

Independent Commission on Multilateralism

Keynote address by H.E. Mr. Mehdi Jomaa

“Terrorism, including issues related to Ideology, Identity Politics, and Organized Crime”

April 10, 2015

Excellencies,

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd,

Ambassador Puri,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to be here. Thank you so much for this invitation. A retreat of this kind is precisely the place to think about a global answer to these issues. As we know, terrorism is not a local phenomenon, but rather a regional and global one. It therefore requires a global answer.

Terrorism is the axiomatic denial of the nation state. Terrorists have a strategy and a vision, which is simply put- to erase borders and values. We must not think about acts of terrorism as independent or random events. Rather the terrorism of today pursues a strategy to replace states with another project, a new global order. The International community is facing a new kind of pressure from global terrorism, and it is the pressure against freedom, democracy and the state.

The international community must understand this reality, particularly given the mass flow of weapons across porous borders in volatile regions.

Terrorism seeks to erase our borders and our universal civilization. One can clearly see this objective in the recent attacks in Tunisia. In attacking the Bardo Museum in Tunis on March 18 earlier this year, terrorists sought to erase Tunisia’s civilization. They sought to erase our history precisely for its richness and diversity. Bardo represents not only Tunisia’s Islamic history, but all of its history, culture and civilization.

Yet despite these attempts to destroy our country and heritage, and Tunisia's delicate recent past, our country has survived. It has prevailed in the fight against terrorism precisely because of our rich historical diversity and because of our pursuit of an inclusive system based on dialogue following the revolution. Tunisia's constitutional history can, in fact, be traced back to 1857 with the signing of the "Fundamental Pact". This history of constitutionalism and legal thought has also to secure Tunisia's democracy during tough and trying times as have been seen in our recent past.

Following the attack on Bardo I spoke of earlier, Tunisians turned to our police men and women as heroes of our country and guardians of our heritage. This reaction from citizens was something in and of itself that showed the progress that we have made since the revolution. As Prime Minister, I put forth great effort to improve the relationship and rebuild trust between law enforcement figures, police men and women, and the people.

Following the revolution, it was clear that there was a very real need to rebuild the confidence between the population and the security sector. As you know, the role of the police had been problematic in Tunisia because of what they represented in terms of repression. It must also be said that collaboration with other states and neighbors in the region was a very important factor in this effort. As a new government, we worked hard to improve this relationship and better understand what has happening on the ground. In fact, following a raid on a terrorist cell, I went to speak to a woman, a medical student, who had become an extremist to understand why and how that had happened. It was important that I had learned her story from her. And what I learned was that she had been searching for recognition and meaning in her life. She had not turned to extremism because she did not have a job or a source of income, but because she was frustrated and felt a sense of injustice.

Distinguished colleagues and friends, what this highlights is the critical importance of social, economic and political inclusion. The fight against terrorism cannot be with guns and force alone.

This is not to say such reasons are the only ones that drive people to extremism. Would-be terrorists are driven to extremism for a multitude of reasons; some coming from criminal background simply find terrorism to be a more convenient cover for the activities and one that may also guarantee a more satisfactory “after-life”.

Yet the psychological and social element in driving radicalization and recruitment cannot be overlooked. The international community must rely on more than weapons and security personnel. Such an approach is not enough. The fight against terrorism must be fought by building more freedom and justice. The current global answer must be made more synthesized, streamlined, faster and effective to adapt to our current realities.

For a global strategy against terrorism, we all need to look beyond national interest. In fact, we need to even think of neglecting our national interest. And what do I mean by this? The notion of national interest is no longer applicable. There are fighters from over 80 countries fighting amongst Da’esh ranks in Syria. And when these fighters are done fighting, they will come home and bring their terrorism with them. In developing a global strategy, we have to develop greater solidarity as an international community, possibly forsaking short-term national interests for the sake of greater and longer-term international peace and security.

In our fight against terrorism, the United Nations offered moral support, but in fact, the critical aid and assistance came through bilateral partnerships. Further, from the Tunisian experience, we have learned the value of timing, acting quickly and with humility, and having in place concrete mechanisms to combat terrorism and extremism. Moving forward, greater attention must be placed on monitoring the internet for extremists, while not encroaching on civil liberties. Cyber-recruitment is central to the activity of terrorists, but we must be careful not to reduce the freedom of people, which could be counter-productive. People need to be satisfied with their governments and supported by their governments in order to support the state.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues, I am optimistic about our prospects. Tunisia offers hope for a troubled region. Yet we have learned from our experience and I believe that we, as a global community, can and will prevail in our battle against terrorism

and extremism. There is no other option. We must succeed in our efforts against this dark project, and we must engage youth in this fight and show that there is hope in a shared future. Young people are our future. Let us think global and act local.

If we do this and if we work together, I have no doubt that we will succeed.

Thank you.