UNODC

Oakridge MUN 2026

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Institutional Architecture and the Human Rights Dimension of Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism

CONTENTS

MUN Rules Of Procedure (ROP)

1. Roll Call

- The Chair calls on each country to declare if they are "Present" or "Present and Voting." It refers to the voting procedure on the Draft Resolution, where a delegate can vote "Yes", "No", or opt to "Abstain".
- If "Present and Voting," the delegate cannot abstain from voting. If the delegate chooses to respond with "Present", they may answer with "Present and Voting" on subsequent days, but this is not permissible for "Present and Voting" as this reply must be used consistently from that point forth.

2. Setting the Agenda

- Delegates motion to set the agenda, followed by a formal debate on which topic to discuss first. This motion requires a simple majority to pass.

3. Speakers' List

- After passing a motion to enter formal debate, delegates are placed on a speakers' list to make formal speeches. Time limits are set, and the Chair calls on delegates to speak in order.
- A delegate must raise their placard if they wish to add their name to this list. They can be on this list only once on any occasion.

4. Points

- **Point of Order:** To correct a procedural error by the Chair.
- **Point of Personal Privilege:** For personal discomfort (e.g., if the room is too cold, or if a fellow delegate cannot be heard).
- **Point of Inquiry:** To ask questions about discussion or statements in committee.
- **Point of Parliamentary Inquiry:** To ask questions with regard to the Rules of Procedure.

5. Motions

- **Motion to Suspend the Meeting:** To break for caucuses or adjourn the session.
- **Motion to Close Debate:** Ends the discussion on a topic and moves to voting. Requires a two-thirds majority.
- **Motion to Table the Topic:** Postpones debate on a topic. Requires a majority vote.

6. Yields

- **Yield to the Executive Board:** A delegate yields their remaining time from their speech to the Executive Board. It is to be used as they see fit.
- **Yield to Another Delegate:** A delegate yields their remaining time for another delegate to speak. (This delegate's permission must be sought beforehand)
- **Yield to Points of Information:** A delegate yields their remaining time to Points of Information to the committee.
- **Yield to Comments:** A delegate yields their remaining time to comments from the committee.

7. Caucuses

- **Moderated Caucus:** The Chair controls the speaking order with shorter, focused speeches. The topic selected is a narrowed version of the agenda, chosen by the delegate who proposed the moderated caucus.
- **Unmoderated Caucus:** Informal discussion among delegates not under the moderation of the Executive Board.

8. Draft Resolutions and Amendments

- Delegates collaborate to create draft resolutions, which are formal solutions to the discussed issue.
- **Friendly Amendments:** Accepted by all sponsors without a vote.
- **Unfriendly Amendments:** Need to be voted on to be added.

9. Voting

- **Procedural Votes:** Includes motions and amendments; all members must vote.
- **Substantive Votes:** For resolutions and unfriendly amendments; only "Present and Voting" delegates may vote, and abstentions are allowed.

Part I — A Comprehensive Institutional Briefing

Mandate · Organizational Structure · Powers · Functions · Subsidiary Bodies · Funding. Current as of July 2026.

1. What UNODC Is

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is the UN Secretariat entity mandated to address illicit drugs, transnational organized crime, corruption, terrorism prevention, and crime prevention/criminal justice reform, as an integrated cluster of "rule of law" problems.

Origins. UNODC was created in 1997 as the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (ODCCP), formed by merging the UN International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP, established 1991) with the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division of the UN Secretariat. It was renamed the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in 2002.

Institutional status. UNODC is not a specialized agency with its own founding treaty and independent international legal personality (unlike, say, the WHO or the IAEA). It is a programme/office of the UN Secretariat, headquartered at the Vienna International Centre. Its head — the Executive Director — simultaneously serves as Director-General of the UN Office at Vienna (UNOV), a single "double-hatted" post at Under-Secretary-General rank, appointed by the UN Secretary-General. The two offices share a Division for Management.

Footprint. UNODC operates through a headquarters in Vienna, a network of regional offices, country offices and programme offices spanning most of the world, and liaison offices in New York and Brussels.

Mission, in UNODC's own framing: to contribute to global peace and security, human rights, and development by making the world safer from drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism.

Five interlinked thematic pillars structure virtually everything UNODC does:

1. Countering the world drug problem
2. Preventing and combating transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking
3. Preventing, detecting and combating corruption and economic crime
4. Terrorism prevention
5. Crime prevention and criminal justice reform (access to justice, prison reform, juvenile justice, etc.)

Research, statistics and policy analysis run underneath all five as a cross-cutting function.

2. The Legal and Political Mandate

Unlike a specialized agency, UNODC has no single founding convention. Instead, its mandate is assembled from being the secretariat and technical-assistance arm of a cluster of multilateral treaties, plus a continuous stream of General Assembly, ECOSOC and Security Council mandates. A precise mandate map matters enormously for anyone assessing what UNODC can legitimately be asked to do.

The three international drug control conventions

- Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 (as amended by the 1972 Protocol)
- Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971
- UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988

The organized crime treaty

- UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC, the "Palermo Convention"), 2000, in force 2003 — plus its three Protocols: Trafficking in Persons; Smuggling of Migrants; and Firearms.

The anti-corruption treaty

- UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC, the "Merida Convention"), 2003, in force 2005 — the only universal, legally binding anti-corruption instrument.

The newest treaty (not yet in force)

UN Convention against Cybercrime ("Hanoi Convention"), adopted by the General Assembly on 24 December 2024 (resolution 79/243). It opened for signature in Hanoi on 25–26 October 2025 and needs 40 ratifications to enter into force (90 days after the 40th deposit). As of mid-2026 it has around 75 signatories but only a handful of ratifications, so it is not yet operative — UNODC has, however, already been designated to serve as secretariat once a Conference of the States Parties convenes.

> Note for a human-rights audience: the Convention has drawn sustained criticism from NGOs, technology companies and some states for its broad scope and thin human-rights safeguards, alongside support from others as a needed tool for cross-border evidence-sharing.

The counter-terrorism legal framework — a structurally different case

There is no single "UN counter-terrorism convention" administered by UNODC. Instead, there are 19 international legal instruments against terrorism, developed piecemeal since the 1960s under various auspices (the UN Secretary-General as depositary for most; ICAO for aviation-security instruments; IMO for maritime ones; IAEA-linked for nuclear material). These cover hijacking and aviation security, hostage-taking, protection of internationally protected persons, protection of nuclear material, terrorist bombings (1997), financing of terrorism (1999), and nuclear terrorism (2005), among others.

UNODC does not act as treaty depositary or custodian for these instruments the way it does for UNTOC or UNCAC. Its role, instead, is defined by General Assembly mandate: to help states ratify and domestically implement them, and to build criminal-justice capacity to apply them. The current comprehensive mandate is General Assembly resolution A/RES/78/226 (19 December 2023), "Technical assistance provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime related to counter-terrorism." This sits alongside the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/60/288, 2006), which explicitly encourages states to draw on UNODC's technical assistance and is reviewed by the General Assembly roughly every two years.

The foundational crime-prevention mandate

- ECOSOC resolution 9(I) (1946) — established the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

- ECOSOC resolutions 1992/1 and 1992/22 — established the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
- General Assembly resolution 46/152 (1991) — the "Statement of principles and programme of action of the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme," the charter document for UNODC's crime-side mandate

3. Organizational Architecture

A necessary clarification of terminology before the org chart. People (including many otherwise-careful commentators) loosely refer to the whole Vienna-based drugs-and-crime ecosystem as "UNODC." Legally, that is imprecise, and getting the distinction right is exactly the kind of thing that separates a general awareness of UNODC from specialist command of it:

- The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) are not subordinate to UNODC. They are functional commissions of ECOSOC that, since 1991 and 2006 respectively, also act as UNODC's governing bodies — meaning they sit above the UNODC Secretariat in the policy and budget-approval sense, not below it.
- The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is fully independent of both governments and of UNODC's management chain, even though its secretariat is administratively housed inside UNODC.
- The Conference of the Parties to UNTOC and the Conference of the States Parties to UNCAC are constituted by their respective treaties' states parties — UNODC services them as secretariat but does not control them.

So "UNODC," strictly speaking, refers to the Secretariat/Executive Director's office — everything else is better described as the wider institutional family that UNODC's Secretariat serves, is governed by, or is monitored by.

The Secretariat in detail

Executive Direction. The Executive Director sits at the apex, supported by a Chief of Staff and an Independent Evaluation Section that reports directly to the ED (kept outside the four divisions to preserve oversight independence).

Division for Treaty Affairs (DTA) — the normative and substantive engine, headed by a Director (D-2). Its main components:

- Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch (OCB) — secretariat to the UNTOC Conference of the Parties; internally organized into the Conference Support Section, the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section, the Firearms Trafficking Section, and the Cybercrime and Money Laundering Section. OCB also now services the new Cybercrime Convention process.
- Corruption and Economic Crime Branch (CEB) — secretariat to the UNCAC Conference of the States Parties.
- Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB) — UNODC's counter-terrorism technical-assistance engine (treated in full depth in Part II of this briefing).
- Justice — criminal justice reform, prison reform, access to justice, juvenile justice, and custodian of the UN's non-treaty "soft law" standards (e.g., the Nelson Mandela Rules on prisoner treatment, the Bangkok Rules, the Beijing Rules on juvenile justice).
- Secretariat to the Governing Bodies — services the CND and CCPCJ sessions themselves.
- Border Management Branch.

Division for Operations (DO) — where technical assistance is actually delivered. Organized into regional sections overseeing UNODC's Regional Offices, Country Offices and Programme Offices worldwide; this is the field-implementation arm that turns headquarters mandates into projects on the ground.

Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs (DPAPA) — research, data, statistics, and public engagement, including:

- Research and Trend Analysis Branch — produces flagship publications such as the World Drug Report, the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, the Global Study on Homicide, and the World Wildlife Crime Report.
- Laboratory and Scientific Section; Statistics and Surveys Section.
- Advocacy and public-affairs functions, and donor/partnership relations.

Division for Management (DM) — human resources, budget/finance, IT, and conference services; shared with UNOV since both offices are headed by the same official.

Current Executive Director: Monica Kathina Juma of Kenya, who took office on 11 May 2026, appointed by Secretary-General António Guterres. She succeeded Ghada Fathi Waly of Egypt, whose five-year term ended in November 2025; John Brandolino (then Director of DTA) served as Acting Executive Director in the interim. Juma previously served as Kenya's National Security Adviser and held several Cabinet Secretary portfolios (Defence, Foreign Affairs, Energy).

4. Powers and Functions: What UNODC Can and Cannot Do

For anyone briefing a human-rights/criminal-justice audience, this distinction matters more than any org chart — it is easy to overstate UNODC's authority, and doing so leads to bad analysis.

What UNODC actually does

Function	What It Looks Like In Practice
Normative and standard-setting	Drafts model laws, legislative guides, and technical commentaries; provides secretariat and drafting support during treaty negotiations (e.g., OCB's role shepherding the new Cybercrime Convention through its Ad Hoc Committee).
Facilitating treaty implementation review	Runs the peer-review machinery for UNCAC (Implementation Review Mechanism) and, more recently, UNTOC — but the reviews are state-driven and consensual; UNODC facilitates, it does not adjudicate.
Technical assistance and capacity-building	This is the core function. Legislative drafting help, training curricula for judges/prosecutors/investigators/prison officials, mentoring, secondment of UN Volunteers, joint programmes with INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization, OHCHR, IOM and others.
Research, data and trend analysis	World Drug Report, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, Global Study on Homicide, and (with civil-society partners) the Global Organized Crime Index — widely cited and genuinely influential on public and policy debate.

Function	What It Looks Like In Practice
Secretariat services	To CND, CCPCJ, UNTOC-COP, UNCAC-CoSP, INCB (administratively), and the quinquennial UN Crime Congress.
Direct field implementation	Embedded advisers, judicial mentoring programmes, prison-reform projects, joint interdiction task forces (e.g., AIRCOP with INTERPOL/WCO at airports).
SDG custodianship	UNODC is the official "custodian agency" for several SDG 16 indicators (violence, corruption, trafficking, access to justice), meaning it collects and validates the data governments report against for global SDG monitoring.

What UNODC cannot do

- **Cannot legislate.** CND, CCPCJ, and General Assembly resolutions are recommendatory. They are not binding law on any state — a sharp contrast with Security Council resolutions adopted under Chapter VII.
- **Cannot prosecute, adjudicate, or run courts.** UNODC has no judicial or quasi-judicial function of its own.
- **Cannot conduct enforcement operations inside a state without consent.** Everything — training, legislative review, country visits, peer reviews — happens "upon request." Non-cooperation by a state simply means the activity doesn't happen.
- **Cannot impose sanctions.** The closest thing anywhere in this institutional family to a coercive tool is the INCB's Article 14 mechanism under the 1961 Convention: as a genuine last resort, the Board may recommend that other states stop importing from, or exporting to, a state that has failed to remedy a serious treaty violation. Even that is a recommendation to other states, not a sanction imposed by INCB itself, and it is rarely invoked.
- **Cannot compel publication or disclosure.** Under the UNCAC review mechanism, for instance, only the executive summary of a country review is automatically public; the full report is published only with the reviewed state's consent.
- **Is financially dependent** on donors for the vast majority of what it actually delivers (see Section 6) — which means its de facto priorities can diverge from its de jure mandate, since heavily earmarked voluntary funding lets

donors steer resources toward preferred themes and regions. UN oversight bodies (notably the Joint Inspection Unit) have flagged this structural tension repeatedly.

5. Subsidiary and Related Bodies, In Detail

For each body: legal basis, composition, and — the specific thing asked for — what it can and cannot do.

5.1 Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

Legal basis: ECOSOC resolution 9(I) (1946); mandate expanded by General Assembly resolution 46/104 (1991) to also function as UNODC's governing body for drug policy.

Composition: 53 member states elected by ECOSOC for four-year terms (11 African States, 11 Asian States, 10 Latin American & Caribbean States, 6 Eastern European States, 14 Western European & Other States, with one seat rotating between the Asian and Latin American/Caribbean groups). Meets annually in Vienna (normally March), plus a reconvened session and intersessional meetings. Non-members may attend and speak but not vote.

Can do:

- Function as the central UN drug-policy-making body.
- Exercise a genuine "binding-ish" treaty power: it can add, remove, or reschedule narcotic drugs under the 1961 Convention (on WHO recommendation, simple majority) and psychotropic substances under the 1971 Convention (on WHO recommendation, two-thirds majority), and bring precursor chemicals under control under the 1988 Convention (on INCB's advice). This scheduling power is the single most concrete piece of "hard" authority anywhere in the CND/CCPCJ/UNODC complex.
- Approve UNODC's drug-programme budget and give it policy direction, as its governing body.
- Adopt political declarations (e.g., the 2019 Ministerial Declaration) — influential, but not binding law.
- Create its own subsidiary bodies: the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East; the four regional HONLEA bodies (Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies) for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean; and ad hoc

expert mechanisms, most recently an Expert Panel (established under CND resolution 68/6) tasked with recommending how to strengthen implementation of the drug conventions through 2029.

Cannot do: Bind non-member states to its resolutions; compel a state to change domestic drug policy; enforce its own scheduling decisions (enforcement remains entirely a national responsibility).

5.2 Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)

Legal basis: ECOSOC resolution 1992/1 (establishment) and 1992/22 (mandate and priorities); expanded by General Assembly resolution 61/252 (2006) to also serve as UNODC's governing body for the crime programme.

Composition: 40 member states elected by ECOSOC on staggered three-year terms (12 African, 9 Asian, 8 Latin American & Caribbean, 4 Eastern European, 7 Western European & Other States). Annual regular session in Vienna (normally May), a reconvened session, and intersessional meetings.

Can do:

- Act as the principal UN policy-making body on crime prevention and criminal justice — organized crime, economic crime and money-laundering, criminal-law protection of the environment, urban and juvenile crime, and the fairness/efficiency of criminal justice systems generally.
- Approve UNODC's crime-programme budget, as governing body.
- Serve as the preparatory and follow-up body for the UN Crime Congress, the quinquennial mega-conference (see 5.6): it shapes the Congress agenda beforehand and operationalizes the Congress's declaration into resolutions afterward.
- Review and update the UN's standard-setting instruments in crime and criminal justice — soft law rather than treaty law, but influential (Nelson Mandela Rules, Bangkok Rules, Beijing Rules, and similar).
- Maintain the UN Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme Network (PNI), a network of affiliated research institutes worldwide that feed technical expertise into the Commission's work.

Cannot do: Create binding criminal offences (the UN, as an intergovernmental organization, cannot itself define what conduct is criminal except through treaties that states then choose to ratify); adjudicate individual cases; bind non-member states.

5.3 International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)

Legal basis: Established by the 1961 Single Convention (operational since 1968); also exercises functions under the 1971 and 1988 Conventions.

Composition: 13 individuals — not government representatives — elected by ECOSOC to serve in a personal capacity for five-year terms. Three are nominated by the WHO for medical/pharmacological expertise; ten are nominated by governments. Members elect their own President.

Can do:

- Administer the mandatory global “estimates” system, under which governments report projected licit drug needs, and the international import/export authorization system, to keep licit trade in balance with genuine medical and scientific demand.
- Monitor precursor chemicals and recommend scheduling changes to the CND.
- Request explanations from governments over apparent treaty violations and propose remedial measures.
- As a genuine last resort, invoke the Article 14 mechanism (1961 Convention): recommend that other states parties halt drug imports from, or exports to, a state that has failed to remedy a serious violation. This is recommendatory rather than self-executing, and used sparingly — but it is the closest thing to a coercive lever in this entire institutional ecosystem.
- Publish an authoritative annual report, submitted to ECOSOC via the CND.

Cannot do — and a live controversy worth knowing: INCB routinely describes itself as “independent and quasi-judicial.” That self-description is contested. Governments and scholars — including, in a pointed 2022 intervention, a US State Department attorney-adviser — have argued that neither the drug conventions nor ECOSOC resolutions actually confer adjudicative authority on the Board; it has no power to rule bindingly on a state’s compliance, “convict,” or issue binding findings. It is best understood as an expert monitoring and advisory body with one narrow recommendatory enforcement tool (Article 14), not a court.

Relationship to UNODC: INCB's secretariat is administratively housed within UNODC, but on substance the INCB Secretary reports to the Board, not to the Executive Director. INCB is independent of UNODC's management chain.

5.4 Conference of the Parties to UNTOC (and its Working Groups)

Legal basis: Article 32 of UNTOC (2000).

Composition: all States Parties (UNTOC is one of the most widely ratified UN conventions).

Can do: Promote and review implementation of UNTOC and its three Protocols; oversee a Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of UNTOC (established 2018, modelled on UNCAC's peer-review architecture); direct specialized working groups — including on firearms trafficking and on trafficking in persons/smuggling of migrants, among others — that produce guidance and identify technical-assistance priorities. OCB, within DTA, serves as its secretariat. Most recently, the COP process (via an Ad Hoc Committee also serviced by OCB) delivered the new UN Convention against Cybercrime — evidence that UNODC's treaty portfolio is still actively expanding.

Cannot do: Amend the Convention's substantive obligations outside the formal amendment procedure; compel ratification or compliance by non-consenting states.

5.5 Conference of the States Parties to UNCAC (CoSP)

Legal basis: Article 63 of UNCAC (2003).

Composition: all States Parties (around 190); meets every two years.

Can do: Promote and review UNCAC implementation; adopt resolutions directing UNODC's anti-corruption technical assistance. Its principal subsidiary body, the Implementation Review Group (IRG), oversees the peer-review Implementation Review Mechanism — two five-year review cycles covering, respectively, criminalization/law enforcement plus international cooperation (Chapters III–IV), and prevention plus asset recovery (Chapters II and V). Reviews are non-adversarial and non-punitive; a full country report is published only with the reviewed state's consent, though the executive summary is always public. Other CoSP subsidiary bodies include the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Prevention and the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Asset Recovery. CEB, within DTA, serves as secretariat.

Cannot do: Force disclosure of a full country review report against a state's wishes; impose findings of non-compliance with binding legal consequence.

5.6 The UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Not a standing body — a quinquennial mega-conference, held every five years since 1955, described by UNODC as the world's largest and most diverse gathering on crime and criminal justice topics (governments, civil society, academia, practitioners).

The 14th Congress was held in Kyoto, Japan in 2021 (postponed a year by the pandemic), producing the Kyoto Declaration.

The 15th Congress is hosted by the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi. It was originally scheduled for the final week of April 2026 but has been postponed to 26 September – 1 October 2026 because of the conflict in the Middle East. Its theme is "Accelerating crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law: protecting people and planet and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the digital age," and it is expected to produce an Abu Dhabi Declaration.

Function: exchange of expertise and practice; production of a non-binding political declaration, which CCPCJ then operationalizes through resolutions. CCPCJ is both the preparatory and the follow-up body for each Congress.

5.7 Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB)

TPB is not an intergovernmental "subsidiary body" in the CND/CCPCJ sense — it is the operational branch inside DTA that delivers UNODC's counter-terrorism mandate. Given the human-rights/criminal-justice lens of this briefing, TPB's work merits standalone, in-depth treatment: see Part II below, which is devoted entirely to TPB's human-rights and criminal-justice work on terrorism.

6. Funding and Resourcing

Funding structure is not a footnote here — it is a major determinant of what UNODC can actually deliver versus what it is formally mandated to do.

- **UN regular (assessed) budget:** a small slice, funding only certain "core" mandated functions (parts of governing-body secretariat services, the INCB secretariat, some normative posts). For the 2026–2027 biennium, UNODC's regular-budget allocation is around US$52 million.

- **Voluntary/extrabudgetary contributions** (general-purpose and earmarked special-purpose funds): the large majority — projected at roughly US$645 million in special-purpose programme delivery for 2026–2027 — comes from voluntary contributions by member states, the EU, and other donors. Put together, this means well over 90% of what UNODC actually spends is voluntary and often earmarked, not guaranteed core funding.
- **Consequence:** because so much funding is earmarked to specific donor-chosen projects, countries, or themes, UNODC's de facto priorities can drift from what CND/CCPCJ formally mandate on paper. UN oversight bodies (the Joint Inspection Unit, in particular) have flagged this as a structural weakness for years, and it has repeatedly complicated efforts to fund "unglamorous" but essential core functions evenly across all five thematic pillars.
- **Context in 2026:** this is landing during a period of acute UN-wide financial strain — major arrears from large assessed contributors, a roughly 15% cut to the UN regular budget for 2026, and the system-wide "UN80" efficiency drive — just as UNODC underwent a leadership transition (Ghada Waly's departure in November 2025, an interim period under Acting Executive Director John Brandolino, and Monica Juma's arrival in May 2026). Observers have flagged the development of UNODC's next strategic framework, to succeed the UNODC Strategy 2021–2025, as an early priority for the new Executive Director.

Part II — Comprehensive Expert Briefing: Human Rights and Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism

Prepared for: UNODC Expert Group Meeting · Document Date: July 2026 · Classification: For Official Use — Deliberative

II.I Executive Summary

The intersection of counter-terrorism imperatives and international human rights law constitutes one of the most consequential and contested arenas in contemporary international public law. The post-9/11 global security environment has generated an extensive architecture of counter-terrorism law — spanning domestic legislation, UN Security Council resolutions, and regional frameworks — whose implementation has too frequently been accompanied by systematic human rights violations: arbitrary and incommunicado detention, torture and cruel treatment, overbroad criminalisation, discriminatory profiling, and the suppression of civil society.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), through its Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB), has for more than two decades occupied a central role in assisting Member States to build criminal justice capacities that are simultaneously effective and fully compliant with international human rights law. The mandate proceeds from the foundational premise — enshrined in the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS) and reaffirmed in successive Security Council resolutions — that human rights are not an obstacle to effective counter-terrorism, but a precondition for it.

This briefing synthesises the international legal framework, the institutional mandate and prior work of UNODC, recent developments from 2024 to mid-2026, and the principal human rights concerns identified by expert bodies — including the UN Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights — that Member States and UNODC technical assistance programming must urgently address.

> Core Thesis: Effective, sustainable and legitimate counter-terrorism is only achievable when criminal justice responses are grounded in, and limited by, international human rights law. The erosion of rights in the name of security has consistently demonstrated counter-productive results — fuelling radicalisation, undermining community trust, and delegitimising state authority.

II.II The International Legal and Normative Framework

A. The Core Treaty Architecture

The primary legal instruments governing both the suppression of terrorism and the human rights obligations of States in doing so are distinct but deeply interrelated bodies of law.

The anti-terrorism legal architecture comprises 19 universal instruments — from the 1963 Tokyo Convention on offences aboard aircraft to the 2010 Beijing Protocols — that collectively require States to criminalise specific acts of terrorism and extend cooperation through mutual legal assistance (MLA) and extradition. These instruments are not comprehensive; they address discrete categories of conduct rather than terrorism as a unified offence, which itself remains undefined in binding universal treaty law.

B. The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS)

Overlaying this is the human rights framework, anchored principally in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention Against Torture (CAT), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Each imposes non-derogable obligations — prohibitions on torture, extrajudicial execution, and arbitrary detention — that no counter-terrorism exigency can override. The ICCPR's Article 4 framework permits derogation of certain rights in genuine public emergencies, but only on a strictly proportionate, non-discriminatory, and temporary basis, with immediate notification to the UN Secretary-General.

Adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 60/288 (2006) and subject to biennial reviews, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy provides the overarching political and operational framework for the UN system's counter-terrorism work. Its four pillars — (I) addressing conditions conducive to terrorism; (II) preventing and combating terrorism; (III) building States' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism; and (IV) ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law — are expressly interdependent and of equal weight.

Pillar IV is particularly significant as a normative anchor. It commits Member States to ensure that all counter-terrorism measures comply with their obligations under international law, including international human rights law, refugee law, and international humanitarian law. UNODC technical assistance programming is constitutively framed around this cross-pillar integration. The Ninth GCTS Review (2025) has further reinforced calls for mainstreaming human rights throughout the counter-terrorism architecture and for greater accountability for rights-violating counter-terrorism measures.

C. The Security Council Counter-Terrorism Resolutions

A dense and sometimes tension-generating body of Security Council resolutions forms the backbone of the mandatory counter-terrorism obligations on all UN Member States. Resolution 1373 (2001) established a binding obligation to criminalise terrorism financing, improve border controls, exchange intelligence, and enact domestic counter-terrorism legislation — obligations monitored by the Counter-

Terrorism Committee (CTC). Resolution 1267 (1999) and its successors created the Al-Qaida/ISIL sanctions regime, including asset freezing and travel bans.

Critically, subsequent resolutions — notably 1456 (2003), 1624 (2005), 2178 (2014), and 2396 (2017) — have consistently affirmed that all counter-terrorism measures must comply with international law, including human rights law. However, compliance with these human rights affirmations has been significantly weaker than compliance with the security-focused operative provisions, a structural asymmetry that remains a central tension in the international counter-terrorism architecture.

D. The OHCHR Guidance Note on Defining Terrorism (2025)

A landmark development in early 2025 was the publication by OHCHR of its Guidance Note on Defining Terrorism in National Legislation — a document developed in close consultation with the Special Rapporteur. The Guidance Note establishes that national terrorism definitions must comply with the principles of legality and legal certainty under Article 15 of the ICCPR, must not be so broad as to capture ordinary criminal conduct, legitimate political dissent, or protected humanitarian activities, and must require proof of the requisite mental element (mens rea). The Note explicitly addresses the criminalisation of terrorism financing, warning against strict liability offences and urging that financing of exclusively humanitarian activities be excluded from the ambit of terrorism financing offences.

> As the OHCHR Guidance Note and successive Special Rapporteur reports have made clear, national definitions of terrorism remain largely left to the discretion of States, leading to varying interpretations in domestic counter-terrorism legislation. Ambiguous definitions of terrorism in some States have led to policies and practices that violate the fundamental freedoms of individuals and populations, and discriminate against particular groups.
>
> — OHCHR, 2025

II.III UNODC’s Mandate and Institutional Architecture

A. The Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB)

Within UNODC, the Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB) is the primary institutional actor on criminal justice responses to terrorism. TPB operates under the remit of the UNODC Strategy 2021–2025 (and its successor), which clusters counter-terrorism work under the objective of ‘countering terrorism through effective, accountable and inclusive legal, crime prevention, and criminal justice measures in line with international norms and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.' TPB maintains extensive regional field presence through UNODC's global network of regional and country offices.

UNODC's counter-terrorism mandate is distinct from that of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) — which provides strategic leadership and coordinates UN-wide counter-terrorism activities — and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), which monitors Member State implementation of Security Council resolutions. UNODC is the delivery arm for technical assistance at the legislative, capacity-building, and criminal justice levels. The three bodies collaborate closely: the 2022 Model Legislative Provisions on Victims of Terrorism, for instance, was a joint UNOCT–UNODC–Inter-Parliamentary Union product.

UNODC is also one of the designated custodians of the 19 universal anti-terrorism instruments, providing legislative assistance to Member States seeking to ratify and domestically implement those instruments. This function positions UNODC at the interface between international treaty obligations and domestic legislative reform — a critical junction at which human rights standards must be integrated.

B. Complementary UN Bodies and Coordination Architecture

Body	Primary Role	Relationship to UNODC
UNOCT / UNCCT	Strategic coordination of UN counter-terrorism; resource mobilisation; capacity-building funding	Lead policy direction; joint programming; funding channels
CTED	Monitoring SC resolution compliance; expert assessments of Member States	Shares assessment data; joint country engagements (e.g. Djibouti biometrics project)
OHCHR / SR on CT & HR	Human rights monitoring, reporting, norm development; Special Rapporteur mandate	Normative guidance; joint modules; SR informs UNODC programming mandates
FATF	AML/CFT standards; Recommendations on terrorism financing	UNODC model laws align with FATF standards; joint training

Body	Primary Role	Relationship to UNODC
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)	Parliamentary engagement; legislative processes	Joint legislative provisions (e.g. Victims of Terrorism MLPs 2022)
UNHCR	Refugee law; protection of displaced persons in CT contexts	Programming on CT/ humanitarian law nexus; non-refoulement obligations

II.IV UNODC's Previous Work: Core Instruments and Programmes

A. The Counter-Terrorism Legal Training Curriculum (CTLC)

The flagship normative contribution of UNODC's Terrorism Prevention Branch is the Counter-Terrorism Legal Training Curriculum (CTLC), a comprehensive, modular training programme addressed to criminal justice practitioners — prosecutors, judges, investigators, and legislative drafters. The Curriculum is structured around key thematic pillars and is available in all six official UN languages:

- **Module 1 — Counter-Terrorism in the International Law Context:** surveys the 19 international anti-terrorism instruments, the Security Council legal framework, and the obligations arising from the ICCPR and CAT in the counter-terrorism context.
- **Module 2 — Human Rights in Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism:** the most directly relevant module for this meeting's agenda. Addresses the right to a fair trial, protection against torture and inhuman treatment, the right to liberty, the right to privacy, freedom of expression and association, and non-discrimination in counter-terrorism practice. Provides case law from the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Court, the Human Rights Committee, and CAT.
- **Module 3 — Use of Evidence and Witness Protection in Terrorism Cases:** addresses chain of custody, admissibility, testimonial protection, and the use of classified intelligence as evidence in compliance with fair trial standards.
- **Module 5 — Investigative Interviewing, the Right to Remain Silent and Prevention of Torture:** developed with particular attention to contexts

(notably the Sahel and Horn of Africa) where confessions obtained under duress have been a documented problem.

- **Module 6 — Gender Dimensions of Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism:** addresses the differential impacts of terrorism and counter-terrorism on women, the rights of women associated with terrorist groups (whether as victims, perpetrators, or both), and gender-responsive criminal justice frameworks.

The CTLC represents the substantive core of UNODC's normative contribution to this field and is regularly updated to incorporate developments in international jurisprudence and emerging threats.

B. The Model Legislative Provisions on Victims of Terrorism (2022)

A landmark achievement was the February 2022 joint publication — by UNOCT, UNODC, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union — of the Model Legislative Provisions to Support the Needs and Protect the Rights of Victims of Terrorism. This publication represents the most comprehensive international normative framework on victims' rights in the counter-terrorism context, covering sixteen thematic chapters including: rights to assistance and reparation; protection of physical and psychological integrity; sexual and gender-based violence by terrorist groups; trafficking by terrorist groups; and victims in the context of armed conflict, displacement, and migration.

The Model Legislative Provisions are explicitly grounded in international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and are designed to be adaptable across common law and civil law jurisdictions. Their development involved more than 220 expert panellists and participants, including terrorism survivors, human rights advocates, judges, prosecutors, and members of parliament. The Philippines became the first Member State to formally initiate the implementation of the Model Legislative Provisions in January 2024, when the UN and the Government of the Philippines launched a technical assistance project specifically focused on implementing the MLPs and developing a National Comprehensive Assistance Plan — a programme supported by the US State Department.

C. The AML/CFT Model Legislation

In collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNODC has developed model legislation on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) in both civil law and common law versions. The 2005 model (for civil law systems) and the 2009 model (for common law systems) assist States in implementing the FATF Recommendations and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism. A critical human rights dimension of this work is ensuring that terrorism financing legislation meets the ICCPR's mens rea requirements — that financing of terrorism is not treated as a strict liability offence and that the financing of legitimate humanitarian activities is not inadvertently captured.

D. Technical Assistance to the Sahel and Horn of Africa

UNODC has maintained sustained and intensive engagement in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, where the intersection of poverty, fragile statehood, and active terrorist threats from ISIL/Da'esh-affiliated and Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups creates an environment where human rights violations in counter-terrorism are both more likely and more consequential. Flagship regional programmes have included sustained engagement in the Lake Chad Basin (addressing the Boko Haram crisis affecting Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger), the Liptako-Gourma region, and Somalia.

Critically, UNODC has also developed context-specific training modules — including, for the Nigerian context, modules on Investigative Interviewing, the Right to Remain Silent and Prevention of Torture, reflecting documented concerns about the use of confessions obtained under duress in terrorism prosecutions in the region.

II.V Recent Developments (2024 – mid-2026)

A. West Africa Coastal States Regional Programme (September 2025)

One of the most significant recent institutional developments is the September 2025 launch of the UNODC–European Union regional programme titled 'Strengthening the Criminal Justice Chain to Terrorism Action in West African Coastal Countries', formally launched in Cotonou, Benin, with the first Programme Steering Committee convening from 10 to 12 September 2025. The programme covers four beneficiary countries: Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo.

The programme responds to a structural shift in the geography of terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa. For the eighth consecutive year, sub-Saharan Africa in 2025 remains the region most affected by terrorism globally. The Sahel has witnessed a marked escalation in attacks by Al-Qaeda and ISIL affiliates, with the spillover of terrorist violence now reaching the northern border areas of West Africa's coastal states.

Terrorist groups in the region exploit porous borders, cross-border natural parks, and informal financial economies to conduct coordinated attacks and sustain operations. A series of consultative missions conducted across the four countries earlier in 2025 produced country-specific recommendations that informed a harmonised regional framework and national workplans, adopted at the Cotonou steering committee. The human rights compliance of criminal justice responses to this evolving threat is a central programmatic objective.

B. Special Investigative Techniques and the Niger Workshop (2025)

In November 2025, UNODC organised a national capacity-building workshop in Niamey, Niger, focused on Special Investigative Techniques (SITs) in terrorism-related investigations — bringing together representatives from the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of National Defence. The workshop addressed the legal framework for SITs under international and national law, typologies and practical application of SITs in counter-terrorism investigations, crime scene management and evidence handling, and — critically — the importance of promoting and protecting human rights in the deployment of such techniques. The participation of human rights institutions alongside security ministries in such workshops reflects UNODC's integrated approach.

C. Cameroon: National Expert Group on Human Rights in Counter-Terrorism (December 2024)

In December 2024, UNODC organised a national capacity-building workshop for Cameroon's Expert Group on Human Rights in the Counter-Terrorism Context in Douala, joined by the UN Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. The Expert Group — chaired by a senior Bar Association member and comprising representatives from the National Human Rights Commission, multiple ministries, law enforcement, and the judiciary — has a formal mandate to raise awareness about human rights in counter-terrorism and provide capacity building to relevant institutions. The workshop, supported by Sweden, facilitated expert exchanges on: the human rights impacts of counter-terrorist financing measures; use of force in hostage-taking situations; accountability for sexual violence linked to terrorism; and the complex policy question of reconciling victims' rights with incentive-based defection programmes for terrorist group members.

D. Iraq: Victims of Terrorism Support and Reparation (September 2024)

In September 2024, UNODC organised a national inter-agency meeting in Baghdad focused on continuing and strengthening support for victims of terrorism —

bringing together the Supreme Judicial Council, the National Security Service, the High Commission for Human Rights, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and civil society organisations. The meeting followed the conclusion in June 2023 of a Netherlands-funded UNODC project on legal and psychological support for terrorism victims, and focused on preparing a document on protecting victims of terrorism in Iraq — designed to enable both authorities and victims to navigate national legal, administrative, and criminal justice systems, and to support reintegration pathways.

E. Philippines: Standard Operating Procedures on Terrorism Cases (January 2025)

In January 2025, the Philippines Department of Justice and key criminal justice agencies signed a Memorandum of Understanding operationalising Standard Operating Procedures for handling terrorism and terrorism financing cases, developed with UNODC technical assistance and supported by the Australian Government. The SOPs are specifically designed to reinforce human rights safeguards: they include strict adherence to the right against unlawful detention, protection of personal data in accordance with international privacy standards, and mechanisms to prevent coercion or evidence obtained through torture. The Philippines case represents an important institutional model for operationalising human rights compliance within counter-terrorism prosecution frameworks.

F. Biometrics, Evidence and Rule of Law: The Djibouti Model (2024)

UNODC and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) completed a joint project with Djibouti — supported by the University of New Haven and the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund — to develop regulations on the responsible collection, analysis, transfer, and protection of biometric data in counter-terrorism investigations. The project produced draft regulations on biometric data governance compliant with human rights and rule of law standards, and enhanced the forensic laboratory capacity of the Djiboutian National Police. Djibouti's location as a strategic transit point in the Horn of Africa, adjacent to the Al-Shabaab threat zone, makes this capacity particularly consequential. The project is a model for the responsible integration of new technologies into criminal investigations without compromising data rights or due process.

G. Burkina Faso: Legal Aid Access for Victims of Terrorism (June 2025)

In June 2025, following the adoption by Burkina Faso's Ministry of Justice and Human Rights of a Roadmap for Supporting Victims of Terrorism (November 2024), UNODC organised a national workshop in Ouagadougou on facilitating access to legal services for victims of terrorism. Fifteen legal experts from the Ministry of

Justice, the National Human Rights Commission, and civil society organisations developed concrete recommendations including mechanisms to rapidly identify and register civilian victims; the establishment of a dedicated legal aid office for terrorism victims; and the allocation of assets seized from terrorism-related convictions to a national victims' fund.

H. The Special Rapporteur: Redefinition of Terrorism (Report to HRC, March 2026)

In a development of profound normative significance, the Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights, Professor Ben Saul, presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2026 a comprehensive updated model definition of terrorism — an update of the mandate's 2010 model definition. The report addresses: the definition of 'terrorist organisation'; whether property damage should be included in the definition of terrorism; whether a political purpose element should be required; how to differentiate organised crime for profit from terrorism; the contested concept of 'State terrorism'; exceptions to the definition for armed forces in armed conflict; and the status of certain acts of democratic protest. This report, developed following an extensive stakeholder consultation process (call for inputs issued November 2025), is directly relevant to UNODC legislative assistance work and will require integration into UNODC's model provisions and training curriculum.

The Special Rapporteur's mandate was renewed for a further three-year term by HRC resolution 58/14 of April 2025, reflecting sustained institutional consensus on its importance.

II.VI Critical Human Rights Concerns

A. Overbroad and Vague Definitions of Terrorism

The most structurally consequential human rights concern is the definitional question. The absence of a universally agreed definition of terrorism in binding international law has generated enormous variation in national definitions — variation that has systematically been exploited to extend counter-terrorism powers to conduct well beyond genuine terrorism. Documented patterns include: criminalisation of non-violent speech, assembly, and association; application of terrorism charges to political dissidents, human rights defenders, journalists, and environmental activists; and the equation of organised crime for profit with terrorism.

The proliferation of 'apologie du terrorisme' (glorification of terrorism) offences across jurisdictions is particularly concerning. As the Special Rapporteur has observed, such offences have become a powerful tool for repressing legitimate criticism and political expression, standing in direct opposition to the freedoms of thought, expression, and assembly protected by the ICCPR. The Special Rapporteur's model definition of terrorism expressly warns against relying on vague concepts in defining the offence, and requires that incitement offences be limited to incitement to conduct that is truly terrorist in nature, with restrictions on free expression only as necessary and proportionate.

Algeria's Order n° 21-08 provides a recent illustration: joint UN Special Procedures communications in 2021 expressed concern that the definition of terrorism under Article 87 bis failed to comply with international principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination, and that the law had been applied to criminalise offences that fall short of any reasonable terrorism standard.

B. Administrative Detention and the Erosion of Due Process

Administrative measures to counter terrorism — detention without criminal charge, terrorist listing and proscription, restrictive orders, and border exclusion mechanisms — have proliferated significantly across jurisdictions since 2001 and are expanding again in the 2020s. These measures are characterised by their operation outside the standard criminal justice framework, often with fewer procedural protections, reduced judicial oversight, and longer or indefinite duration.

The Special Rapporteur's October 2025 report to the General Assembly represents the most authoritative recent analysis of these measures. The report identified four categories of concern: (i) restrictive orders (curfews, movement restrictions, electronic monitoring) that may be imposed without criminal conviction; (ii) listing of individuals and organisations as 'terrorist' — a process often lacking adequate notice, evidence disclosure, or opportunity for challenge; (iii) administrative security detention, identified as 'particularly dangerous' given its documented association with arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and torture; and (iv) compulsory preventive interventions (e.g. forced de-radicalisation programmes). The Special Rapporteur cautioned specifically against the use of AI-powered risk assessment tools in administrative detention decisions, noting their unreliability and potential for discrimination.

> Administrative security detention is particularly dangerous, since it can too easily enable arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and arbitrary deprivation of life. Recent abuses of administrative detention in armed conflicts are testament to these risks.
>
> — Special Rapporteur Ben Saul, October 2025

C. Use of Military Courts to Try Terrorism Suspects

The Special Rapporteur's May 2025 visit to Somalia produced a stark finding directly relevant to multiple UNODC beneficiary states: the use of military courts to adjudicate terrorism suspects — a practice the Special Rapporteur identified as particularly concerning because military courts 'lack sufficient independence and fair trial safeguards.' Somalia had also adopted 'excessive and overbroad terrorist definitions and offences.' The military court concern is not isolated to Somalia; it is a documented pattern across several of the countries where UNODC maintains active counter-terrorism technical assistance programmes, including in the Sahel region. UNODC programming must directly engage with the transition of terrorism cases to civilian courts with adequate independence, resourcing, and fair trial guarantees.

D. Misuse of Counter-Terrorism Law Against Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Civil Society

One of the most extensively documented concerns across multiple UN Special Procedures mandates is the systematic misuse of counter-terrorism legislation to suppress legitimate civil society activity. Egypt provides one of the most thoroughly documented cases. The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in January 2025 expressed acute concern about Egypt's practice of 'rotation' or 'recycling' — the repeated application of new terrorism-related charges against human rights defenders at or before the expiry of their detention, preventing release despite court orders. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention had previously found that such detention constituted retaliation for cooperation with UN mechanisms. This pattern is not unique to Egypt; similar concerns have been documented in the context of counter-terrorism law application across multiple UNODC programme countries.

E. Children in Counter-Terrorism Contexts

The situation of children in counter-terrorism contexts has emerged as a distinct and urgent human rights concern identified across multiple Special Rapporteur reports and UNODC programming. Concerns include: the unjustified detention of children for terrorism-related offences; mass arbitrary detention of children associated with ISIL in North-East Syria; violations of due process and fair trial guarantees in terrorism proceedings involving minors; inhumane conditions of detention; disproportionate penalties; the lack of rehabilitation and reintegration pathways; the impact of coercive administrative measures on children; and widespread violations against children in armed conflict — killings, maiming, forced recruitment, sexual and gender-based violence, and trafficking. UNODC's programming on children requires significant deepening to address the full spectrum of concerns across these settings.

F. Counter-Terrorist Financing and Its Impact on Humanitarian Access

A growing and deeply practical concern is the chilling effect of counter-terrorist financing (CTF) measures on legitimate humanitarian activities in conflict-affected areas. Risk-averse financial institutions, in seeking to comply with CTF obligations, have de-risked banking relationships in regions affected by terrorism — a phenomenon that has materially impaired the ability of humanitarian organisations to transfer funds to populations in greatest need in conflict-affected areas that often lack formal banking infrastructure. The 'Algeria Guiding Principles' on new and emerging financial technologies for counter-terrorist financing purposes — prepared by CTED and adopted at the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee in January 2025 — represent an important attempt to provide calibrated guidance on risk-based proportionate regulation, and explicitly address the need to evaluate the impact of CTF measures on humanitarian access. UNODC must integrate this dimension into its AML/CFT technical assistance programming.

G. New Technologies: Artificial Intelligence and Surveillance in Counter-Terrorism

The integration of artificial intelligence, mass surveillance tools, biometric technologies, and digital evidence collection into counter-terrorism investigations and prosecution presents both opportunities and serious risks from a human rights perspective. The Special Rapporteur has specifically addressed the use of AI-powered risk assessment tools in administrative detention contexts, warning of their unreliability and discriminatory potential. The Djibouti biometrics project (2024) represents UNODC's most advanced engagement with this challenge — providing a model for the development of regulatory frameworks that enable responsible use of biometric data while protecting privacy rights and ensuring that data is not transferred to States where it could be used to facilitate persecution. UNODC's broader engagement with AI in criminal justice requires significant normative development.

H. Regional Organisations and Counter-Terrorism: An Under-Scrutinised Dimension

The Special Rapporteur's 2025 report to the Human Rights Council addressed the counter-terrorism activities of regional organisations as an 'under-scrutinised' dimension of the international counter-terrorism architecture. Regional organisations — including the African Union, ASEAN, the European Union, the Organization of American States, and the Arab League — have become increasingly important counter-terrorism actors, developing their own sanction regimes, information-sharing frameworks, and operational coordination mechanisms. The Special Rapporteur cautioned that regional sanctions against individuals and organisations designated as terrorist must fully respect human rights law, and that regional organisations must not become vehicles for amplifying domestic repression or undermining civil and political freedoms. UNODC engages with regional organisations in its technical assistance programming but must sharpen the human rights focus of that engagement.

II.VII Programmatic Recommendations for UNODC

A. Legislative and Definitional Reform

- UNODC should proactively integrate the Special Rapporteur's March 2026 updated model definition of terrorism into its legislative assistance programming, the Counter-Terrorism Legal Training Curriculum, and the guide for legislative incorporation of universal anti-terrorism instruments. Member States seeking UNODC legislative assistance should be explicitly guided toward definitions that comply with international principles of legality, proportionality, non-discrimination, and mens rea requirements.
- UNODC should develop specific guidance for Member States on the exclusion of humanitarian activities from the scope of terrorism financing offences, drawing on the 'Algeria Guiding Principles' and the OHCHR Guidance Note on Defining Terrorism (2025).
- UNODC should strengthen engagement with national parliaments and legislative drafting bodies to review existing terrorism legislation against

international human rights standards, with particular attention to speech-related terrorism offences ('apologie du terrorisme') and the use of terrorism definitions against civil society actors.

B. Judicial and Criminal Justice Capacity

- UNODC should expand and resource programmes for the development of civilian terrorism courts with adequate independence, specialised expertise, and full fair trial guarantees — particularly in the Sahel and Horn of Africa, where military courts currently adjudicate terrorism cases.
- Technical assistance programming should systematically address the right to legal counsel from the earliest stages of detention, access to independent medical examination, and the prohibition on using confessions as the primary or sole basis of terrorism convictions.
- UNODC should support the development of robust victim and witness protection frameworks in all countries where it provides technical assistance on terrorism prosecution, ensuring these frameworks comply with the Model Legislative Provisions on Victims of Terrorism (2022) and provide adequate procedural safeguards for both prosecution and defence.

C. Administrative Measures

- UNODC should develop specific programming on the human rights compliance of administrative counter-terrorism measures — building on the Special Rapporteur's October 2025 recommendations — to assist Member States in designing administrative detention frameworks, listing procedures, and restrictive order regimes that include adequate judicial review, transparency, proportionality safeguards, and access to legal counsel.
- UNODC should specifically address the mass arbitrary detention situation in North-East Syria, working with relevant UN bodies to support repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of detained foreign nationals, with particular priority for children.

D. Technology and Human Rights

- UNODC should develop normative guidance specifically addressing the use of artificial intelligence in counter-terrorism investigations and prosecution, encompassing: the use of AI in threat assessment and administrative detention decisions; the admissibility of AI-generated evidence; algorithmic bias and discrimination; and safeguards for the rights of persons subjected to AI-based counter-terrorism measures.

- The Djibouti biometrics regulatory framework should be refined into a UNODC model regulatory instrument for adoption or adaptation by other Member States, addressing the collection, storage, analysis, transfer, and destruction of biometric data collected in counter-terrorism contexts.

E. Victims of Terrorism

- UNODC should systematically support the integration of the 2022 Model Legislative Provisions into domestic legal systems, building on the Philippines precedent and the Burkina Faso Roadmap. Country-specific implementation plans should be developed for all priority programme countries in West Africa, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa.
- UNODC should address the specific and acute needs of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence committed by terrorist groups, including through specialised prosecutorial capacity, victim-centred evidentiary frameworks, and psychosocial support programmes.
- UNODC should work with national judiciaries and ministries of justice to develop asset forfeiture mechanisms that direct seized terrorism-related proceeds to national victims' funds — following the model developed in Burkina Faso in 2025.

F. Institutional and Monitoring

- UNODC should enhance its systematic monitoring and reporting function with respect to the human rights compliance of counter-terrorism technical assistance provided to Member States, including post-assistance follow-up mechanisms to assess whether legislative and capacity frameworks are implemented in human rights-compliant ways in practice.
- UNODC should deepen its cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights, including through formal information-sharing arrangements, joint country assessments, and the systematic incorporation of Special Rapporteur findings and recommendations into UNODC programming design.
- UNODC should advocate within the UN counter-terrorism architecture for dedicated resources for the Special Rapporteur mandate, which currently

monitors 193 Member States and 46 UN entities without commensurate staffing support.

II.VIII Conclusion

Human rights and effective criminal justice responses to terrorism are not competing values — they are mutually constitutive. The empirical evidence is unambiguous: counter-terrorism measures that violate human rights are not merely unjust — they are strategically counterproductive, fuelling the grievances, alienation, and loss of state legitimacy that terrorist organisations exploit for recruitment. The most sustainable counter-terrorism strategies are those rooted in the rule of law, community trust, accountable institutions, and respect for the rights of all persons.

UNODC has built an impressive normative architecture over two decades — from the Counter-Terrorism Legal Training Curriculum to the Model Legislative Provisions on Victims of Terrorism, and from the Sahel regional programmes to the Djibouti biometrics framework. The challenge now is not primarily one of normative development, but of implementation depth, programmatic accountability, and political will. The proliferation of overbroad terrorism definitions, administrative detention abuses, military court proceedings, misuse of terrorism law against civil society, and the mass arbitrary detention of children and foreign nationals in North-East Syria represent urgent and documented failures of implementation that demand a sustained, principled, and resource-adequate response from UNODC and the broader UN counter-terrorism architecture.

The year 2026, with the updated model definition of terrorism from the Special Rapporteur now before the Human Rights Council, the Ninth GCTS Review embedding human rights more forcefully into the strategic framework, and the West African coastal states programme newly launched, presents a significant opportunity for UNODC to sharpen the human rights integration of its programming, deepen implementation accountability, and assert the operational reality of the complementarity between security and rights that has been the declared premise of the international counter-terrorism framework since 2001.

> The integrity of the rule of law is not a luxury that can be deferred until the security threat is resolved. It is, precisely, the foundation upon which durable security is built.
>
> — Expert Briefing, UNODC, July 2026

Part III — Quick Reference, Current Snapshot and Consolidated Sources

Quick-Reference Table: The UNODC Institutional Family

Body	Type	Composition	Core Power
CND	ECOSOC functional commission; UNODC governing body (drugs)	53 states	Scheduling of narcotic/ psychotropic substances and precursors; drug policy resolutions; approves drug-programme budget
CCPCJ	ECOSOC functional commission; UNODC governing body (crime)	40 states	Crime-policy resolutions; prepares/follows up UN Crime Congress; approves crime-programme budget
INCB	Independent treaty-monitoring body	13 individual experts	Estimates/authorization system; precursor monitoring; last-resort Article 14 trade-restriction recommendation
UNTOC-COP	Treaty conference of states parties	~190 states parties	Reviews UNTOC implementation; working groups; review mechanism
UNCAC-CoSP	Treaty conference of states parties	~190 states parties	Reviews UNCAC implementation; Implementation Review Mechanism via the IRG
UN Crime Congress	Quinquennial conference (not standing)	Universal, multi-stakeholder	Produces political declarations (Kyoto 2021; Abu Dhabi, Sept–Oct 2026)
UNODC Secretariat (DTA/DO/ DPAPA/DM)	Executive/ administrative arm	Staff, led by the Executive Director	Technical assistance, research, field delivery, secretariat services — no binding authority

Body	Type	Composition	Core Power
TPB	Operational branch within DTA	Staff	Counter-terrorism technical assistance, incl. human rights and criminal justice responses to terrorism

Current Snapshot (Mid-2026)

- Executive Director / UNOV Director-General: Monica Juma (Kenya), in office since 11 May 2026.
- CND: held its 69th session in March 2026.
- CCPCJ: held its 35th session in May 2026.
- 15th UN Crime Congress: postponed from April to 26 September – 1 October 2026, Abu Dhabi.
- UN Convention against Cybercrime: adopted December 2024, opened for signature October 2025, not yet in force (needs 40 ratifications; only a handful deposited so far).
- UNODC Strategy: the 2021–2025 Strategy has run its course; a successor framework is expected to be an early priority for the new Executive Director.
- Financial backdrop: ongoing UN-wide liquidity pressure and the "UN80" efficiency reform process are affecting UNODC's resourcing environment alongside the leadership transition.
- Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights: Professor Ben Saul, mandate renewed for a further three-year term by HRC resolution 58/14 (April 2025); presented an updated model definition of terrorism to the HRC in March 2026.
- West Africa Coastal States Programme: UNODC–EU regional programme launched September 2025 (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo).

Consolidated Select Sources

- UNODC, "About UNODC" and organizational chart materials — unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc

- UNODC, CND and CCPCJ mandate pages — unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/
- INCB, “About” and “Mandate and Functions” — incb.org/incb/en/about
- UNODC Terrorism Prevention Branch, “About Us,” “Our Work,” and “Resources” — unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism
- UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, “UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy” and Compact materials — un.org/counterterrorism
- UNODC and UNOV, budget documents to CND/CCPCJ for the 2026–2027 biennium (E/CN.7/2025/14–E/CN.15/2025/17 and related reconvened-session reports)
- UNODC, “Crime Congress — About/Preparations” — unodc.org/unodc/en/crimecongress
- UNODC, “United Nations Convention against Cybercrime” treaty page — unodc.org/unodc/en/cybercrime/convention
- UN News/UNIS Vienna press releases on the appointment of Monica Juma (May 2026)
- UNCAC Coalition and UNODC, on the Implementation Review Mechanism — uncaccoalition.org; unodc.org/corruption
- OHCHR, Guidance Note on Defining Terrorism in National Legislation (2025)
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism — reports to the Human Rights Council (March 2026) and General Assembly (October 2025)
- UNOCT, UNODC and Inter-Parliamentary Union, Model Legislative Provisions to Support the Needs and Protect the Rights of Victims of Terrorism (February 2022)
- CTED, ‘Algeria Guiding Principles’ on new and emerging financial technologies for counter-terrorist financing purposes (January 2025)
- UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and UN Special Procedures communications, various country-specific reports (2021–2025)

This briefing draws on UNODC’s and the UN’s own public materials, and on UN human rights mechanism reporting, as of July 2026. Institutional details (leadership, session numbers, budget figures) and fast-moving developments are the kind of *facts that shift year to year — worth a quick verification against unodc.org and ohchr.org if using this deep into the future. This document is a deliberative briefing and does not represent formally adopted UNODC policy positions.*