

European Seminar convened by the  
*Fonds de Garantie aux Victimes de Terrorisme* of France  
**“For a better support of victims of terrorist attacks”**

Statement by Laura Dolci, victim of terrorism

*Paris, 15- 16 March 2018*

My name is Laura Dolci. I am Italian and work in Geneva. My late husband, Jean-Sélim Kanaan, was a UN staffer like me, of French and Egyptian nationality. He was killed at the age of 33 with other 21 colleagues holding 11 different nationalities in the terrorist attack against the UN headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003. Our son, who was then 28 days old, was the first victim of terrorism assisted in the French *Departement de l’Ain*, where we happened to reside at the time of the attack. Today, 23 victims are receiving support in that corner of France, as a result of terrorist attacks that occurred in the last decade in France or abroad. The terrorist commando that brought down the UN building was composed of individuals from several countries, affiliated to Al Qaeda.

Tonight I am sharing with you these facts and figures to illustrate that **terrorism is diffusing in its range, and so are its victims**. Victims of terrorism can be found today in almost every state. In my recently-published book [\*A Victimless Crime? A narrative on victims of terrorism to build a case for support\*](#), I say exactly that: victims of terrorism are not a distant or abstract reality. They can be your neighbour or your colleague at work. A child that has lost his or her parent in a terrorist attack can attend the same school class of your children. We, victims, make up at present a very large, albeit scattered, community of individuals from all races, gender, age, professional backgrounds, creeds and latitudes.

Moreover, in the form it has taken since the ‘90s, terrorism has increasingly acquired the features of **a transnational crime**. Although it may be fuelled by grievances born at the local level, today terrorism operates across borders, as is the case with other contemporary crimes such as human trafficking, crimes on the internet or environmental crimes. Hardly any country is spared by global terrorism. As you all know well in this room, countries may be the stage of attacks carried out on their soil or may be called into play because their nationals are on the casualties’ list of an

attack happening elsewhere, or feature amongst the names of the suspected perpetrators.

However, over the years I could observe that many victims fall between the cracks in what is increasingly **'a problem without passports' or one 'with too many passports'**. If, an Italian citizen like me residing in Switzerland, is caught up in a terrorist attack led by a multi-national commando while sightseeing in Moscow, who takes care of that victim: Italy, Switzerland or the Russian Federation? Or the countries of origins of the terrorists involved in the attack?

This is aggravated by the fact that, to this day, countries that have in place a specific framework to provide assistance to victims of terrorism can still be counted on the fingers of two hands only – and most of them are present in this room tonight. It is a sad reality that although terrorism is the one word most pronounced in the news daily and large counter-terrorism programmes have multiplied in the last years, the great majority of states have yet to invest in mechanisms to support victims of this heinous crime. At the international level, more than 10 years since the adoption by consensus of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the United Nations General Assembly, which affirmed the need to promote and protect the rights of victims of terrorism, no international fund has been established - despite two UN resolutions calling for that.

This workshop is therefore a very welcome and a much-awaited initiative. I am honoured for having been invited and provided with an opportunity to share my experience, which I have recently elaborated in a sabbatical research supported by two academic institutions. The leadership and vision of the *Fonds de Garantie des Victimes des actes de terrorisme*, and his Director Monsieur Rencki, should be saluted. As you all know, terrorism is complex and victimhood is not an easy or mainstream subject. Your mere presence in this gathering is an indication that we may have reached a greater momentum as compared to some years back.

Terrorism is not, in many ways, an ordinary crime. i) Its degree of violence, for one, is not ordinary. While terrorism is not defined per se under the crimes for which the International Criminal Court has jurisdiction, terrorists use means and weapons similar to those of war-time, mass-murder of non-combatants. When one has to undergo repeated surgeries to extract Kalashnikov bullets out of a limb, it feels closer to Aleppo than Munchen. Despite my efforts to live fully again, I still have indelible splinters of horror inside of me, like the miniscule pieces of glass projected

by the blast in 2003 and wandering in the body of many of my injured colleagues – even many years after the bombing; ii) Terrorism has an intentional public dimension that goes beyond the direct victim since it hits with calculated randomness in order to target an entire community, a government or an institution. Terrorism thus dehumanizes the direct victim, which is an aggravating factor in the victims' recovery; iii) Lastly, terrorist acts, despite the magnitude of the harm caused, have statistically a lower rate of positive criminal processes. The combination of mass-victimisation, cross-border issues, the absence of the criminal (often killed in action or suicidal) and the use of extra-judicial securitized counter-terrorism make it particularly difficult for the victim to obtain justice.

A better response to victims of terrorism should therefore, in my view, be based on:

- The understanding of these specific victimological features in order to respond in a more sustainable and effective manner to the needs of victims. This would require talking to the victims, undertaking epidemiological studies and constituting a repository of existing studies and researches;
- The sharing of best practices between the countries that have developed differentiated response for victims of terrorism, and between those countries and others that are yet to do so. There is probably not one size fits all as each State has a different societal model but cooperation and coordination are essential in the face of a phenomenon that is by now cross-border;
- A multi-disciplinary approach as the experience of victimhood is being felt at many levels by the victim, including physical and mental integrity, but also in the context of the re-insertion of the victim in the active life and in the access to justice.

My son and I are today in a good place. I was fortunate because the country of origin of my husband, France, already then had laws recognizing the harm suffered by victims of terrorism. Its institutions reached out to me and gave us a status, upon which my son and I could progressively build our after-attack life.

Drawing from my direct experience, I wish to conclude by sharing with you two broader reflections:

- Responding with **social solidarity** to those who happened to be hit directly by terrorism constitutes the most effective reply to this heinous

crime – it empties it from its fundamental scope and message, which is nihilism and destruction.

- Supporting the untapped source of strength of victims can also help build a stronger societal case and norm against terrorism and prevent the repetition of violence. In contrast, embracing a logic of fear in the aftermath of terrorism is an easy shortcut that unfortunately only plays in the hands of terrorists.

I thank you.

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