



Remarks by the Deputy Director of UNICRI, Mr. Leif Villadsen

The Battle of the Bytes: Confronting the Dark Side of Generative AI and the Prospect of its Malicious Use for Terrorist Purposes

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Online via Webex

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished participants,

On behalf of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), please allow me to join my distinguished colleagues in welcoming you all here this morning to this Counter-Terrorism Week side-event.

I am particularly grateful to H.E. Mrs. Mitsuko Shino for the support of the Permanent Mission of Japan both in the co-organization of this side-event and for the support of Japan our joint research with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) at the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) two years ago, which will hear more about shortly. The fact that we are coming back to this research now, two years on, demonstrates quite clearly the relevance of this ground-breaking research. I am also grateful for the enthusiasm of the Permanent Mission of Australia to also back this side-event and for bringing the expertise of the Australian Federal Police to this table for us all to learn from their experiences. We look forward to deepening our partnerships with both Australia and Japan going forward.

And last, but not least, our United Nations partners. I am deeply grateful to United Nations Counter-Terrorism (CTED) for its guidance and support, in particular in the context of the Delhi Declaration, and, of course, to our friends in the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) at the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) exploring this world of new technologies together with us over the years and in bringing together what – if I may – might be described as the most cutting-edge session of this Third Counter-Terrorism Week.

Indeed, artificial intelligence (AI) is certainly a topic that has taken the world by storm in recent years – and particularly over the past six or so months, as things like generative AI, deepfakes, ChatGPT, Midjourney, Dall-E and Bard have become household names for so many of us.

Since 2018, UNICRI through its Centre for AI and Robotics in the Hague, has been at the forefront of this in the field of crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law. We have championed the concept of responsible AI innovation in law enforcement, developed and tested policy frameworks for controversial technologies such as facial recognition and explored applications to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse and terrorism online.

And, while we have all collectively been trying to come to terms with what AI means, how it can be used and, importantly, how it can be use *responsibly* in a human rights compliant manner, those seeking to do harm – whether for criminal or other purposes – have also been exploring its potential.

As I am certain you all know very well, terrorists and violent extremists have long been recognized as early adopters of emerging, under-regulated and under-governed, new technologies. GPS devices, mobile phones, the Internet, social media, drones, cryptocurrencies are all examples of this. There is no reason to think that AI would be any exception to this trend – particularly now that advancements in Generative AI in particular have made some of the potential of this technology exceptionally accessible to so many.

I will leave it to my colleagues to introduce you to our ground-breaking study [*Algorithms and Terrorism: The Malicious Use of AI for Terrorist Purposes*](#), but

suffice to say that this report highlights these dangers in great detail and provides concrete recommendations for what we as the international community must do to prevent and combat the malicious use of these new and emerging technologies.

In light of recent technological advancements with generative AI, we believe it is time and indeed it is vital to take a fresh look at the nature of these threats, as well as our own recommendations. This process starts here today. We, UNICRI and UNOCT, therefore invite your continued cooperation and support both within the context of this side-event and beyond it.

Allow me to conclude with a brief reminder that, while we are here to today to talk about the malicious use of generative AI, there are equally so many positive potential applications of this technology. Our desire is not to stoke fears around generative AI, but to raise awareness of how it can and already is being used for malicious purposes, how terrorist and violent extremists could seek to also leverage its potential, and to foster dialogue around how we can prevent potential threats, while ensuring that we can continue to explore the potential opportunities of this promising new technology. We are here to discuss and to learn and we should not lose sight of this.

With that, allow me to thank you all once again for joining us and I wish you an informative session.