



ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

Victims of Terrorism

Lost Rights & Incomplete Efforts



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Introduction

Terrorism remains one of the most serious challenges to maintaining peace, achieving sustainable development goals, and realizing human rights. The seventh anniversary of International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism falls on August 21, 2024, carrying a heavy legacy for victims of terrorism and their families around the world. These victims and survivors continue to struggle to make their voices heard, often neglected and forgotten once the immediate impact of terrorist attacks fades. This struggle is exacerbated by the deterioration of economic conditions in many countries, which directly affects the resources and capabilities necessary to meet the medium- and long-term needs of victims, hindering their reintegration and full rehabilitation.¹

The seventh anniversary comes amid global developments, most notably the continuation of the Russian-Ukrainian war, now entering its third consecutive year. This conflict has cast a direct and indirect shadow on terrorist operations and armed groups worldwide. The anniversary also coincides with the re-eruption of the long-standing armed conflict between Palestinians and Israelis since October 2023, further destabilizing the Middle East region, which has long suffered from the scourge of terrorism, leaving behind thousands of victims and lasting effects extending for decades due to killing, harming and wounding thousands of innocent victims from all cultures, races and religions across the world.²

This study examines several key aspects related to victims of terrorism. It begins by defining who qualifies as a victim of terrorism and the impact of terrorist attacks on them. It then discusses the rights of victims of terrorism, both the general rights shared with other crime victims and the specific rights pertaining to their situation.

The study also explores the latest efforts and initiatives aimed at supporting victims of terrorism, led by the United Nations, regional and local organizations, as well as individual countries and governments. In this context, the study focuses on two basic initiatives: the first was implemented in the Philippines in cooperation between international organizations, civil society organizations and Philippine government; and the second was implemented in Mozambique following the rise in the number of victims of terrorism over the past few years. The also study highlights the role of victims themselves in combating and confronting terrorist crimes, as the group most directly affected by these crimes, and concludes with a set of recommendations.

¹ International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, <https://tinyurl.com/2s3pus7e>

² الممارسات الجيدة بشأن دعم ضحايا الإرهاب في إطار العدالة الجنائية، مكتب الأمم المتحدة المعني بالمخدرات والجريمة، 2016، <https://tinyurl.com/3e45msxy>

Defining Victims of Terrorism & Impact of Terrorist Operations

Victims of terrorism are defined as individuals directly affected by a terrorist crime, as well as the families of those who die as a result of such crimes. They are entitled to specific support services and protection measures. A terrorist crime is a deliberate act committed with the intent to terrorize the population or a specific group.³ According to article 2 of European Directive on Rights of Victims, a terrorist victim is a natural person who has suffered physical, mental, emotional, or economic harm due to exposure to a terrorist crime, or the families of such persons.⁴

Terrorist operations have a profound impact on their victims, depriving them of fundamental rights, such as the right to life, health, and decent living conditions. The physical effects are among the most prominent, often resulting in death or injury, the severity of which depends on the type of weapon used and the preventive measures taken. The psychological and mental toll is also significant, as victims experience constant fear and anxiety.⁵

The scale of the impact increases with the frequency of terrorist attacks. For example, in West Africa alone, over 3,500 terrorist attacks were recorded in 2023, accounting for nearly half of all such incidents worldwide and leaving around 7,000 victims.⁶ These attacks have caused not only human losses but also large-scale humanitarian crises, with 2.4 million people displaced and 9,000 schools closed, further exacerbating the suffering of victims and their families.⁷

Rights of Victims of Terrorism

From a legal perspective, victims of terrorism enjoy various rights, whether approved by international and regional charters and treaties or stipulated in national constitutions and legislation. These rights can be divided into two categories: general rights shared with victims of other crimes, and specific rights related to victims of terrorism. While terrorism is one of the most dangerous and horrific crimes, encompassing various illegal acts such as murder, harm, kidnapping, sabotage, and destruction, victims of terrorism should be entitled to the same rights as victims of other crimes, which include right to receive information about their rights, stay informed of the latest developments in their cases, understand the legal procedures, participate in the judicial process, and demand compensation from the perpetrator, whether an individual, organization, or government. In addition to these general rights, victims of terrorism also have specific rights, such as the right to appropriate medical treatment and psychological support, especially in cases of trauma; access to counseling and information on

³ Terrorist crimes and victims of terrorism, brottsoffermyndigheten, <https://tinyurl.com/yc82cntu>

⁴ Eu handbook on victims of terrorism, EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism, January 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/4unrd7nw>

⁵ OP.Cit, <https://tinyurl.com/4unrd7nw>

⁶ 4 آلاف ضحية في 2023.. أفريقيا تحتضن نصف أنشطة الإرهاب عالمياً، سكاى نيوز عربية، 22 فبراير 2024، <https://tinyurl.com/mw363ys6>

⁷ قوة إيكواس لمكافحة "الإرهاب" هل تفلح فيما فشلت به مبادرات سابقة؟ الجزيرة، 15 مايو 2024، <https://tinyurl.com/5995fjy3>

relevant legal, practical, or economic issues; and measures to protect victims and their family members.⁸ The study focuses on three basic rights of victims of terrorism, as follows:

1. Right to Access Justice

The right to access justice is a fundamental human right and a principle of the rule of law, enshrined in various international and regional legal instruments. It encompasses the right to effective redress and a fair trial. States are obligated to provide victims with adequate means to access the judicial system and present their cases before a competent and independent authority. Terrorist attacks often result in a large number of victims from multiple nationalities, who suffer material, psychological, mental, and emotional harm with long-term impacts on their lives. While survivors strive to rebuild their lives and overcome the trauma, many States do not always ensure adequate support for them and their families. In June 2023, the United Nations General Assembly issued Resolution No. 77/298 during the eighth review of the UN International Counter-Terrorism Strategy, highlighting the need to ensure full respect for the right of terrorism victims to access justice and redress mechanisms. However, there are still significant obstacles, such as the absence of laws regulating victim participation in terrorism proceedings, lack of information, legal assistance, and simultaneous translation for foreign victims, which can prevent them from exercising this right.⁹

2. Right to Remember Victims of Terrorism

The right to remember is crucial for continued support and advocacy. Commemorating victims of terrorism is crucial to their healing process and strengthening social cohesion, as well as defending democratic values. It ensures the centrality of victims' roles in memorial policies, as their testimonies are powerful tools for raising awareness and preventing extremism.¹⁰ Various international, regional, and local organizations, as well as some countries, commemorate victims of terrorism through specific days or events, such as the United Nations' International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism on August 21, and the European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Terrorism on March 11. Some countries have also established memorial exhibitions and centers to immortalize the memory of victims, such as the Memorial Exhibition in Vitoria, Spain, opened in June 2023 through a collaboration between the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Spanish Memorial Center for Victims of Terrorism.¹¹ The celebration of the memory of the victims of terrorism is considered a real opportunity to recognize, honor, and support victims and survivors. In this context, we must recall the immortal statement of the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres at the opening

⁸ جرائم الإرهاب وضحايا الإرهاب، <https://tinyurl.com/4y3776ta>

⁹ Victims of terrorism and their right to access justice: Challenges and solutions, 26 September 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/mrymexhf>

¹⁰ Victims of terrorism: Council stresses need to improve support and recognition, European Council, 5 December 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/5a7ke3jp>

¹¹ La Oficina de Lucha contra el Terrorismo de la ONU y el Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo presentan la exposición "Memorias, interior, 7 June 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/4taddum7>



of the International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism in 2018, when he said that "hearing the voices of victims is crucial to countering terrorist narratives."¹²

3. Right to Access Information

The right to access information is crucial for victims of terrorism, as it involves providing them with accurate, sufficient, and timely details about the terrorist attack. Government authorities are responsible for sharing this information to reassure victims and help them make informed decisions. The credibility of the information is enhanced when it aligns with data and reports from civil society and human rights organizations.¹³

Efforts & Initiatives to Support Victims of Terrorism

Victims of terrorism are innocent citizens who find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, randomly targeted in brutal attacks that disregard any moral, societal, or legal standards. Many victims take years to recover from their injuries or adapt to their losses, and without help, the trauma can remain with them for life. Therefore, the initiatives, programs, and efforts to support victims of terrorism, led by United Nations, regional/local organizations, and governments, are of utmost importance.¹⁴

United Nations has been at the forefront of initiatives to support victims of terrorism since 2024, through the International Programme on Victims of Terrorism of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. These efforts are carried out in partnership with international, regional, and local civil society organizations. In January 2024, International Programme on Victims of Terrorism, in cooperation with the Government of the Philippines, launched the Human Rights Technical Support Initiative. This initiative focused on developing legislation and national assistance plans to support victims and survivors of terrorism, using model provisions to address their rights and needs. The initiative was a direct response to UN General Assembly Resolution 73/305, which called on member states to develop comprehensive national initiatives and assistance plans for victims of terrorism. The initiative involved more than 50 participants from the Philippine government, civil society organizations, the UN Country Team, and victims/survivors of terrorism. One of the key outcomes was the agreement to establish a joint mechanism that includes civil society and victims to better respond to their needs.¹⁵

Another notable example is the initiative of the National Institute for Disaster Management in Mozambique, which included strategies to support internally displaced victims

¹² Amplifying Voices of Victims Critical to Countering Terrorist Narratives, Stresses Secretary-General, as International Remembrance Day Exhibition Opens, 17 August 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/2r9yek4s>

¹³ Ibid, <https://tinyurl.com/4unrd7nw>

¹⁴ Victims' Voices, Silencing Terrorism: A Story of Impact to Prevent Terrorism, <https://tinyurl.com/mbhb9mni>

¹⁵ United Nations and Philippines Launch New Project To Support Victims Of Terrorism Through Legislative Frameworks, 16 January 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/jr5ce4s9>

of terrorism in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, where the number of internally displaced persons reached around 1.2 million, mostly from areas severely affected by terrorism. Despite enormous challenges in alleviating the trauma faced by victims due to terrorist atrocities, the initiative led by the National Institute for Disaster Management in Mozambique has already succeeded in returning 600,000 internally displaced people to their areas of origin. This was done in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), within the framework of IOM's International Strategic Plan for 2024-2028, which aims to address the drivers of conflict and displacement resulting from disasters and terrorist operations.¹⁶

Role of Victims of Terrorism in Combating and Confronting Terrorism

United Nations General Assembly has recognized the important role that victims of terrorism can play in combating terrorist crimes. Victims can help counter the elements of temptation involved in terrorism and share their experiences to prevent the recurrence of such crimes. As the ones most aware of their own suffering, victims are best positioned to address their issues and present them to societal and decision-making circles. This means that these same people are the first guarantor and the strongest motive for governments of countries and various civil society organizations taking many measures to prevent terrorist incidents from occurring again.¹⁷ Therefore, victims and survivors of terrorism play an important role in preventing and combating violent extremism. They are a reliable voice in the war against terrorism and extremism. However, involving victims in the work of preventing and combating violent extremism carries risks. The direct experience of a terrorist attack can traumatize victims, and their participation in such efforts may provoke the trauma again unexpectedly. Therefore, continuous work is required to prevent victims and survivors from being exposed to trauma again, especially those involved in the work of preventing and combating violent extremism.¹⁸

¹⁶ INGD drawing up strategies to support victims of terrorism, aimnews, 14 August 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/4fb9vh9v>

¹⁷ دور الضحايا في مكافحة الإرهاب، مكتب مكافحة الإرهاب، <https://tinyurl.com/44ybev7>

¹⁸ RAN VoT WG meeting - Ensuring the well-being of victims/survivors of terrorism involved in P/CVE, 21 November 2023, European Commission, 15 March 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/cb36bnzi>

Recommendations

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights seizes this opportunity to recommend the following:

- Enact legislation at local and international levels that guarantees the care and support of victims of terrorist operations, including the development of relevant legislation related to assisting and supporting these victims in all legal, economic, social, financial, health, and other aspects.
- Rehabilitate victims of terrorist operations and integrate them into their communities, preserving the fabric of those communities.
- Strengthen policies and initiatives to support victims of terrorism in overcoming their physical and psychological suffering, using these initiatives and policies as a tool to prevent extremism and terrorism.
- Provide victims of terrorism with the opportunity to participate in developing and addressing counter-terrorism policies at the local, regional, and international levels, and to play a crucial role in efforts to combat violent extremism leading to terrorism by making their voices heard.
- Strengthen solidarity with victims of terrorism and raising awareness of their experiences, making their voices heard and recognizing their role in preventing and combating violent extremism.
- Increase capacity of states and civil society organizations to support victims of terrorism.
- Work continuously to prevent victims of terrorism from being exposed to repeated trauma, especially those involved in preventing and combating violent extremism.