

Enhancing Civil Society Engagement

Key findings and recommendations on the role of civil society in preventing violent extremism and counterterrorism from consultations held in connection with the UN regional high-level conferences on counterterrorism

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the key findings and recommendations from consultations with civil society organized in connection with the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) regional high-level conferences on counterterrorism.¹

Following the first UN High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States in June 2018, the UNOCT organized seven regional high-level conferences to “keep up the momentum on key counter-terrorism issues ... strengthen international cooperation ... [and] promote implementation of the [United Nations] Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.”² Both the initial high-level meeting and the subsequent regional conferences were faulted by some for the limited

involvement of civil society.³ To help bolster civil society engagement as part of that process, the UNOCT partnered with the Global Center to organize two one-day, civil society–led workshops preceding the last two regional conferences, in Abu Dhabi on 17 December 2019 and Vienna on 10 February 2020.

The Abu Dhabi civil society consultation, which was co-organized with Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, was titled “Empowering Youth and Promoting Tolerance: Practical Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism.” Participants included 35 youth-led organizations and civil society organizations from 11 different countries engaged in promoting tolerance and partnering with youth leaders and human rights and gender advocates across the Arab League region.

1 This paper was prepared by Annabelle Bonnefont and Jason Ipe with the Global Center on Cooperative Security. Any errors or omissions are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNOCT, the participants in the regional consultations, or the Global Center on Cooperative Security.

2 UNOCT, “Regional Conferences,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/regional-conferences-0> (accessed 12 June 2020).

3 For example, see Eelco Kessels, “Remarks at the United Nations High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States,” 29 June 2018, <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/S3-Global-Center-on-Cooperative-Security.pdf>; Eric Rosand, “Where Is Civil Society in the UN’s Counterterrorism Efforts,” Brookings Institution, 15 May 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/05/15/where-is-civil-society-in-the-u-n-s-counterterrorism-efforts/>. A number of civil society representatives participated in the regional conferences, notably the regional high-level conference in Nairobi, where women-led civil society representatives from Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, and Tunisia participated in a closed meeting with the UN Secretary-General.

The Vienna civil society consultation, co-organized with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), was held in advance of the regional high-level conference on foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), convened by the UNOCT, OSCE, and Switzerland, in cooperation with the Albanian OSCE chairmanship in Vienna. Participants included 53 individuals representing more than 40 different civil society organizations with diverse experiences working on prevention, intervention, rehabilitation and reintegration, and related issues across the OSCE region.

The civil society workshops were intended to

- ▶ provide an opportunity for civil society–centric discussions on the thematic areas with the aim of improving cooperation with governments and the United Nations;
- ▶ encourage the sharing of good practices and lessons learned and offer concrete proposals for scaling up successful approaches; and
- ▶ identify recommendations for improving engagement among civil society, states, and intergovernmental bodies on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism.

This paper summarizes the key outcomes of those discussions. It highlights some of the contributions of civil society to advancing implementation of the Strategy in the areas of prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation and reintegration. It identifies challenges and proposes a series of recommendations for states, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society to enhance engagement on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism by

- ▶ creating an enabling environment for civil society,
- ▶ supporting its financial and organizational capacity, and
- ▶ engaging it in relevant policy formulation and implementation processes at all levels.

The consultative process was limited in duration, geographic scope, and thematic focus.⁴ The summary therefore does not reflect the full range of contributions of civil society to countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism or the full range of civil society views on the topic. Despite the limitations of the process, the resulting recommendations highlight fundamental issues around ensuring that civil society has the operating environment, the resources, and the opportunity to engage on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism effectively.

THE ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN COUNTERING TERRORISM AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

CIVICUS, a global civil society network, defines civil society as “the arena outside the family, state and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests.”⁵ Civil society broadly includes non-profit and nongovernmental organizations, but also academia, traditional and religious leaders, grassroots organizations, advocacy groups, unions, philanthropic foundations, research institutions, and youth and women-led groups.⁶

Civil society includes community-based actors that have extensive knowledge of local dynamics. Indeed, their position within communities means certain civil society actors may have more credibility and experience than, for example, governmental actors in working with specific groups and helping address their concerns while providing a constructive route to accountability and transparency in counterterrorism work. Being viewed as knowledgeable, experienced, and trusted entities by local communities, civil society

4 The process was limited to the two one-day workshops involving civil society from the Arab League or Arab state and OSCE regions and focusing on empowering youth and promoting tolerance and challenges related to FTFs.

5 CIVICUS, “Enabling Environment,” n.d., <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/what-we-do/defend/civicus-enabling-environment> (accessed 12 June 2020).

6 See European Commission, “Multiannual Indicative Programme for the Thematic Programme ‘Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Local Authorities’ for the Period 2014-2020,” C(2014) 4865 final, 15 July 2014, p. 4.

actors have key roles to play in supporting the development of more inclusive and effective measures to prevent and respond to terrorism and violent extremism.

Civil society, in particular human rights defenders and advocates, also plays an integral role in bringing the response to terrorism into balance with the broader human rights and international law obligations of states. Indeed, through activism, education, research, and oversight and even as assistance and service providers, it can play a critical role in ensuring that counterterrorism measures respect human rights and the rule of law; monitoring the actions of militaries, law enforcement, and other security services; laying down guidelines; conducting investigations into alleged abuses; scrutinizing counterterrorism legislation; and generating awareness of a range of counterterrorism-related issues.

The United Nations has recognized the important role that civil society actors play in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. The role of civil society was stressed in the initial 2006 resolution adopting the Strategy, which “encourage[s] non-governmental organizations and civil society to engage, as appropriate, on how to enhance efforts to implement the Strategy.”⁷ In adopting the Strategy, member states also resolved to “foster the involvement of civil society in a global campaign against terrorism and for its condemnation.” The report containing the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism⁸ similarly acknowledges the contributions of civil society to preventing violent extremism and counterterrorism, as do a number of relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.⁹

The discussions during the two civil society workshops highlighted in concrete terms some of the myriad contributions that civil society can and has made to countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. These contributions fell largely into three functional

areas: prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation and reintegration.

PREVENTION

Civil society has an important role to play when it comes to preventing violent extremism, including in reducing the appeal of violent extremism and building resilience to its influence and spread. Civil society organizations around the world have actively engaged in long-term efforts to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism identified in Pillar I of the Strategy. They have been working to support sustainable development, provide humanitarian relief, empower marginalized communities and vulnerable groups, promote dialogue, protect human rights, improve governance, expand political participation, empower women, and prevent and resolve violent conflict while providing a constructive outlet for the redress of grievances.

As highlighted by Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov in his closing remarks during the civil society organization-led workshop in Vienna, “[C]ivil society, in all its diversity, is an indispensable partner in addressing the root causes of violent extremism conducive to terrorism.” This role is acknowledged in the UN Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which calls for systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups and recognizes the importance of engaging civil society and youth in that regard.

The importance of civil society to preventative counterterrorism efforts was stressed by participants during both workshops. Civil society participants highlighted their efforts to build resilience to the spread of violent extremism, including by raising awareness of the threat of violent extremism; giving voice to marginalized and

7 UN General Assembly, A/RES/60/288, 8 September 2006.

8 UN General Assembly, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/70/674, 24 December 2015.

9 For example, see UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/70/291, 19 July 2016; UN Security Council, S/RES/2396, 21 December 2017.

vulnerable peoples, including victims of terrorism; promoting religious education and inter- and intrafaith dialogues; supporting youth; developing and disseminating counternarrative campaigns; and building community trust with governmental institutions.

They highlighted the work of organizations supporting peace and stability within their communities, for example, providing effective awareness-raising strategies and fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue and trust in implementing programs such as Zarqa Community Prevention Network, established under the umbrella of the Aaz-Zara Municipality in Jordan to enhance social cohesion, community resilience, and tolerance through the creation of community prevention networks working directly with their local administration. Other prevention programs presented throughout the consultations focused on enhancing inter- and intracommunity and -faith tolerance or delivering skill-based trainings. In this regard, participants heard about the experience of civil society actors in the Middle East and North Africa region who worked with local communities and religious leaders to build the capacity of imams and *wa'edat* (female preachers), paired with community activists who are more connected with and active on social media, to extend their outreach and to support efforts to actively counter the growing presence of extremist groups online and offline.¹⁰

INTERVENTION

Civil society also plays a direct role in intervention work, delivering programs and actions that disrupt the radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism and terrorism. In the intervention space, participants observed that civil society actors, including psychologists, risk assessment experts, educators, religious representatives, victims, and former terrorism offenders, are playing critical roles in risk assessment and intervention approaches around the world. Community

engagement through the work of civil society actors offers the opportunity to develop trusted partnerships that can help with the early detection of security challenges, as well as more sustainable and effective responses. Civil society organizations have extensive knowledge of the local dynamics, trends, and drivers of violent extremism, which allow them to provide timely interventions and context-specific responses. Therefore, the inclusion of civil society representatives in the development and implementation of interventions programs is critical in improving their effectiveness and long-lasting impact.

Participants shared examples of intervention programs, including from Moonshot CVE, which conducts interventions in the online space to connect vulnerable individuals with safer content, counselors, and information to broker their engagement with local service providers offline. Participants also heard from the Violence Prevention Network, a German nongovernmental organization that provides training to teachers, social workers, and prison official to identify and respond to radicalization and works with state and local authorities in Germany to develop and provide interventions targeting right-wing and religiously motivated extremists.

REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION

Looking at the current challenges posed by returning FTFs and their families, civil society representatives participating in the Vienna workshop argued that the most pressing challenge for governments and civil society is in the area of rehabilitation and reintegration. Civil society representatives highlighted, in particular, the challenges posed by large numbers of FTFs and family members associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in camps and detention in Syria and Iraq. These challenges include managing individuals who have returned and will return from

¹⁰ The project developed by Al Hayat Center titled “Building Capacity and Partnership Between Religious Leaders (Imams and Wa'edat) and Social Activists to Counter Violent Extremism in Jordan” engaged 5,312 beneficiaries. The beneficiaries were divided into three target groups. The first group comprised 101 imams/wa'edat and community activists engaged in the training course (53 of 101 were female and wa'edat). The second group involved 264 peer education sessions reaching out to 2,625 peers educated by the first group. The third group comprised 2,586 participants from local communities in the local campaigns developed and implemented by the first group.

conflict, dealing with violent extremists in custody, and ultimately managing the release of violent extremist offenders in ways that facilitate their successful reintegration and minimize risks to communities.

UN Security Council Resolution 2396 calls on member states to “develop and implement comprehensive and tailored prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration strategies ... in consultation, as appropriate, with local communities, mental health and education practitioners and other relevant civil society organizations and actors.” The resolution highlights the importance of women and youth in this process, asking states to “ensure participation and leadership of women in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of these strategies.”

In both workshops, civil society participants shared how their efforts support the rehabilitation of terrorist offenders and returnees and facilitate their reentry into society through on-going educational and vocational skills training. The participation of civil society actors is crucial to the effective, context-specific development and implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration programs. Participants stressed that governments cannot confront those challenges alone and should work with civil society, the private sector, and other local actors who enjoy credibility in their communities and bring to bear specific expertise and skills across a wide range of psychosocial, vocational, financial, educational, legal, religious, familial, and communication needs. Civil society actors often have the trust of and access to the affected individuals and communities in ways that government officials do not. Participants shared a number of good practice examples where civil society has been integrated into the development, design, and implementation of multiagency approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration, such as Operation Zhusan, where the government of Kazakhstan has

cooperated with civil society, religious organizations, psychiatrists, and other stakeholders on the rehabilitation and reintegration of some 600 women and children repatriated from Syria.

On the difficult issue of repatriation, participants highlighted the role that civil society actors can play, along with the media, in supporting responsible public engagement on the rationale for often unpopular repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration policies and approaches and communicating the dangers if these challenges are left unaddressed. In this regard, participants heard about the experience of women-led civil society actors in Central Asia working with communities and media to help facilitate community acceptance of female returnees.

Across all of these areas (prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation and reintegration), participants highlighted the importance of accounting for gendered aspects of violent extremism and the need to support women civil society actors.¹¹ The United Nations also reaffirms the important role of women and women’s organizations in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism.¹² Several examples shared by participants illustrated the important role of women in efforts to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism. In the area of prevention, participants shared the importance of involving women-led organizations who benefit from a privilege position to intervene directly with girls and women who are at risk of terrorist radicalization or who have returned from conflict areas in foreign countries where they may have been actively involved in violent extremism. Additionally, women-led organizations have strongly embraced reintegration efforts that include vocational and psychological training programs led by women and mothers, such as the Pavlodar Centre for Analysis and Development

11 For additional information, see Political Settlements Research Programme, “Fionnuala Ní Aoláin’s Remarks on Civil Society Empowerment and Women, Peace and Security,” 6 November 2017, <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/2017/11/06/fionnuala-ni-aolains-remarks-on-civil-society-empowerment-and-women-peace-and-security/>; Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, “Why Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Law and Practice Is Failing a Human Rights Audit,” *Just Security*, 28 April 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/69899/why-preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism-law-and-practice-is-failing-a-human-rights-audit/>.

12 UN Security Council, S/RES/1325, 31 October 2000; UN Security Council, S/RES/2122, 18 October 2013; UN Security Council, S/RES/2242, 13 October 2015.

of Interfaith Relations in Kazakhstan, which has been working with local communities in providing sociopsychological work as group therapy and psychological counseling to women during the process of reintegration.¹³

MODELS OF AND CHALLENGES TO ENGAGEMENT

In each of these areas, participants cited good practice models of engagement being undertaken at local, national, and international/intergovernmental levels. Participants shared various examples of engagement between local authorities and civil society, including the experiences of local prevention networks in municipalities in Jordan and Lebanon, which consist of local practitioners who work with youth, faith leaders, other civil society representatives, government officials, teachers, social workers, and law enforcement to coordinate local efforts to prevent violent extremism.¹⁴

At the national level, participants discussed civil society engagement including as part of national action planning processes on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism. Participants shared a number of good practice examples where civil society was proactively engaged in these processes from the outset, which were contrasted with less participatory and ultimately less successful planning processes.¹⁵

At the international level, the participants welcomed their engagement as part of the regional high-level conference process and the announcement by the UNOCT of a forthcoming civil society engagement strategy. They expressed support for more sustained

mechanisms of engagement with multilateral bodies working on counterterrorism-related issues, including by the United Nations, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and others.

Although the participants praised these and other good practice examples of engagement and welcomed the rhetorical support for their efforts, they noted that serious obstacles and risks arise to their engagement in counterterrorism efforts in practice. They observed that, at the most basic level, their capacity to engage is constrained by increasingly onerous restrictions on their operations, including by the misapplication of counterterrorism measures. They noted that their capacity to work in certain areas, in particular direct invention and rehabilitation and reintegration, requires a clear legal basis, which is often lacking. More broadly, they noted a fundamental lack of trust between government and civil society in many of the communities most vulnerable to the spread of violent extremism. Even in contexts where state–civil society relations are highly constructive, participants expressed concerns about the potential instrumentalization of civil society in service of narrow counterterrorism or intelligence gathering objectives. They noted that civil society engagement on counterterrorism is further constrained by limited resources, competing priorities, and limited organizational capacity related to counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism, particularly in areas of program design and monitoring and evaluation. Finally, they observed that opportunities to engage at local, national, and international/intergovernmental levels are relatively rare and, where they do exist, rarely involve genuine consultation or produce additional resources to support civil society.

13 For additional information, see Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger, and Rafia Bhulai, eds., “A Man’s World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism,” Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism and the Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016, http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/AMansWorld_FULL.pdf; Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Rafia Barakat, “Strengthening Community Resilience Against Violence and Extremism: The Roles of Women in South Asia,” Global Center, November 2013, http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/13Nov27_Women-and-CVE-in-South-Asia_Policy-Brief_Final.pdf.

14 For additional information, see Strong Cities Network, “SCN in Lebanon and Jordan - 6 Prevention Networks Established,” 17 July 2017, <https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/en/scn-lebanon-jordan-6-prevention-networks-established/>.

15 For a comparative analysis of national action planning processes, including the engagement with civil society, see Sebastien Feve and David Dews, “National Strategies to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism: An Independent Review,” Global Center, September 2019, <https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GCCS-2019-National-Strategies-Prevent-Counter-Violent-Extremism-Independent-Review.pdf>.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To help address some of these challenges and advance efforts at developing productive and long-lasting relationships with civil society organizations, participants offered recommendations directed at governments and intergovernmental bodies focused on ensuring that civil society has the operating environment, resources, and opportunity to engage on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism effectively.

1. CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Relations between governments and civil society vary dramatically from country to country. In certain contexts, civil society organizations are seen as critical elements of democratic societies and partners to government in the provision of basic services. In other contexts, they may be viewed with suspicion because of their work among marginalized populations or be perceived primarily as regime opponents. Because of this ambivalence, civil society organizations do not always enjoy the necessary political and legal conditions to properly conduct their work. Legal limitations specific to the counterterrorism context further impact civil society's capacity to engage in this space.

Ensure a Conducive Operating Environment for Civil Society

The capacity of civil society actors to usefully engage in counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism is dependent on their freedom to operate generally. A key factor for civil society organizations to work in a country is the legal and regulatory framework allowing and governing their establishment, space, and scope to function in public life.

Workshop participants observed a trend, however, toward systematic repression of civil society, including through the misuse of counterterrorism laws and other measures justified on the basis of national security concerns.¹⁶ They described increasingly onerous registration and reporting requirements, restrictions on access to funding, and even intimidation. They expressed concern about an increasing hostile operating environment for civil society in many of their countries.

Highlighting this discrepancy between the rhetoric and commitment of states to engage civil society and the lived experience of organizations on the ground, participants in the workshops called on states to avoid undue restrictions on the work of civil society organizations and ensure an enabling environment for civil society. They also called on intergovernmental bodies, the United Nations in particular, to speak out forcefully against undue restrictions on the financing, operations, and freedom of assembly of civil society actors. They urged those organizations to hold states accountable for abuses and called on technical bodies responsible for assessing implementation of counterterrorism obligations, including the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Financial Action Task Force, to raise abuses in this regard in their dialogue with states.

Ensure Legal Basis for Civil Society to Engage on Specific Aspects of Counterterrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism Efforts

Because of the sensitive nature of certain elements of counterterrorism-related work, civil society may require specific enabling legislation or exemptions to terrorism or terrorism financing laws to carry out their work. Participants noted, for example, that humanitarian actors, as well as peace-building organizations engaging persons associated with violent extremist

¹⁶ See CSIS Human Rights Initiative, "Counterterrorism Measures and Civil Society: Changing the Will, Finding the Way," March 2018, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180322_CounterterrorismMeasures.pdf?EeEWbuPwsYh1iE7HpnS2nPyMhev21qpw; Godfrey M. Musila, "Freedoms Under Threat: The Spread of Anti-NGO Measures in Africa," Freedom House, May 2019, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/05132019_UPDATED_FINAL_Africa_Special_Brief_Freedoms_Under_Threat.pdf; UN General Assembly, *Impact of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Civic Space and the Rights of Civil Society Actors and Human Rights Defenders: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism* A/HRC/40/52, 1 March 2019.

groups to promote reconciliation or encourage defections, can be exposed to prosecution for supporting terrorism, as can organizations facilitating rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals associated with terrorist groups.¹⁷

Similarly, organizations working with law enforcement as part of direct intervention and diversionary programs or those working in prisons to promote rehabilitation and reintegration need to have a legal basis for that work to enable access to individuals, protect against liability, and clearly delineate roles and responsibilities with governmental partners.¹⁸

Participants called on states to create, where necessary, specific legal and policy frameworks to enable civil society engagement on violent extremism-related issues, such as rehabilitation and reintegration, as part of comprehensive frameworks for countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism.

Build Trust and Partnership Based on Shared Interests

Workshops participants observed that a significant trust deficiency exists among government, civil society, and communities, especially within populations who feel they have experienced injustice at the hands of the state, often under the banner of counterterrorism objectives.¹⁹ Indeed, some organizations felt as though the communities they represent were perceived primarily as “problems to be solved” or, worse, as threats that should be mitigated. This is a significant barrier that requires “do no harm” responses at the community and institutional governance levels that address the lack of trust between communities and governments, with a prominent role for civil society actors.

To build trust, government and intergovernmental bodies should engage civil society on their own terms,

on the basis of shared interests, not merely as instruments in countering violent extremism. Security from violence and violent extremism is only one aspect of the human security priorities of civil society and the communities they represent. Quite commonly, corruption, joblessness, and economic marginalization are more pressing concerns, particularly among those most vulnerable to violent extremism. Investments in counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism should not displace investments in these other priorities, nor should civil society actors be instrumentalized or securitized for the state’s own narrow objectives.

Building stronger partnerships, as noted, also requires recognizing that civil society is not a homogenous entity with a singular experience. Participants highlighted the need for a more inclusive and diverse set of perspectives to protect against bias in the understanding of violent extremism that hinders the effectiveness of efforts to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism and for more appreciation of the positive benefits that engaging a diverse network of civil society actors brings.

2. SUPPORT CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY

Civil society organizations require the right resources to fulfill their potential, including adequate funding, organizational capacity, and thematic and practical expertise.

Ensure Civil Society Access to Funding

States and intergovernmental bodies should avoid measures that restrict civil society access to legitimate funding, including those related to foreign funding or raising funds. Civil society organizations are heavily dependent on public funds. Participants in the civil

17 See Emanuela-Chiara Gillard, “Recommendations for Reducing Tension in the Interplay Between Sanctions, Counterterrorism Measures and Humanitarian Action,” Chatham House, August 2017, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/CHHJ5596_NSAG_iv_research_paper_1708_WEB.pdf.

18 See Christina Nemr et al., “It Takes a Village: An Action Agenda on the Role of Civil Society in the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Those Associated With and Affected by Violent Extremism,” Global Center and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague, August 2018, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/GC_It-Takes-a-Village_WEB.pdf.

19 CSIS Human Rights Initiative, “Counterterrorism Measures and Civil Society.”

society workshops urged governmental and intergovernmental bodies to actively support civil society by providing direct financial support to organizations working on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism, contributing to pooled funding arrangements such as the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, and incentivizing private sector actors and individuals to support civil society organizations in this area.

Participants noted that as the work of civil society is increasingly implicated in national and international strategies and action plans on counterterrorism and violent extremism, states and intergovernmental bodies should be sure that commensurate levels of funding for civil society match those responsibilities and expectations.²⁰

In addition to supporting programing on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism, workshop participants urged donors to provide more unrestricted funding to civil society organizations and funding to support general organizational capacity, not just implementation of narrowly defined counterterrorism objectives. They highlighted the importance for civil society actors to receive consistent, predictable, long-term funding. They stressed the need for donors to expand their funding to smaller civil society actors and grassroots organizations to open new opportunities to less established actors who may be most knowledgeable about specific dynamics. They urged donors to be more flexible in their funding requirements, to peg funding to achievement of objectives rather than implementation of activities, and to be less risk averse in letting civil society organizations test new concepts and ideas. They called on governments and intergovernmental bodies to engage civil society in determining funding priorities and program design, not merely as program implementers.

Finally, they urged private sector companies, philanthropic entities, and other international

nongovernmental partners to do more to support civil society engagement on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism, including through substantive training and knowledge sharing.

Build the Technical Capacity of Civil Society to Work on Counterterrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism

Not only do civil society organizations need financial resources, they need the technical and organizational access and capacity to implement effective programing on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism.²¹ Participants in the workshops stressed that civil society needs access to relevant publications and research, translation services, training programs, and engagement networks and platforms, as well as organizational capacity building in areas such as project management, financial administration, and monitoring and evaluation.

Participants highlighted the need to improve program design, monitoring, and evaluation capacities. They observed that much community-level programing on preventing violent extremism is assumed to have a positive impact but lacks rigorous evaluation. Trainings and capacity-building activities should be provided to civil society organizations to assess, through a rigorous evaluation process, the impact of programs at the community and local levels. Small investments in organizational capacity development and technical skills building can lead to enhanced knowledge, better partnerships, and targeted, multi-stakeholder engagements while contributing to building a community of practice among civil society actors.

Participants stressed that investing in operational capacities for civil society organizations also can aid in ensuring that they are self-sufficient in seeking funding to sustain and expand their programs.

²⁰ See Feve and Dews, "National Strategies to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism," p. 31.

²¹ See OSCE, *The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe*, 4 July 2019, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/2/400241_1.pdf.

Support the Capacity of Women-Led Civil Society Organizations

Civil society is essential in engaging women and girls in public life and enabling their full capacities to be realized. Security Council Resolution 2242 recognizes that women are vital to efforts to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism.²²

Participants noted that women are still underrepresented in peace and reconciliation processes and that efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism underaccount for gendered aspects of violent extremism. Participants shared that having gender expertise in, for example, the development of national action planning processes for preventing violent extremism, including in the area of rehabilitation and reintegration, improves the ability to reintegrate returnees more effectively.

Workshop participants stressed the need to engage and support women civil society actors in efforts to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism and to integrate gender-sensitive perspectives when developing related national action plans, strategies, and programs. They highlighted that giving special attention to women's voices strengthens the capacity of the international community to respond to terrorism, deepens the understanding of its harms, and provides key messages to address the root causes of violent extremism and terrorism.

3. ENGAGE CIVIL SOCIETY IN RELEVANT POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES

The process of developing counterterrorism strategies and policies at national, regional, and international levels is a unique opportunity for stimulating a whole-of-society response to terrorism and violent extremism. Indeed, merely talking about civil society

and youth-led organizations or inviting them to the table is not enough. Civil society engagement needs to involve meaningful exchanges that influence the strategic design and objectives of policy, which in turn must translate into actions by government and nongovernmental actors.²³ Participants offered recommendations for how civil society can be better integrated in relevant policy formulation and implementation processes at local, national, and intergovernmental levels.

Local Engagement

At the local level, government should empower community-based organizations to engage on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism and build partnerships among communities, civil society actors, local government, and law enforcement. Grassroots organizations, youth organizations, and women-led organizations are key agents in supporting peace and stability within their communities. By promoting the work of community-based organizations, governmental stakeholders can ensure that local specificities and community dynamics are taken into account while developing policies and programs that have a direct, positive impact on local communities. It can also help ensure that measures taken to counter terrorism do not discriminate, in purpose or effect, on the grounds of race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin and that noncitizens are not subjected to racial or ethnic profiling or stereotyping.

Workshop participants urged the creation of mechanisms for communication and cooperation between civil society and local governmental actors, including municipal officials, social service providers, teachers, and law enforcement, to build trust among key local stakeholders and foster discussions regarding local drivers of violent extremism, counterterrorism policies, and other issues related to terrorism and its prevention. Mechanisms for communication and cooperation at the local level can facilitate cooperation on the development of local action plans on preventing violent extremism, the design and implementation of

22 UN Security Council, S/RES/2242, 13 October 2015.

23 For additional information, see Feve and Dews, "National Strategies to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism."

prevention programming and multiagency intervention strategies, and collaborative approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration at the local level.

National Engagement

National authorities should engage civil society in national action planning and other relevant policy development processes on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism. Civil society plays a role in helping to define security agendas and in fostering dialogue between communities and governmental stakeholders. When drafting and revising national counterterrorism legislation and developing counterterrorism strategies and action plans, governments should solicit input from a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations.²⁴ Government should ensure that civil society's views are meaningfully reflected in the resulting policies and programs. Furthermore, governments should take advantage of civil society expertise to develop specific, locally oriented counterterrorism strategies and should rely on civil society expertise to inform technical assistance.

The process of developing strategies or plans of action on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism provides an important entry point for civil society engagement. For this engagement to be beneficial for both stakeholders, it should include (1) a long-term process, in which trust building and reconciliation are central; (2) enabling conditions of safety and respect, provided and safeguarded for by national governments and enabling legislation; and (3) a thorough analysis of root causes, grievances, and the push and pull factors of radicalization.

As highlighted by participants, civil society should be included in formal consultations on government implementation plans and measures, be represented in

mechanisms that oversee implementation efforts, and participate in evaluation and accountability processes. The primary goal of engaging civil society in these processes should be to further support, not to control or direct its work.

Intergovernmental Engagement

Workshop participants called for the mainstreaming of civil society engagement across the relevant policy formulation and programming of the United Nations and other multilateral bodies. Indeed, participants stressed that civil society should play a more fulsome role in the counterterrorism efforts of the United Nations and be given a voice in its deliberations on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism efforts. In that regard, participants welcomed their involvement in the dedicated civil society consultations and regional high-level conferences in Abu Dhabi and Vienna and the announcement of a UNOCT civil society engagement strategy to “systematically and meaningfully engage with a wide variety of civil society organizations.”²⁵

Participants noted that civil society engagement is not an activity unto itself; it is a way of working consultatively and should be mainstreamed across various programs and thematic areas of work, not undertaken separately or as a token gesture. Within the UN system, this means ensuring a baseline level of engagement across the UNOCT and the members and working groups of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (Global Compact), a coordination mechanism for UN and related bodies working on counterterrorism-related issues. Global Compact working groups and members should solicit civil society input and participation on relevant work plans and projects and engage them as partners and implementers of programming.

24 PVE plans should be developed in a multidisciplinary, inclusive and holistic manner that draw input from a variety of Government actors and levels, such as law enforcement, social service providers and relevant Government ministries, regional and local authorities, as well as non-governmental actors, including youth, families, women, religious, cultural and educational leaders; local communities; civil society organizations; the media; and the private sector.

UNOCT, *Reference Guide: Developing National and Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism*, n.d., p. 10, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/UNOCT_PVEReferenceGuide_FINAL.pdf.

25 UNOCT, *Civil Society Engagement Strategy*, 17 January 2020, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/civil_society_engagement_strategy_website_mai_2020.pdf.

Participants welcomed the possibility of continued engagement as part of the UN high-level conferences, as well as regular briefings and meetings. They urged the UNOCT to consider adopting a regular process for the receipt and adjudication of requests to participate in UN activities, meetings, and briefings. They also noted that ensuring meaningful participation from civil society in many cases will involve supporting travel for civil society participants and assisting them in visa procedures. It also requires resources and mechanisms to engage civil society in project delivery.

Participants urged UN counterterrorism actors—the UNOCT, the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime—to include consultations with local civil society groups as an integral part of their efforts to understand the environment in which they are assessing implementation of UN norms and providing assistance to implement them. The dedicated civil society forums and smaller sidebar consultations undertaken by Under-Secretary Voronkov as part of the regional high-level conferences in Abu Dhabi and Vienna could provide a model for this type of consultation for future official trips.

Finally, participants urged the United Nations to consider mechanisms for reflecting civil society input in the review process for the Strategy.²⁶ A more robust process should be put in place for requests for civil society submissions to inform the Secretary-General's report on implementation of the Strategy, notably by

providing adequate time for dissemination and preparation of the solicitations. Moreover, the briefing for member states on the Secretary-General's report could equally be made public and webcast and made available on the UN website to promote great transparency.

CONCLUSION

Although limited, UNOCT efforts to engage civil society as part of its regional high-level conferences and the resulting recommendations highlight the importance of ensuring that civil society has the operating environment, resources, and opportunity to engage on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism. Governments and intergovernmental bodies are quick to highlight the role of civil society in supporting their counterterrorism objectives; the recommendations above provide a road map for how they can support civil society.

Perhaps more important is the precedent this engagement sets for the UNOCT, UN counterterrorism efforts generally, and UN member states. UN action in this space serves as a model for member states for a consultative approach to working with civil society partners and supporting their engagement on countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. Going forward, the challenge for the UNOCT will be ensuring that participation of civil society in the regional conference series translates into sustained engagement and consultation that meaningfully informs UN work in this area.

26 After the 2018 review of the Strategy, civil society organizations also called on the United Nations to do more to incorporate civil society input into the review process. See “Global Group of NGOs Deplore Lack of Attention to Human Rights in Latest Review of UN’s Global Counterterrorism Strategy by UN Member States,” 10 July 2018, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Statement_GCTS_Review-20180710-FINAL.pdf.