



Preliminary findings of the visit to Belgium

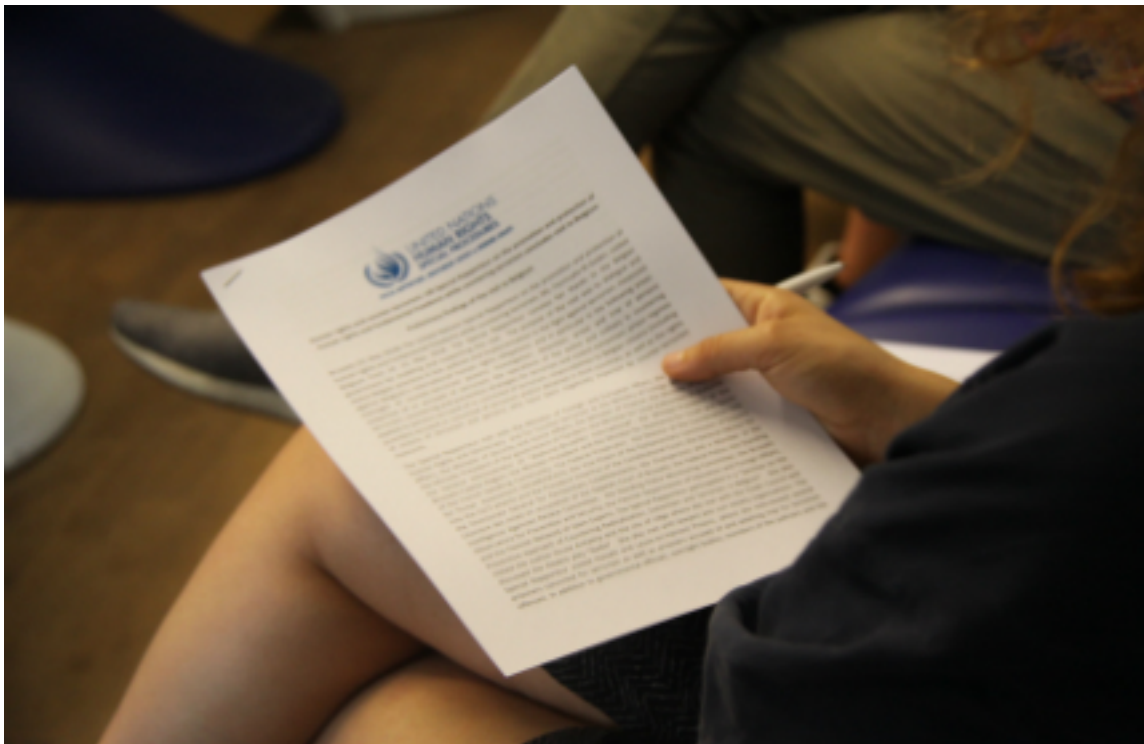
The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, visited Belgium from 24 -31 May 2018.

The purpose of the visit was to dialogue and assess Belgian practices in law, policies and implementation in the fight against terrorism, measured against Belgium's international human rights obligations. The Special Rapporteur met with governmental officials, oversight bodies, members of the judiciary and the legal profession, and with members of civil society. She also visited two prisons, where she interviewed several prisoners convicted for terrorism as well as prisoners accused of and awaiting trial for terrorism offences.

Like many countries, Belgium faces the challenges of addressing and countering radicalization, including its violent manifestations, and has taken active steps to develop strategic policy in this

regard. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of May 22 2016, the Special Rapporteur commended the commitment of the Belgian Government to upholding its human rights obligations in its national practices. According to her the “various levels of government are conscious of, and sensitive to, the appropriate balance between the protection of rights and security measures.”

“Belgium provides a model of deliberate and composed response to the extremity of terrorism, which is often directed at provoking an extreme state response in order to undermine democracy”, Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin said.



With regard to the victims of the attacks mentioned above, the Special Rapporteur is mindful of the measures of support the Government undertook. “But despite these efforts, the rights and needs of victims are not fully addressed and still require significant legal and policy attention. Addressing the rights of the victims of terrorism represents a best practice not just because it assists victims and survivors to rebuild their lives and can also help to reduce polarization in society through building national solidarity”, the Special Rapporteur concluded.

Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur underscores her concern that no systematic de-radicalization or disengagement programmes are being put in place in Belgian prisons. Given the evidenced expertise and experimentation taking place at federal, regional, community and municipal levels, the disjunction is evident.

Prisoners convicted of these offences will be released and returned to Belgian society. Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin said that “It is in the interest of all citizens that tailor-made programs are developed with regional, community and federal interface and consistently implemented in prisons.”

Finally, “Belgium is further facing the ongoing challenge of the return of other citizens accompanying foreign fighters including spouses and minors from conflict zones.” The Special Rapporteur was mindful of the challenges related to the return of these foreign fighters from conflict zones, but she insisted that the Belgian government must take action to protect the often young and very vulnerable children of imprisoned jihadists.

In conclusion, the general tone of the Special Rapporteur was positive. “Belgium is a very diverse country” and, according to her, “succeeds efficiently in tackling the security challenges that terror entails, well within the realm of the rule of law.”