Department of Safety and Security (DSS)

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Year of Establishment: 2005

CTITF Working Group Membership:
• Strengthening the Protection of Vulnerable Targets (lead)

The Department of Safety and Security (DSS) serves as the central coordinating department at UN headquarters responsible for formulating policy recommendations, responding to emergency situations, coordinating inter-agency safety programs, and making decisions related to relocation/evacuation of UN staff members.[58] In order to fulfill this function, DSS cooperates with host governments to ensure safety and security of UN staff, assesses the safety of local conditions in order to advise UN staff accordingly, responds to emergency situations involving UN staff, and determines the processes for security clearance.

Established in 2005 in response to deficiencies outlined in the 2003 *Independent Panel on Safety and Security of UN Personnel in Iraq*, DSS brought together a number of preexisting security functions in one entity. Though not directly involved in countering terrorism, DSS is the lead actor coordinating the safety and security of United Nations staff, assets, and operations at all United Nations duty stations around the world, taking into account various threats, including terrorism.

As a member of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, DSS—together with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)—co-chairs the Working Group on the Protection of Vulnerable Targets. The working group works closely with member states, international, regional and subregional organizations, the private sector, and other partners to identify and share best practices to prevent terrorist attacks on vulnerable targets. DSS has been collaborating with other UN entities and the NGO community to collect and analyze data on security incidents relating to terrorism in order to identify emerging threats and develop effective responses.[59]

In this working group, DSS is also working closely with INTERPOL, which has established a referral center for states to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, resources, experts, technical assistance, and best practices to protect vulnerable targets. During the centers nearly two years of operation, 134 states have contributed inputs.[60] Moreover, DSS is working with INTERPOL and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to develop stronger emergency response capacities for security threats,

including terrorism.[61]

Additionally, DSS has worked with UNICRI to produce a handbook to facilitate the establishment of public-private partnership (PPP) projects at a national and local level to prevent terrorist attacks. This handbook is also part of UNICRI's broader efforts to promote PPP initiatives to strengthen the protection of vulnerable targets.[62]

Prompted by attacks on the United Nations in Algiers, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon commissioned the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel and Premises Worldwide on February 5, 2008. The panel had a broader mandate to focus on "strategic issues vital to delivery and enhancement of the security of United Nations personnel and premises and the changing threats and risks faced by it."[63] Reflecting on why the UN had increasingly become a target of attacks, the report suggested that

A growing part of the public no longer perceives the UN as impartial and neutral. At the core of this issue is the perception that the United Nations has become an instrument of powerful Member States to advance agendas that serve their own interests, rather than those of the global community of nations….This perception has a negative impact on the security of UN personnel, its activities, and its premises.[64]

This observation underscores the importance of perceptions of legitimacy regarding the UN's role in international counterterrorism initiatives and the value of an effective communications strategy that conveys that UN's efforts to address global terrorism are derived from the organization's core values and principles, as enshrined in the UN Charter, and that the actions of all its bodies are in accordance with them.[65]

Ensuring the safety of UN staff is paramount for the UN to carry out its many activities in the field and at headquarters. DSS has learned a great deal from assuming this responsibility, and has much to contribute in strengthening international and national policies and practices to secure the safety of civilians.