



Cairo Institute
for Human Rights Studies
Institut du Caire pour les études des droits de l'Homme
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان

UN Human Rights Council: 61st Session

Item 3: ID with the SR on the promotion of HRs while countering terrorism

Oral Intervention

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

10th March 2026

Delivered by: Mayssa Achek

Vague definitions of terrorism used to suppress peaceful opposition and undermine rights

Mr. President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his vital report that better defines terrorism, and for his continued documentation of the systematic weaponisation of counterterrorism across our region.

His exemplary revised definition arrives at a moment of profound crisis. For two decades, mandate holders have identified vague definitions as among the most common enablers of rights violations while countering terrorism. We see the consequences daily. In 2025, 168 defendants, including peaceful activists, were referred to mass trial in Egypt - an outcome of the authorities' routine abuse of counterterrorism legislation through the perpetual 'recycling' of charges against detained rights and defenders and others, causing them to remain in detention indefinitely. Algeria continues to imprison people under Penal Code Article 87 bis, a provision the UN Human Rights Committee denounced as overly broad and vague.

And this weaponization has gone transnational. The Arab Interior Ministers' Council has facilitated five extraditions between 2022 and 2025. All five victims now remain forcibly disappeared or face torture.

The Special Rapporteur's new definition offers critical improvements. Limiting terrorism to intentional killing, serious injury or hostage-taking would exclude much conduct currently prosecuted. Yet definitions alone cannot stop the practices mentioned. This Council must act to ensure States adopt and implement these standards, end administrative detention without due process, dismantle transnational repression mechanisms, and hold perpetrators accountable.

Thank you, Mr. President.