continue operations and remain vigilant to prevent and counter any illegal activities including spread of misinformation and disinformation on COVID-19 in Maldives that serves no legitimate purpose, but create fear and panic among the public



Commissioner of Police (CP) Mohamed Hameed announced that Maldives Police Service will take criminal action against fearmongers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reference: [presidency.gov.mv](http://presidency.gov.mv); [psmnews.mv](http://psmnews.mv), [avas.mv](http://avas.mv), [edition.mv](http://edition.mv)



Chief of Defense Force, Major General Abdulla Shamal has stated that the national defense force will do all that is necessary to ensure the safety and protection of the people from the COVID-19



# NCTC and Stakeholders Participated the Online Train the Trainer Module on Requesting Electronic Evidence Across Borders, Hosted by UNODC

21 April 2020



## SECURE INTERACTIVE ROOM FOR **ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE MATTERS**

Terrorism Prevention Branch, UNODC

Made possible thanks to the generous contributions of the European Union



Adapting to COVID-19 restrictions with use of online counter-terrorism learning platform, UNODC with its partner agencies remains committed to providing criminal justice officials with the tools and knowledge needed to tackle challenges associated with electronic evidence and terrorist use of the Internet. To ensure the sustainability of training courses, as well as to address emerging global threats, a new online space was inaugurated on the platform specifically dedicated to electronic evidence matters.

On 21 April 2020, in the framework of projects in Sri Lanka and the Maldives generously funded by the European Union and jointly implemented

with INTERPOL, UNODC convened the first online meeting on the newly established iRoom. In close collaboration with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the event brought together subject matter experts to seek inputs on a draft training module based on the Practical Guide for Requesting Electronic Evidence Across Borders, jointly drafted by UNODC, the United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the International Association of Prosecutors (IAP).

Source: [unodc.org](https://www.unodc.org)



## NCTC Begins Collaboration with the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies

21 April 2020

### A Proposal for E Learning and Webinars on PCVE



Amidst the COVID-19 restrictions NCTC began its collaborations with the DKI Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. During this initiation NCTC officials held an e-video conference with an expert of Terrorism Studies at the Hawaii center and discussed on future collaborations on preventing and countering violent extremism through e-platforms. The proposal included three options in order of preference:

Option 1 being a series of 4 webinars addressing priority concerns for Maldives, each lasting for

one hour. Option 2 would be a standalone webinar on COVID-19 and Violent Extremism, which would address on the issues of COVID-19. This is also a live and interactive session less comprehensive in nature. Option 3 would be prerecorded lecture sessions custom made for the required need of Maldives.

Further collaborations are awaiting to move forward with required suggestions from both parties.



Source: unodc.org

States have the responsibility to protect children from all forms of violence especially when they are in vulnerable situations such as when in contact with the justice system. States should address efforts to prevent child involvement with crime and violence. The rights of child victims and witnesses have to be protected to prevent further revictimization. Any action taken in relation to a child alleged offender should aim at promoting his or her rehabilitation and reintegration and deprivation of liberty must be a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

# Global Trends of Crime and Terror Nexus During COVID-19 Pandemic: Building Community Resilience to Prevent Violent Extremism

*By: LTC Amanulla A. Rasheed*

## Introduction

What is a critical vulnerability? It is important to answer this key question to tackle key security challenges. For the COVID-19 pandemic the most critical vulnerability is the people and their lockdown situation. There needs to be an engagement of the security forces in support for national service, to fight the war against the COVID-19, alongside the frontline healthcare professionals. The spiritual belief and public adherence to the restrictions, and the strong commitment of all stakeholders are the nation's strengths in fighting this pandemic. It entails the collective and cohesive effort displayed by the people as well as the mitigation and response efforts.

On the other side, crime and terror would transform, changing its ways and means to exploit the situation and target the vulnerable communities in order to create chaos and misconceptions amongst the public and hate towards the state governments. Extremist sympathizers are covertly playing their role in spreading the Jihadist beliefs in the vulnerable communities, which is part of terror tactics, and yet the spread of violent extremism have been managed. Hence, it is imperative to build community resilience to prevent violent

extremism through extensive awareness and knowledge using E-platforms for communication.

## Crime and Terror Nexus

When we look at the recent trends of organized crimes (OC) around the globe, since the borders have been closed and restrictions imposed on daily life, the ability of OC operate has been disrupted. Common burglars and thieves will find it more difficult to break into homes when occupants are in all day. Therefore, we all need to be cautious of those desperate criminals' next tactics to obtain money, they may have to directly face their victims. Extremists' on the other hand will adapt to the situation with new approaches by means of the cyber domain.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) asserted that as the COVID19 continues to spread globally, new terrorist threats like the far-right networks are reported to be preparing to exploit the possibility of social disorder. Furthermore, groups affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh (ISIL) continue to use media platforms such as Telegram to provoke the commission of offences by supporters in countries distracted by COVID19, framing the pandemic as a divine reinforcement of their struggles<sup>i</sup>.

INTERPOL's COVID-19 global threat assessment<sup>ii</sup> suggests that there would be

*...continued on page 7*

multiple new threats during this pandemic globally.

“(1) Marked increase of cyber threats including malicious domains, malware and ransomware, (2) health service providers and essential products outlets increasingly targeted as critical infrastructure, (3) fraudulent and counterfeit trade in personal protective equipment (PPE) and antiviral pharmaceuticals, (4) increased drug commerce via social media, encrypted apps and the Dark net, and (5) individuals and businesses on reduced incomes potential targets of loan sharks”<sup>iii</sup>.

Several changes in crime patterns have been noted as one third of the world’s population is at different forms of confinement. Burglaries may be few, but thieves are increasingly targeting different businesses that are left unattended by security guards. Very recently Maldives Police Service revealed that over MVR 1.7 million were stolen from real estate developer and construction materials supplier, Apollo Holdings. INTERPOL reported that there has also been a significant rise in domestic violence cases since the start of COVID-19 related isolations and quarantines, “with reports showing women and children at greater risk of abuse”<sup>iv</sup>. A recent statement in 06th April, by the Minister of Gender, Family and Social Services confirmed that discussions to establish shelters as a measure to address the possibility of increased domestic violence were ongoing. This statement was made in consideration of the current Health Protection Agency (HPA) curfew and state advised self-isolation measures amid the COVID-19 pandemic that may presumably 'lock-in' victims with their abusers<sup>v</sup>. There has been a Global increase in online activity by pedophiles

seeking child sexual abuse material. The shortage of moderators who identify and remove offensive material from networks has resulted in the exacerbation of this issue.

Public frustrations due to joblessness and lacking essential provisions are also increase and may lead to protests, looting, and destruction of public property. Recently several boats belonging to the government were set ablaze by suspected desperate groups in Maldives.

“In addition to the global threat assessment, INTERPOL continues to share warnings to member countries in relation to specific threats. Purple Notices have been issued in relation to increased ransomware attacks and new types of fraud specifically linked to COVID-19”<sup>vi</sup>.

After going through the developing criminal activities, we shall never forget the growing extremist networks and terrorism related activities. Whilst the world is moving to a new normal, those who challenge to exploit the vulnerable situation would also may adapt new tactics to cause damage to the society. Instead of physical action, extremists’ may resort to psychological operations, cyber-attacks, manipulation of educational sector, and infiltrating state prison facilities to conduct subversive activities which would create chaos in the country.

The COVID-19 situation is an opportunity for the terrorist organizations to use the window in raising funds by illicit means. A statement by the President of the global money laundering (ML) and terrorist financing (TF) watchdog, Financial Action Task Force (FATF), mentioned: “the members of the FATF both domestically and multilaterally, are applying every available

*...continued on page 8*



resource to combat the COVID-19 pandemic”<sup>vii</sup>. Innocent victims are being targeted by malicious or fraudulent cybercrimes, fundraising for fake charities, and various medical scams where criminals attempting to profit from the pandemic by exploiting people in urgent need of care and the goodwill of the general public and by spreading misinformation about COVID-19<sup>viii</sup>.

As stated earlier, the new trends associated with criminals and terrorists would include seeking new alternatives to exploit weakness in national anti-money laundering/countering-financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) systems, assuming that resources are focused elsewhere. Hence, financial institutions and other businesses should remain vigilant to emerging ML and TF risks to effectively mitigate these risks, and are able to detect and report suspicious activity. Consequently, financial intelligence units and law enforcement agencies should continue to collaborate with the private sector to arrange mechanisms for sharing information and address ML risks, especially those related to fraud, and TF risks linked to COVID-19<sup>ix</sup>.

### Building Community Resilience for PVE

Community resilience depends on factors like psycho-social strength, socio-economic strength, social security, strategic communications, and life sustenance for those displaced due to COVID19, proper awareness and education. State emergency response groups will need to plan ahead to counter all challenges facing against these factors and prepare national assistance plans for the whole community during and post-COVID-19 pandemic. When all this issues have been addressed a community could be prepared that will counter and prevent the growing national security threat of violent extremism (VE).

Henceforth, VE seeks weak and vulnerable communities from basic human needs as the factors described above.

Socio-economic strength is vital to be present in a community. There is already an impact on the global economy, which would have adverse effects to the local community. Governments have started emergency stimulus economic packages to provide local small, medium and large business with a basic investment manage the short term affects. In the long run , it would be necessary to teach people how to grow their own food, banding together to provide investments to keep struggling local businesses afloat, organizing mutual aid networks, and advocating for a “green stimulus”<sup>x</sup>. These measures could form the basis for engaging the people such that they do not move towards intolerance of this hardship.

Secondly, addressing mental health concerns and strengthening psychological resilience is crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. As declared by WHO Regional Director for Europe, it is the power of strength and cooperation that we also fortunately possess as humans, and focus on to respond most effectively to this crisis as individuals, family and community members, friends and colleagues.

Strategic communications are the most vital tool for community resilience along with awareness and education on prevention violent extremism. In case of Maldives a continuous effort on PVE was made through engaging the education sector; both senior educators and parents, who are the mainstay of the community. These efforts need to continue especially during COVID-19 as extremists would try to exploit ...continued on page 9



the idleness of the youth due to minimal school activities. Counter narratives would also be a significant tool in enabling the community to understand the correct approach to all worldly activities. National and private institutions who are already involved in strategic communications would be a great assistance in this regard.

### Conclusion

Strategic communications and Community awareness on the new ways and means by which extremists exploit the situation of COVID-19 and how they target the vulnerable communities in order to create chaos and misconceptions amongst the public is important. State agencies in collaboration with civil society organisations should ensure community resilience by providing basic knowledge on the changing world and prepare them to face all challenges of crime and terror to protect the society along with the security forces. During this COVID-19 crisis, the security forces should more prepared and vigilant to respond to national security threats that emanate from sources worldwide, whilst healthcare sectors are in the frontline treating the sick. The commitment of all stakeholders is necessary in fighting the pandemic and should foster spiritual belief and public confidence in the face of the restrictions of lockdowns. Crimes are no different to terrorism in such a situation, as these would also create fear and chaos within the public that is akin to that produced by terrorism and violent extremism. Furthermore, public awareness and support on caring of mental psychological health issues and teaching to manage the localized economies to sustain basic needs of the community is also vital.

### Reference

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- ii "Preventing Crime and Protecting Police: INTERPOL's COVID-19 Global Threat Assessment." INTERPOL. Accessed April 18, 2020. <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2020/Preventing-crime-and-protecting-police-INTERPOL-s-COVID-19-global-threat-assessment>.
- iii A loan shark is a person who – or an entity that – loans money at extremely high interest rates and often uses threats of violence to collect debts. The interest rates are generally well above an established legal rate, and often loan sharks are members of organized crime groups.
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- x Proposal, Green Stimulus. "A Green Stimulus to Rebuild Our Economy." Medium. Medium, March 31, 2020. [https://medium.com/@green\\_stimulus\\_now/a-green-stimulus-to-rebuild-our-economy-1e7030a1d9ee](https://medium.com/@green_stimulus_now/a-green-stimulus-to-rebuild-our-economy-1e7030a1d9ee).



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