



26 March 2015 – Over 20,000 [foreign fighters](#) have already joined the Syria/Iraq conflict, according to the latest estimates by [ICSR](#) and

[Munich Security Conference](#)

. As their number hit an alarming record, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)

) launched a

[new global initiative](#)

aimed at bolstering countries' criminal justice responses to the 'Foreign Terrorist Fighters' (FTF) phenomenon. The UNODC initiative will thus assist Member States in criminalizing areas such as terrorist recruitment, incitement to terrorism, terrorism financing, and terrorist training.

The phenomenon of foreign fighters isn't new, but the extent of their involvement in various conflicts around the world is unparalleled as several terrorist groups, including Al-Qaida, the Al-Nusra Front, or the Islamic State (ISIL), recruit foreign nationals. With an estimated worldwide total of 20,730 FTF, foreign fighters are most often nationals or residents of countries of the Middle East (11,000), Western Europe (4,000) or the former Soviet Union (3,000)*.

Three-day conference

In light of this issue, a three-day conference was held in collaboration with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law in Malta (IIJ).

Representatives from the Mediterranean basin, the Balkan countries, Belgium, France, Italy, Japan, the Russian Federation, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States were represented, together with five United Nations agencies and six international and regional organizations.

Urgent need to combat terrorism

Addressing the event, [UNODC](#)'s representative stressed the urgent need to combat terrorism and bring perpetrators to justice before they launch terrorist attacks.

"The tragic events in [Tunis](#) just last week, or in [Belgium](#), [France](#) and [Denmark](#) over the past months confirm the unprecedented threat posed by individuals involved as Foreign Terrorist Fighters. Our principal objective is ultimately to support Member States' efforts in disrupting terrorist plans and operations before they are committed. The more we are confronted with unprecedented terrorist threats, the more we have to collectively look for effective responses and preventive strategies."

** As indicated by ICSR, these numbers are estimates. No data have been published yet for Asia.*