Statement by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism

Artificial Intelligence and Robotics: Reshaping the Future of Crime, Terrorism and Security, 2 April 2019

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,

First of all, I would like to thank the Permanent Representatives of Georgia, the Netherlands, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the colleagues from UNICRI and INTERPOL for organizing this important event. It is very important to address this issue as time moves fast and new technologies appear every day and we need to address these challenges.

The international counter-terrorism efforts continue to address a broad range of threats emanating from terrorist groups of all sizes. In many aspects of our lives, the internet has leveled the playing field, giving a voice and opportunities to the millions of people who did not have it before. While largely a force of good, we have unfortunately seen that it has also benefited the forces of evil.

Today, small terrorist cells and lone wolfs have access to many of the same resources that the large terrorist organizations such as   -Qaida have.

Those cells and individuals do not need great financial resources. They misuse the Internet to access bomb-making guidelines, they spread their hateful ideology on social media for propaganda and recruitment purposes, and they exchange information on the dark-web for their heinous purposes.

Terrorists are also likely to try to weaponize new and emerging technologies, such as drones, artificial intelligence and synthetic biology. Reportedly,
commercial drones for surveillance missions in Syria and armed them with grenades during the battle for Mosul in 2017.

To counter such threats, we need to expand our toolbox to include new instruments. Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in particular are promising technologies that could provide law enforcement with important tools to support their efforts to counter terrorism.

Robotic patrol systems could help police in remote border areas and drones already assist with surveilling territory that is difficult to access, but that is often misused by terrorists as safe haven. Big data and artificial intelligence could help detect, or even predict and prevent crimes, including terrorism.

Thirdly, I am particularly grateful to our colleagues from UNICRI and INTERPOL for inviting private sector representatives to this important event.

The private sector is in many cases the engine of innovation and owns both the knowledge and the infrastructure of new technologies. I would be keen to learn about your views on how we can collaborate to use your inventions to counter-terrorism and for the good of humanity.

The risks we face leave us only one way forward. We need to continue innovating and collaborating among all of us   the United Nations, Member State Governments, and the private sector. I invite all of you