

**Secretary General's Special Remarks at the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (JWG-CTTC)  
Bhutan, 25 November 2021**

His Excellency, Lyonpo Ugyen Dorji, Home Minister, Ministry of Home & Cultural Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan,

Mr, Kado Zangpo, Officiating Secretary & Chair of the Meeting, Ministry of Home & Cultural Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan,;

Leaders of the Delegations from BIMSTEC Member States,

Excellencies, Senior Officials of the Government, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning.

01. To begin with, I would like to express my gratitude to the Royal Government of Bhutan, in particular, to the Ministry of Home & Cultural Affairs, for hosting the ninth Meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime.

It is indeed fulfilling, to see the 9<sup>th</sup> Joint Working Group, meeting again after a gap of 3 years.

I would also like to thank all the delegates of the BIMSTEC Member States for their participation in the Meeting.

02. Peace and stability as we all know are essential pre-conditions for any economic development and social progress.

Therefore, since its establishment in 1997, BIMSTEC has advocated for peaceful and progressive development in the region.

However, terrorism is one of the biggest challenges and threats for peace and stability in the BIMSTEC region.

The First BIMSTEC Summit held on 31 July 2004 in Bangkok, expressed concern at the continuing threat of international terrorism and transnational crime in the region and therefore agreed to coordinate efforts to combat this menace.

Taking note of the emphasis placed by the First BIMSTEC Summit on combating terrorism and transnational crimes, the 8<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting held at Dhaka in December 2005 added Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) as one of the priority sectors of BIMSTEC.

### **03. Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime is a sector that has evolved over the years, both in terms of institutional mechanism as well as the areas covered by the sector. This sector, primarily conducts its tasks through the institutional mechanism of the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime.

The First Joint Working Group Meeting, was held in New Delhi, in December 2004. Due to the vast and diverse nature of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime, the meeting decided to form sub groups under this sector.

Today there are 6 Sub-Groups;

- Intelligence sharing;
- Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of the Terrorism;
- Legal and law enforcement issues;
- Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals;
- Human Trafficking and Irregular OR Illegal Migration;
- And Cooperation on Countering Radicalization and Terrorism.

We are happy to inform that these sub groups have been very active; many meetings were conducted over the last few years and have made significant progress.

However, I would like to also mention that the Sub-Group on Human Trafficking and Irregular OR Illegal Migration has not been able to move forward - mainly because, the Member States could not come to an agreement in the nomenclature

of this sub group. We are however hopeful that we will be able to resolve this today.

04. In addition to the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime and its six Sub-Groups, BIMSTEC has also established the “Annual Meeting of National Security Chiefs of Member States” with a view to oversee all traditional & non-traditional security threats emerging in the BIMSTEC region.

So far, the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs have met three times.

While the establishment of the Annual meeting of National Security Chiefs broadened the scope of countering terrorism and security related matters, the Member States, further felt, the need to hold meetings at the level of Home Ministers.

Therefore, the 4<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2018, decided, that BIMSTEC Home Ministers will hold meetings on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime matters.

**Excellency**, there has been no Home Ministers meeting held so far. And this is mainly because, the modalities of holding the BIMSTEC Home Ministers Meeting have still not been agreed upon amongst the Member States.

We are keenly looking forward to today’s Joint Working Group meeting to finalize the modalities, so that, the long overdue first meeting of the BIMSTEC Home Ministers as envisioned by 4<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit can take place and further strengthen cooperation in Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime.

### **Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,**

05. We are happy to inform you that the BIMSTEC Convention on combating international terrorism, transnational organized crime and illicit drug trafficking has been ratified by all Member States and it has entered into force on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

This is truly a remarkable achievement of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Sector in particular, and for BIMSTEC as a region, to help prevent and

reduce crime, terrorism and drugs through enhanced cooperation amongst the Member States.

We are also happy to inform you that, in the coming 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit (which is likely to happen very soon) - the BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters will be signed.

Therefore, we would like to extend our deep appreciation to the Joint Working Group of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime, the Lead Shepherd Member States, and India, who is the lead country in this Sector for making significant progress.

### **Distinguished Delegates,**

06. Today's Meeting, bears special significance for a number of reasons.

***First***, although the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime is supposed to meet every year, this meeting is being held after a gap of three years. Therefore, this meeting will be an opportunity to update Member States on the various developments that have taken place during the last three years.

***Second***, this meeting will finalize the nomenclature of the Sub-Group on Human Trafficking and Irregular OR Illegal Migration, and pave the way for holding its meetings and discussions.

***Third***, we hope to finalize the modalities of holding the BIMSTEC Home Ministers Meeting and enable the first meeting to be held soon.

***Fourth***, we hope this meeting will give necessary directives to relevant sub-groups for early finalization of BIMSTEC Conventions which are under negotiation, particularly, the BIMSTEC Convention Against Trafficking in Persons,

***Fifth***, this is going to be the last major event related to counter terrorism cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework before the 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit. The outcome of this meeting will feed into the next series of important meetings,

including the 22<sup>nd</sup> Senior Officials' Meeting, the 18<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting and the 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit itself.

07. Before I conclude, On behalf of the BIMSTEC Secretariat, I would like to thank Hon'ble Minister, Lyonpo Ugyen Dorji, for finding time to grace the opening session and addressing the 9<sup>th</sup> Joint Working Group meeting of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime.

Finally, The Secretariat would like to assure our full commitment and support to the Chair and the Delegations. Looking at the agenda, it appears, that the day is going to be long, but I am sure our delegates will extend their full cooperation and conclude with fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.