It is both a singular honour and privilege for me to address the VIIth PAM Plenary Session. Your aims and objectives are not only complementary but add strength to the efforts of the United Nations to build a world in which there is freedom from fear; a world in which we are free to channel our energies into furthering the common good. Your efforts in the fight against terrorism and bolstering counter-terrorism cooperation are commendable. I avail this opportunity to present before you some thoughts in my personal capacity as Chair of the Counter Terrorism Committee.

To say that terrorism today constitutes the most serious challenge to international peace and security would be both a self-evident truism and an understatement. Statistics would indicate that the share of terrorism in global violence is at an all-time high.

Of particular concern to the Mediterranean region is the threat posed by Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) which continues to raise a considerable amount of money from kidnappings for ransom. Al-Qaida, despite considerable disruption in its leadership, remains a potent and dangerous force.

In confronting the scourge of terrorism, the international community has made considerable progress. Ever since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001), most States have now taken steps to criminalize terrorist acts in their domestic laws and regulations. Financial intelligence units (FIUs) and other mechanisms have been set up in many States to guard more effectively against terrorist financing. New systems of border security have been developed. The exchange of information now takes place in a more systematic manner.
I must complement PAM for its pioneering effort in adopting a definition of terrorism as early as 2009. There is now a clear understanding of the acts and actions that constitute terrorism.

Notwithstanding this progress, the efforts of the international community continue to face many challenges. Foremost is the need to remove the moral and legal ambiguities that allow terrorists to gain succour and even legitimacy. Progress under mutual legal assistance and extradition cases is still sketchy and is yet to be fully mainstreamed as part of regional and international counter-terrorism efforts.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

No cause or grievance can justify terrorism. It has to be confronted with resolute determination, not only by governments, but also by societies at large. Security Council resolution 1963 (2010) as well as the universally agreed Global Counter Terrorism Strategy recognize that terrorism will not be defeated by military means, law enforcement measures and intelligence operations alone.

Meeting violence with greater violence can never provide a lasting solution. Such an approach has its inherent limitations. Mahatma Gandhi, I would like to remind you at this stage, said that an eye for an eye makes the whole world go blind. The recent developments in West Asia and North Africa demonstrate that peaceful and non-violent mobilization of a population can be a more effective instrument of social change than violence.

What we need is to promote and ensure a holistic zero-tolerance approach towards terrorism. It is also absolutely essential that any measures taken by States to combat terrorism comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

The success in the fight against terrorism goes hand-in-hand with progress in strengthening counter-terrorism cooperation and exchange of information at the international, regional and sub-regional level. The mechanisms that have been developed to pool the resources and the knowledge of the international community needs to be augmented and made more effective.

At the political and operational levels, Member States need to have comprehensive and integrated national counter-terrorism legal frameworks that are anchored in the rule of law and human rights. They also need to take steps to promote inter-agency coordination and the exchange of counter-terrorism information, both at the national and regional/international levels. Dedicated counter-terrorism units and enhance cooperation with INTERPOL would be useful from this perspective. Regional organizations, in particular, are well-placed in advancing these efforts. I would be remiss if I do not acknowledge PAM’s extraordinary efforts in this regard.
The United Nations, with its unparalleled convening power, is playing a seminal role in combating terrorism including through extending technical assistance, capacity building and sharing of best practices among member States. We are working towards strengthening cooperation, coherence and coordination of counter-terrorism efforts amongst various UN entities. The efforts have also been focussed on enhanced engagement among practitioners - prosecutors, police officers, judges, and immigration and border officials so that counter-terrorism efforts are well informed and better coordinated.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Counter-Terrorism Committee, which I Chair, adopted a landmark Outcome document in its Special Meeting last year that raised the benchmark in the fight against terrorism to a higher level and approved a zero-tolerance approach which is now part of the counter-terrorism lexicon. Next month, the Committee intends to organize another Special Meeting focussing on “preventing and suppressing terrorist financing”. Further, as part of strengthening its outreach efforts, the Committee is also exploring the possibility of collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Moving forward, it is imperative to have the necessary political will to squarely face the challenge of terrorism. We need to expand the scope of the legal instruments and strengthen enforcement efforts to destroy safe havens for terrorists, their financial flows and their support networks.

There has also been an ever increasing need to expand the normative framework to combat international terrorism taking into account the increasingly sophisticated and globalized terrorist challenges. An early conclusion of Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism will further strengthen the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

We also need to evolve a more powerful counter-narrative to combat incitement and radicalization. We need to inculcate values among our young minds that promote tolerance and respect for diversity and different cultures. We need to have mechanisms to ensure accountability and justice.

In concluding, I would like to quote the great European philosopher Edmund Burke. He said that “All that it takes for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” This is the philosophy behind the creation of the United Nations and this organization. It is in that spirit that I am here as Chairman of the United Nations Counter Terrorism Committee to urge greater cooperation and coordination between our organizations to face this contemporary evil.