

CHECKPOINT REACHED:

The Prevention of Violent Extremism and Online Gaming

*10.00 – 12.00, 29 January 2026
Conference Room 11
United Nations Headquarters, New York*

Background

Online gaming ecosystems have rapidly evolved into complex social environments where millions of users – especially youth – interact, collaborate, and build communities. These spaces are digital social worlds, offering opportunities for creativity, connection, learning and identity formation. For many, gaming environments are one of the most significant arenas for peer interaction and belonging. At the same time, the scale, immersion, and social dynamics that make gaming so powerful for positive engagement can also render these spaces vulnerable to exploitation by malicious actors.

The immersive nature of gaming, combined with anonymity, peer bonding, and limited regulation, has created ideal environments conducive to grooming and radicalization – often hidden in plain sight. Terrorist and violent extremist actors are believed to be shifting toward gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms, where oversight remains less stringent than for traditional social media. Such actors have begun using gaming for both direct engagement and indirect influence, including recruitment, propaganda, and communication in chats and private servers, as well as the dissemination of narratives through gamified content, cultural memes, and modified games.

Da'esh, for instance, released custom-made modified content (or 'mods') for games such as Grand Theft Auto V and Arma 3 as early as 2014-2015. These modifications enabled players to re-enact notable terrorist attacks and form communities around this behaviour. Similarly, Boko Haram has already used offline training games for young recruits and child soldiers to desensitize children to violence, build group dynamics, and prepare them for combat.

At the same time, the strong community ties, collaborative gameplay, narrative immersion, and identity-building also position gaming ecosystems as powerful platforms for prevention, resilience, and positive engagement. Gaming communities can provide meaningful alternatives to the narratives and sense of belonging offered by terrorist and violent extremist groups. Increasingly, developers, publishers, civil society actors, and youth themselves are exploring how the pro-social benefits games and gaming culture can be leveraged.

The challenge is therefore twofold. While malicious actors continue to adapt to new technologies and migrate across platforms, often outpacing the capacity of national authorities, platforms, and communities to respond, the opportunities to proactively harness gaming ecosystems for preventing violent extremism remains largely untapped, with limited understanding of and investment into on how these spaces can be proactively leveraged to strengthen resilience and prevent violent extremism.

In 2022, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), through its Global Programme on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE), led one of the first United Nations efforts to explore how violent extremist actors engage within gaming environments and target gaming communities. The assessment highlighted early indicators of propaganda dissemination, recruitment efforts in in-game and adjacent spaces, the gamification of violent extremist narratives, and the use of gaming culture to normalize violence and foster belonging among vulnerable youth.

Building on this, UNOCT and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) sought to translate this emerging evidence into dialogue and awareness and in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Japan, convened an expert-level briefing on gaming and violent extremism together with the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco at United Nations Headquarters in December 2024 and at the ECOSOC Youth Forum in April 2025 with the Permanent Mission of Singapore. These events sought to accelerate global policy recognition and catalyze further engagement in this space.

In late 2024, UNOCT and UNICRI also launched a regional study on gaming and violent extremism in Africa – the fastest-growing gaming region globally – which resulted in the publication in late 2025 of the report “[Level Up: Gaming and Violent Extremism in Africa](#)”. The study highlights that with one of the world’s fastest-growing and youngest gaming populations, Africa’s gaming ecosystem is expanding faster than oversight and resilience measures, creating a dynamic space that violent extremist actors could attempt to leverage as it scales and an opportunity to leverage the emerging gaming ecosystems in Africa to strengthen prevention and resilience efforts through gaming-based PVE approaches. Recognizing parallels in other fast-growing markets, UNOCT and UNICRI, with the support of the Department of Home Affairs of Australia, subsequently expanded this analytical effort to Southeast Asia, where youthful demographics, rapid gaming adoption, and evolving regulatory landscapes present both opportunity and risk.

Objectives

The objectives of the meeting are to further advance discourse on gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms in the context of terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism, in particular the role of gaming in the prevention of violent extremism. It will additionally build on prior events, expanding the conversation into the rapidly growing ‘Esports’ domain. In this context, the meeting will also provide an opportunity to present key insights from UNICRI and UNOCT’s recent study, “[Level Up: Gaming and Violent Extremism in Africa](#)”, as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen evidence-based engagement in this field and to formally launch the new joint UNOCT-UNICRI project on gaming and violent extremism, “*Checkpoint Reached: Gaming and Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia*”, funded by the Government of Japan.

Agenda

Duration	29 January 2026
10.00–10.20	Opening Remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>H.E. Ambassador Mikanagi Tomohiro, Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan</i> - <i>Briony Daley Whitworth, Political Coordinator and Counsellor Political, Permanent Mission of Australia</i> - <i>Christophe Monier, Secretary-General’s Representative, Board of Trustees of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)</i> - <i>Mauro Miedico, Director, United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCT), United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, (UNOCT)</i>

10.20-10.40	Online Gaming Today: Social Worlds, Esports & Digital Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bruce Homer, Professor of Educational Psychology, the Graduate Center, City University of New York
10.40-10.55	Insights from UNICRI-UNOCT Activities on Gaming and Violent Extremism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Odhran McCarthy, Liaison Officer, United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) - Lily Vicente, Programme Management Officer, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)
10.55-11.40	Panel Discussion: Threats, Trust, and Safeguarding the Gaming Ecosystem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lucas Almeida, Threat Detection Scientist, Trustlab Inc. - Cinnamon Rogers, Vice President, Global Public Policy Sony Interactive Entertainment - Cansu Canca, Director of Responsible AI Practice and Research Associate Professor in Philosophy, Northeastern University
11.40-11.50	The Quest Continues: Launch of New Project on Gaming and Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kentaro Matsumura, Counter-Terrorism Expert, Permanent Mission of Japan
11.50-12.00	Q&A, Member State Comments and Closing
Close of Meeting	

Logistics

The event will take place in-person. Prior registration is requested by all those intending to join. Registration can be completed by clicking [here](#) or scanning the QR Code. For any questions regarding this event, please contact:

- Mr. Odhran McCarthy, UNICRI (odhran.mccarthy@un.org)

