

H.E. Mr. António Guterres  
Secretary General  
United Nations  
New York, NY

21 April 2017

**Re: Considerations by civil society organizations related to your report on the Capability of the United Nations system to assist Member States in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy**

Your Excellency,

As representatives from civil society, civil society organizations (CSOs), and organizations representing CSOs dedicated to preventing violent extremism (PVE) and interested in seeing the United Nations' PVE capabilities strengthened, we thank you for your report ([A/71/858](#)) on the Capability of the United Nations system to assist Member States in implementing the [United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#) (2005, henceforth "UN Global Strategy").

We welcome the priority it places on reforming the United Nations system to better play a leading role in the prevention of conflict and promotion of sustainable, inclusive peace, including enhancing the capability of the UN system to counter-terrorism and prevent violent extremism. We are encouraged that there appears to be strong support across the UN membership to enhance collaboration and cooperation among the many UN entities working on these issues and to put in place a senior, full-time official to spearhead UN efforts in this area.

However, we are concerned that the proposal in your recent report falls short in a number of areas that are critical to the success of this endeavor, particularly as they relate to the role of civil society and the protection of human rights.

As such, we respectfully request that you consider the following points as you continue to champion the strengthening of the UN architecture for countering terrorism and PVE:

- The report and the proposal contained therein devote insufficient attention to the important role that civil society plays in both PVE and counter-terrorism and the need for the United Nations to continue to champion a "whole-of-society" approach to address these challenges. This is at odds with the need outlined in the UN Global Strategy and the [Secretary-General's PVE Plan of Action](#) (2016), which includes more than 20 recommendations on issues such as engaging communities, empowering youth, and enhancing the role of women. [Security Council Resolution 2178](#) (2014) also underscores the importance of these stakeholders in addressing the foreign terrorist

fighter phenomenon. The role of women and youth is further reiterated in [Security Council Resolutions 2242](#) (2015) and [2250](#) (2015), which were welcomed by women's peace movements and youth advocates globally.

A vibrant and independent civil society is vital to PVE, as it provides a space for moderate dissent and constructive engagement with the state. CSOs, including local women and youth organizations, are powerful counterweights to rising violent extremist movements, because like them, CSOs are locally rooted and authentic, yet globally connected. They also offer a strong alternative, positive vision and values rooted in rights, peace and pluralism. Yet, as overly broad definitions of terrorism or violent extremism are used to criminalize the legitimate actions of opposition groups and shrink space for CSOs and human rights defenders, it is imperative that the United Nations, including through a new counter-terrorism office, reminds states of the importance of and the need to empower and, where appropriate, partner with civil society and wider communities in the development, implementation and evaluation of PVE and counter-terrorism strategies, policies, and programs.

- The report and accompanying proposal fail to emphasize sufficiently the centrality of protecting human rights when addressing the threats of violent extremism and terrorism. Data shows that support for terrorism and violent extremism is strongly correlated with violence perpetrated by states against their own populations, in certain cases as part of counter-terrorism operations. Excessive and routine police brutality and overly strong security measures that are perceived to target particular communities are among the key sources of grievance within communities that violent extremist propaganda exploits.

To help ensure its credibility among communities around the globe, a new UN counter-terrorism office and coordinator must exert moral leadership in this area, reminding Member States that fighting terrorism through policies that protect the basic rights and freedoms of their citizens is not just a matter of human rights compliance but is actually the most effective security strategy. Further, the United Nations should continue to prioritize the provision of technical support and guidance to Member States to ensure their PVE and counter-terrorism laws and strategies are fully compliant with international human right laws and norms.

- The proposal seems to prioritize the need to respect the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference – principles that are already enshrined in the UN Charter – rather than underscore the importance of ensuring the UN's counter-terrorism and PVE efforts are informed by evidence-based monitoring and evaluation efforts so that any UN-funded assistance programs in this field are effective and not doing inadvertent harm.

- Finally, while the proposal rightly emphasizes the importance of strengthening coordination among UN headquarters'-based actors, increased external coordination – whether with UN field offices and operations, including those led by UNODC and UNDP, or with multilateral bodies, CSOs, and the private sector – is equally important.

There are a number of steps that could be taken to help alleviate the above concerns.

1. An Under-Secretary General should be appointed to head the proposed new counter-terrorism office who has experience in both development and security, as well as demonstrated the ability to work inclusively and cooperate effectively with a range of stakeholders, including civil society actors. The appointee should have a proven record of support for policies that are consistent with the values outlined in the UN Global Strategy and the PVE Plan of Action.
2. This position as well as any new senior UN counter-terrorism posts should be filled following a transparent and competitive process. The positions should be advertised publicly to ensure access to the widest range of candidates, including those currently working outside of government and multilateral organizations. A transparent process will underscore the United Nations' commitment to quality, equality and integrity. It is also a critical opportunity to put into practice the gender parity pledge.
3. The new counter-terrorism office should include a dedicated team of PVE experts, committed to pursuing a "whole-of-society" approach based on evidence-based research and assessments. The office should also ensure that the prevention agenda receives the necessary attention within the framework of the UN Global Strategy. As part of this effort, the new office should take into account the growing role of technology, education and innovation in PVE and prevention more broadly.
4. Finally, as a demonstration of your commitment to a "whole of society" approach to PVE and to engaging civil society, including women and youth led organizations, we propose that you prioritize meaningful engagement between the new counter-terrorism office and civil society, including to ensure that the views of local, grassroots CSOs are heard in New York and at the regional and national levels.

In addition to supporting new and existing effective mechanisms that facilitate the building of trust between governments and communities – a critical element of effective PVE strategies – and new ones, where appropriate – the United Nations should lead by example and establish its own mechanism or cooperate with existing civil society platforms to support the sustained engagement between the United Nations and civil society on this agenda. The signatories to this letter are committed to collaborating with the UN and governments to ensure a coordinated PVE approach based on the comparative advantages that each sector offers. We stand ready to work with you and the new counter-terrorism office to deepen collaboration with the UN on this agenda.

In responding to the challenges we face as a global community, the UN remains a critical actor in ensuring peace and security worldwide. With such global connectivity and vibrant civic activism, the promise of the Charter that highlighted “We the peoples of the United Nations” has never been so important, especially in the face of the threat of terrorism and violent extremism.

Signed,

- Addu Women’s Association (AWA) - Maldives
- Advocacy for Women in Peace and Security- Africa - Kenya
- Alliance for Peacebuilding
- Association of War Affected Women - Sri Lanka
- Bangladesh Enterprise Institute
- Bureau of Human Rights and Rule of Law - Tajikistan
- Charity & Security Network
- Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS)
- Coalition for Action on 1325 - Uganda
- Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN)
- German Institute on Radicalization and De-Radicalization (GIRDS)
- Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC)
- Global Center on Cooperative Security
- HAKI Africa, Kenya
- Human Rights First, US
- Human Security Collective
- International Civil Society Action Network, also representing the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership
- Indonesia Civil Society Against Violent Extremism (C-SAVE)
- Inclusive Security
- Institute for Security Studies, South Africa
- Institute for Strategic Dialogue
- Local Youth Corner- Cameroon
- Maldivian Network to Empower women (MNEW) - Maldives
- Network of Civil Society Organizations (NESCO) Nigeria
- One Earth Future Foundation
- PAIMAN ALUMNI TRUST, Pakistan
- Peace Building Network, Morocco
- Peace Is Loud
- Peace Maker’s Foundation - Nigeria
- Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy
- Prevention Project: Organizing against Violent Extremism
- Quilliam
- Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka
- Search for Common Ground
- Transnational Initiative Countering Violent Extremism, Morocco
- United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY)
- Violence Prevention Network, Germany
- West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)

- WITNESS SOMALIA - Somalia
- Women Peace and Security Network National Working Group (under NSRP) -Nigeria
- Women Without Borders
- Harouna Abdoulaye, President of the Association, Maison de la Vie et de L'Espoir Lutte AntiDrogue, Niger
- Dr. Khadija Arfaoui - Tunisia
- Richard Barrett, Director of the Global Strategy Network and former head of UN Security Council Al-Qaida/Taliban Sanctions Monitoring Team
- Carol Bellamy, Chair, Global Community and Resilience Fund (GCERF)
- Luca Gervasoni, Co-Director of NOVACT and founder of the Observatory to Prevent Extremist Violence (OPEV)
- Shannon Green, Center for Strategic and International Studies, US
- Bushra Qadim Hyder, Qadims Lumiere School, Pakistan
- Daisy Khan, Founder & Executive Director, Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality & Equality (WISE), US
- Michael Opondo, Chair, Global Alliance of Youths Countering Violent Extremism, Kenya
- Edit Schlaffer, Founder and Director, Women without Borders
- Mike Smith, Adjunct Professor, Macquarie University and former Executive Director, UN CTED