

# Women and Countering Violent Extremism

Exploring an Integrated Approach that Bridges Security, Development, and Human Rights

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## BACKGROUND

Women and girls increasingly bear the brunt of extremist violence. From Pakistan to Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, and Somalia, violent extremist groups have deliberately attacked developmental, educational, and socio-economic opportunities for women and girls and have rolled back hard-won gains. Yet, women are not only victims of violent extremism. They also play roles as supporters, perpetrators, and preventers. There is a long history of women planning, supporting, and executing terrorist attacks, from Northern Ireland to Sri Lanka. Today, there are increasing reports of western women traveling to ISIL-controlled territory, with some reports suggesting that women constitute as many as 10 to 20 percent of the foreign contingent. Even though women combatants remain few in numbers worldwide, they can and have played key roles as ideologues and recruiters for violent extremist groups. However, women can also be critical partners in prevention. Across numerous regions, women and women-led organizations have worked at the formal and informal level to resolve conflicts, build peace, promote development, advance education, and challenge violent extremists. Nevertheless, there are concerns that efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism might lead to the instrumentalization of women's rights for counterterrorism purposes and securitize the work of local grassroots organizations.



UN Photo/Marco Dormino

Recognizing the unique access and role women have in many contexts, international actors such as the United Nations, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), and the European Union have called for greater focus on the roles of women in preventing terrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE) and for integrating a gender dimension into CVE policies and programs. For instance, Security Council Resolution 2178 urged member states to strengthen

engagement with civil society, women, and youth in CVE efforts. Furthermore, Resolution 2129 called for increased focus on women, peace, and security (WPS) issues in all relevant work of the Council, including threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts. Likewise, the global study on the implementation of Resolution 1325 emphasized that the damaging impacts of violent extremism on the rights of women and girls “demands the attention” of the WPS agenda.<sup>1</sup> Following the high-level review of Resolution 1325 in October 2015, the Council adopted Resolution 2242 calling on its members to work toward greater integration of various agendas—WPS, counterterrorism, and CVE. In his “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,” the UN Secretary-General reaffirmed that women’s empowerment is crucial to achieving sustainable peace and urged member states follow through on Resolution 2242 and to mainstream gender perspectives in efforts to prevent violent extremism.<sup>2</sup>

## **ABOUT THIS PROJECT**

The Global Center on Cooperative Security, with support from the government of Australia, is undertaking a project to bring together key stakeholders including UN actors, member state officials, experts, and practitioners to advance practical efforts in implementing a gender dimension across multilateral CVE efforts, including the Secretary-General’s “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.” The project aims to develop a closer understanding of the potential points of convergence between CVE and WPS efforts and explore practical means of advancing the two agendas in an integrated manner. This project builds on the Global Center’s ongoing work to raise awareness among the international community about the multiple roles of women in terrorism, violent extremism, and countering violent extremism.<sup>3</sup> A workshop anticipated for spring 2016 will take stock of the normative framework and ways of translating policy into practice. Following the workshop and consultations with relevant stakeholders, the Global Center will produce a policy brief to capture key themes and recommendations on ways to advance the implementation of Resolution 2242 and other multilateral norms, and to consider lessons learned from programming and how they might inform future efforts in this area.

## **ABOUT THE GLOBAL CENTER ON COOPERATIVE SECURITY**

The Global Center works with governments, international organizations, and civil society to develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable responses to complex international security challenges through collaborative policy research, context-sensitive programming, and capacity development. In collaboration with a global network of expert practitioners and partner organizations, the Global Center fosters stronger multilateral partnerships and convenes key stakeholders to support integrated and inclusive security policies across national, regional, and global levels.

For further information about this project, please contact Ms. Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Head of Research and Analysis at the Global Center ([nfink@globalcenter.org](mailto:nfink@globalcenter.org)).

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women, “Preventing Conflict Transforming Justice Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325,” 2015, <http://wps.unwomen.org/~media/files/un%20women/wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,” Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/674, 24 December 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Rafia Barakat and Liat Shetret, “The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors,” Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, April 2013, [http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/13Apr11\\_Women-and-Terrorism-Prevention\\_Final.pdf](http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/13Apr11_Women-and-Terrorism-Prevention_Final.pdf).

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