



High-Level International Conference on the Repatriation of Persons from Al-Hol, Surrounding Camps and Places of Detention

26 September 2025
10:00 – 18:00 hrs
United Nations Secretariat, New York

*Organized by the Government of the Republic of Iraq with the support of the
United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)*

Draft Concept Note

Background and context

Since the military defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) in 2019, thousands of individuals with perceived or actual ties to Da'esh, including suspected foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and accompanying family members, have been arbitrarily detained in camps and places of detention in northeast Syria. As of July 2025, more than 30,000 individuals, many of whom are Syrian and Iraqi nationals, together with approximately 8,500 foreign nationals from over 62 countries, remain stranded in these camps.¹ The population of these camps is predominantly women and children, with an estimated 60% under the age of 18.²

The conditions inside the camps and places of detention continue to deteriorate, representing a protracted human rights, humanitarian, and security crisis marked by arbitrary and prolonged detention, denial of fundamental human rights, acute deprivation of basic services, and high risks of violence, exploitation and radicalization to terrorism. These sites have increasingly become a target of groups like Da'esh, raising serious concerns about the security of the populations held there and the potential resurgence of terrorist groups. In addition, terrorist groups, including the remnants of Da'esh, have attempted to use the camps and places of detention for recruitment and plotting of potential attacks by exploiting the needs and situation of vulnerability of men, women and children present there. Recent developments in the Syrian Arab Republic cast further concerns over the security situation of the camps and places of

¹ United Nations estimates. See also United Nations Security Council, Twenty-first report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, (*pending*).

² Ibid.

detention and highlight the risks of regional instability in case there are mass prisonbreaks or unsupervised departures.

Though several Member States have taken steps to repatriate their citizens back to their countries of origin, the pace of these efforts has been slow and protracted, and their scope uneven. Iraq has taken a leading role in the repatriations process, with more than 17,100 nationals repatriated to date, and has worked toward realizing its goal to repatriate all of its citizens by the end of 2025.³

Despite these notable signs of progress, several Member States with their citizens in the camps and places of detention continue to express concerns over, *inter alia*, national security, operational challenges, and the capacity for effective prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration efforts, as appropriate. As a result, thousands of individuals continue to be held in arbitrary and indefinite detention without access to due process or legal recourse, raising serious human rights and security concerns, and undermining prospects for meaningful accountability for crimes committed by Da'esh or effective rehabilitation and reintegration back to their communities.

As part of its efforts to mitigate the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to international peace and security, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2178 (2014), in which it called upon Member States to develop and implement prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (PRR) strategies for returning FTFs.⁴ Building on this, and recalling Member States' obligations to bring terrorists to justice, in resolution 2396 (2017), the Council further called upon Member States to "assess and investigate individuals whom they have reasonable grounds to believe are terrorists," and to "develop and implement comprehensive and tailored prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration strategies and protocols, in accordance with their obligations under international law," including with respect to FTFs and accompanying family members.⁵

This call is echoed by the General Assembly in its eighth review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, in which all Member States are encouraged to develop effective strategies to deal with returnees, including through repatriation, in accordance with relevant international obligations and national law.⁶

³ UN estimates as of June 2025.

⁴ S/RES/2178(2014), OP 4.

⁵ S/RES/2396 (2017), OP 4, 29-32.

⁶ Eight review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 3 July 2023, A/RES/77/298, para 49.

These resolutions, and existing guidance on the issue, underscore the importance of applying a case-by-case approach to returnees, emphasizing that women and children may require special focus and assistance, as they may have served in many different roles including as supporters, facilitators, or perpetrators of terrorist acts, and may be victims of terrorism.⁷

Against this backdrop, in 2020, thirteen United Nations entities, together with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), established the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syria/Iraq Third Country Nationals Returnees, in order to provide an “all-of-UN” response to the situation of individuals returning from Syria and Iraq through human rights-compliant approaches to address the varied needs and profiles of repatriated individuals. The Global Framework is currently being implemented in Iraq to support the Government-led repatriation of its nationals from northeast Syria.

Objectives of the International Conference

Given the ongoing human rights, humanitarian and security challenges in the camps and places of detention, there is an urgent need to expedite the repatriation of individuals who are held there. The Government of the Republic of Iraq, together with other Member States that have already undertaken voluntary repatriation of their citizens, can offer valuable insights, share experiences and highlight successes and challenges, including with respect to key legal, policy, and operational considerations. These insights extend beyond the repatriation process itself and also encompass the development of comprehensive and tailored PRR efforts.

In addition, the United Nations system and other international and regional partners have played an important role in providing policy advice, technical assistance and capacity-building support to Member States that have taken steps to repatriate their citizens. From access to humanitarian services to tailored capacity building of national officers, the United Nations system agencies and other international and regional partners continue to support Member States in their development of PRR strategies that align with applicable international law and standards, addressing the various needs, profiles, experiences of returnees, and the needs of affected communities.

⁷ S/RES/2396 (2017), OP 31, GCTS (8th review) para 55. See also the Security Council Guiding Principles on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (also known as “Madrid Guiding Principles”, (S/2015/939) and Addendum (S/2018/1177). See also United Nations Key Principles for The Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women and Children with Links to United Nations Listed Terrorist Groups adopted in April 2019, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/key_principles-april_2019.pdf

The High-Level Conference, therefore, aims to:

- (a) Provide an up-to-date overview of the humanitarian, human rights and security situation of the camps and places of detention in northeast Syria, along with data relating to third-country nationals;
- (b) Facilitate the exchange of experiences amongst Member States on the repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (PRR) of individuals from camps and places of detention;
- (c) Foster cooperation at regional and international levels on repatriation and PRR efforts;
- (d) Identify and discuss ways to expedite the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of individuals, in line with international law and national capacities.

C. Meeting Format, Logistics, and Participants

The High-Level Conference will be organized by the Government of the Republic of Iraq with the support of UNOCT and convened from 10:00 – 18:00 hrs on 26 September 2025 at the United Nations Secretariat Headquarters in New York City. The precise venue would be shared with registered participants in due course.

With the view to further promote cooperation and collaboration on the issue, including through regional and international organizations, the High-Level Conference will bring together member countries of the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the European Union, the African Union, the Organization of American States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum, and the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe, along with other relevant UN agencies and entities, international organizations and key civil society partners.

Due to logistical constraints, the High-Level Conference will include oral interpretation in Arabic and English only.

All delegations are responsible for their own costs, visas, accreditation to United Nations facilities and venue entry requirements to participate in the High-Level Conference. A logistical note will be issued to all registered participants.