

A Blueprint for Civil Society-Led Engagement in UN Counterterrorism and P/CVE Efforts

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Based on wide-ranging consultations with individuals representing diverse civil society organizations, governments, and UN entities, this brief presents key recommendations for improving civil society engagement in UN counterterrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts.¹ It provides concrete steps that the United Nations and its member states can take to better engage civil society and offers a blueprint for civil society to advocate for and assert itself more consistently and effectively within the UN counterterrorism architecture, policies, and programs.

Background

Civil society is diverse and so are its members' perspectives, roles, and expertise in the fields of counterterrorism and P/CVE. Civil society includes community-based and nongovernmental organizations, more broadly referenced as civil society organizations; academia; think tanks; community elders; thought and religious leaders; victims' networks; and youth and women's groups, to name a few. Civil society actors are often better placed, more credible, and more knowledgeable and have more experience

working within their communities than governmental and intergovernmental actors. They also have access to communities and local environments that governments and the United Nations often do not, especially in fragile states. Consequently, civil society involvement is fundamental to addressing violent extremism. Cooperation and dialogue between civil society and government agencies is a prerequisite to the successful development, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of effective P/CVE and counterterrorism efforts.² In the UN context, civil society engagement at all stages of the policy and programming cycle is essential to ensure those policies and programs reflect local needs and perspectives, including those related to the threat of violent extremism.³

Civil society engagement with the United Nations on counterterrorism and P/CVE issues has been a recurring point of discussion, especially since the 2006 General Assembly resolution adopting the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, which "encourage[d] non-governmental organizations and civil society to engage, as appropriate, on how to enhance efforts to implement the Strategy."⁴ In adopting the Strategy, member states also

1 For more information on the UN counterterrorism architecture, please see: Melissa Lefas, Junko Nozawa, and Eelco Kessels, "Blue Sky V: An Independent Analysis of UN Counterterrorism Efforts," Global Center on Cooperative Security, November 2020, <https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GCCS-Blue-Sky-V-2020.pdf>.

2 The Prevention Project, "Civil Society Engagement with the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism," January 2018, on file with the authors.

3 The Prevention Project, "10 Reasons Why Civil Society Is an Ally and Not an Adversary in the Struggle Against Violent Extremism," October 2017, on file with the authors.

4 UN General Assembly, "UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," A/RES/60/288, 20 September 2006.

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resolved to “foster the involvement of civil society in a global campaign against terrorism and for its condemnation.”⁵ The Secretary-General’s 2015 plan of action to prevent violent extremism⁶ similarly acknowledges the contributions of civil society to counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism, as do several relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.⁷ Despite growing recognition of the value of a whole-of-society approach to P/CVE issues and the unique contributions that civil society can make to this approach,⁸ opportunities for a broad range of civil society actors to access, let alone influence, UN counterterrorism and P/CVE actors and actions are ad hoc and few and far between. Broadly speaking, the UN membership is divided between states that favor a more centralized, securitized, and government-driven approach to addressing these challenges and those that prefer to see a more inclusive, decentralized, whole-of-society approach where civil society has a central role to play alongside governmental actors. As a result of the diverging attitudes of UN members toward civil society, there has been limited progress in creating space at the United Nations for meaningful, regular, and sustained engagement with civil society in counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts.

The UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), established in 2017, has attempted more structured and consistent engagement with civil society. The UNOCT began incorporating civil society actors into its regional counterterrorism summits and its annual High-Level Counter-Terrorism Week in 2019 and started soliciting

input from civil society as it prepared the Secretary-General’s report ahead of the biennial Strategy review process. In January 2020, the UNOCT released its civil society engagement strategy, whose development was supported by a small financial contribution from “civil society friendly” member states.⁹ The UNOCT committed to establishing focal points for civil society engagement in each of its three organizational branches and launched an online portal (the Connect & Learn Platform) to provide access to UNOCT eLearning materials and connect external stakeholders, including civil society, with its capacity development programs.¹⁰ The UNOCT is also expected to establish a Civil Society Unit for which it is seeking dedicated extrabudgetary resources—the same type of funding it is using to establish a new human rights and gender section in early 2022.¹¹ Many of the 43 members of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (Global Compact)¹² also undertake their own engagement with civil society in their counterterrorism and P/CVE-related programming.

The UN Security Council and its subsidiary bodies, especially the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), have also taken incremental steps to engage civil society. Council members have hosted several counterterrorism-focused Arria formula meetings¹³ that included civil society speakers. The Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) manages its own Global Research Network consisting of academics and researchers.¹⁴ It engages civil society actors in the development of guidance material¹⁵ to assist member states with the

5 Ibid.

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

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

8 Annabelle Bonnefont, “Engagement With Civil Society: The Missing Piece in UN Counterterrorism Efforts,” Global Observatory, 23 June 2021, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/06/engagement-with-civil-society-the-missing-piece-in-un-counterterrorism-efforts/>; Annabelle Bonnefont and Jason Ipe, “Enhancing Civil Society Engagement,” Global Center on Cooperative Security, July 2020, <https://www.globalcenter.org/publications/enhancing-civil-society-engagement>.

9 United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, “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.

10 United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism’s Connect & Learn platform, <https://learn.unoect-connectandlearn.org>.

11 United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, “Remarks by Mr. Raffi Gregorian, Director and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism: ‘Our Common Agenda’ and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Effort,” 13 December 2021, p. 4, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/20211130_dusg_remarks_norway_uae_global_centre_event_on_common_agenda.pdf.

12 The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact is a coordination framework that brings together 40 UN entities from across the UN’s pillars on peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, and humanitarian affairs.

13 Arria formula meetings are informal meetings convened at the initiative of a member or members of the Security Council.

14 National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, University of Maryland, “Launch of CTED Global Research Network,” https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/files/CTED_Research_Network_Launch_Report.pdf.

15 For example, the 2015 “Madrid Guiding Principles” and its 2018 Addendum, “The Madrid Guiding Principles” are 35 principles on stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, developed as a practical tool for use by member states (S/2015/939), in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2178. On 13 December 2018, the CTC held a special meeting dedicated to the review of the principles, which led to the adoption of the addendum that contains an additional 17 principles.

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implementation of council counterterrorism measures, and consults with civil society as part of its missions to assess member state implementation of these measures, with the consent of the assessed state. CTED has also partnered with civil society organizations on the implementation of initiatives like the use and collection of “battlefield evidence”;¹⁶ improving counterterrorism cooperation among law enforcement officials in South Asia;¹⁷ and protecting the nonprofit sector from terrorist abuse. In the most recent renewal of CTED’s mandate, adopted at the end of 2021, the Security Council further builds on these developments by expanding slightly the scope for engagement with civil society, including before, during, and after member state visits.¹⁸

Although these are all positive developments, engagement with civil society by UN counterterrorism bodies remains largely opaque, ad hoc in nature, and driven by UN and member state interests and priorities. The engagement also favors international civil society organizations, particularly those with a New York office, with insufficient attention to the needs and wants of grassroots actors in this area.¹⁹ Where engagement is occurring, it often is focused on the negotiation of resolutions and less on engagement in UN policies and programs at the country level. Perhaps because of the ambivalence among the UN membership toward

civil society, many of the recommendations for strengthening engagement on counterterrorism and P/CVE issues that civil society actors have offered over the past 15 years—often with the support of some member states—have gone largely unheeded.²⁰ This has happened despite the fact that the United Nations has developed stronger partnerships with civil society on a range of other UN priorities, including peace-building; climate change; humanitarian action; anticorruption; women, peace, and security; and the Sustainable Development Goals.²¹ Moreover, even as civil society access to some UN meetings has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic due to a shift to virtual formats, access for civil society to the physical UN premises during the pandemic has been restricted well beyond other groups, such as the media.²²

The United Nations needs to further strengthen its engagement with civil society and recognize it as a partner in efforts to counter terrorism and prevent and counter violent extremism. There are a number of existing frameworks to support such engagement, including the UN’s system-wide community engagement guidelines on peace-building and sustaining peace,²³ the Secretary-General’s recent report “Our Common Agenda”²⁴ and his call to action for human rights²⁵ and the guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space²⁶

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- 16 International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, CTED Launches Guidelines on Battlefield Evidence, <https://icct.nl/update/cted-launches-guidelines-on-battlefield-evidence>.
 - 17 CTED and Global Center on Cooperative Security, “Promoting Regional Security in South Asia: Tackling Terrorism and Violent Extremism Together,” https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/files/documents/2021/Jan/judicial-workshop-brochure_2.pdf
 - 18 UN Security Council Resolution 2617, 30 December 2021.
 - 19 Lefas, Nozawa and Kessels, “Blue Sky V.”
 - 20 Bonnefont and Ipe, “Enhancing Civil Society Engagement”; European Center for Not-for-Profit Law and Human Security Collective, “How Can Civil Society Effectively Engage in Counter-Terrorism Processes?” January 2018, https://ecnll.org/sites/default/files/files/CS_engagement_in_CT_process.pdf; Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe,” August 2018, https://www.osce.org/files/f/ documents/2/2/400241_1.pdf; Prevention Project, “10 Reasons Why Civil Society Is an Ally and Not an Adversary in the Struggle Against Violent Extremism,” October 2017; Avaaz, CIVICUS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, UNA-UK, “Strengthening Civil Society Engagement with the United Nations: Perspectives from Across Civil Society Highlighting Areas for Action by the UN Secretary-General,” February 2017, [https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/25](http://civicus.org/images/CivilSocietyEngagementWithUN.pdf#:~:text=Civil%20society%20was%20engaged%20in%20discussions%20on%20the,of%20%E2%80%9CWe%20the%20peoples%20of%20the%20United%20Nations%E2%80%9D;UN Human Rights Council, “Civil Society Space: Engagement with International and Regional Organizations,” A/HRC/44/25, 20 April 2020, <a href=).
 - 21 United Nations, “Civil Society & Other Stakeholders: Leaving No One Behind when Implementing the Agenda 2030,” November 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/9486ANilo%20Civil%20Society%20&%20Other%20Stakeholders.pdf>; Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, “Civil Society: Roles and Responsibilities in Good Security Sector Governance,” 1 May 2019, https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/DCAF_BG_17_Civil%20Society_0.pdf.
 - 22 Thalif Deen, “UN’s ‘Indispensable Partners’ Barred from Entering Secretariat Building,” Inter Press Service News Agency, 8 November 2021, <http://www.ipisnews.net/2021/11/uns-indispensable-partners-barred-entering-secretariat-building>; UNA-UK, “Member States Call for Civil Society Access to the United Nations,” 9 October 2021, <https://una.org.uk/news/member-states-call-civil-society-access-united-nations>.
 - 23 United Nations, “UN Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace,” <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/un-community-engagement-guidelines-peacebuilding-and-sustaining-peace-0>, accessed 4 February 2022.
 - 24 António Guterres, “Our Common Agenda—Report of the Secretary-General,” United Nations, September 2021, https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf.
 - 25 António Guterres, “The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights,” United Nations, 24 February 2020, https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf.
 - 26 United Nations, “Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space,” September 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf.

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developed pursuant to that. In “Our Common Agenda,” the Secretary-General calls for a more “networked and inclusive multilateral system, anchored within the United Nations.” Effective multilateralism depends on an effective United Nations that can adapt to global challenges while living up to the purposes and principles of its Charter. In particular, his proposals to boost partnerships (commitment 12), including by establishing civil society focal points in all UN entities, offer the opportunity to strengthen civil society engagement.

The following recommendations and case studies are based on research and consultations the Global Center undertook with individuals representing diverse civil society organizations, governments, UN entities, and other multilateral organizations. They offer a blueprint for civil society to advocate for and assert itself within the UN counterterrorism and P/CVE architecture, policies, and programs and lay out concrete steps that the United Nations and member states can take to support such engagement.

Recommendations for Civil Society

1. Establish self-organized and inclusive civil society platforms for engagement with the United Nations, member states, and potentially other multilateral forums across a wide range of counterterrorism and P/CVE policies and programs. Civil society should not wait for the United Nations and its member states to dictate the terms of its engagement. It should further self-organize to assert itself more effectively at the United Nations—as well as in other multilateral forums on counterterrorism matters—including countering the financing of terrorism (CFT), P/CVE, and related issues. Broader, more sustained engagement between a diversity of civil society actors—including a range of local civil society organizations and various stakeholders working at a grassroots level and across a variety of themes—and the United Nations is necessary to protect civil society from abuse and to better inform the future of inclusive multilateral counterterrorism efforts. There are examples where civil society proactively self-organized and was able to foster or improve partnerships

with governments and multilateral bodies, including the Global Nonprofit Organizations Coalition on the Financial Action Task Force (Global NPO Coalition on the FATF),²⁷ the Non-Governmental Organization Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGOWG),²⁸ and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Civil Society Reference Group.²⁹ These mechanisms provide forums to raise awareness of differing perspectives, share experience and expertise, and build trust between multilateral organizations and civil society. Engagement with the United Nations on counterterrorism and P/CVE issues will require specific considerations given the perceptions within some civil society organizations that certain member states have misused the UN counterterrorism and P/CVE framework. Furthermore, the UN counterterrorism architecture has been reluctant to call out governments that adopt and implement counterterrorism laws and policies to target civil society and otherwise violate human rights. Nonetheless, lessons can be learned from these other models to ensure that civil society-led efforts meaningfully influence the policies and priorities of multilateral bodies and sustain collaborative partnerships.

2. Ensure civil society’s independence in its engagement with the United Nations. The ability to act autonomously is crucial to the success of self-organized engagement mechanisms. Independence is necessary to ensure that participating civil society actors are free to express themselves openly and to prevent their engagement from being affected by UN or UN-like politicking and bureaucratic processes. Mechanisms should be self-governed to ensure that civil society is able to hold the United Nations and member states accountable for their words and actions, including human rights obligations and the potential negative impacts of counterterrorism measures.³⁰

3. Ensure that a broad diversity of civil society is represented among platform membership. Any mechanisms should not act as a gatekeeper for civil society participation but, rather, support engagement by a

27 The Global Nonprofit Organizations Coalition on FATF, <https://fatfplatform.org>.

28 The Non-Governmental Organizations Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org>.

29 See the annex for more details on these platforms.

30 The examples in the annex offer several models of self-governance to ensure civil society independence.

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diversity of civil society groups, including those who might not otherwise have the capacity or feel comfortable engaging UN actors, particularly on the potentially sensitive issues of terrorism and counterterrorism, on their own. Membership should be open to any civil society actors interested in UN counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts and in engaging in a constructive dialogue with the organization. Membership should include a diverse range of organizations and individuals including human rights groups, varied subject matter experts, and those with practical experience implementing P/CVE and counterterrorism programming. The mechanisms should consider strategies to reach smaller, local, and regional civil society organizations that have not been represented at the global level, thus reinforcing a bottom-up approach to counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts. For some organizations, engagement with the United Nations on counterterrorism matters, even as part of a broader network or platform, may present reputational or security risks. These risks should be accounted for and mitigated. Any mechanisms should support diverse representation by identifying different entry points for their members to engage with the UN system and direct their efforts to course-correcting when only a few, select organizations are invited to events, asked for input, or selected as project partners. International civil society organizations should also use their access, accreditations, and resources to enable greater access for local and national civil society organizations to engage with UN agencies and present their concerns directly.³¹

4. Coordinate engagement with the UNOCT, the Global Compact, and Global Compact working groups and members. The responsibilities of engagement platforms could include organizing and coordinating interactions with the UNOCT, the Global

Compact, and Global Compact working groups and members. Unlike the UNOCT's ad hoc roundtables with civil society that offer participants the opportunity to raise country- and program-specific challenges and opportunities or project-specific partnerships, an independent platform could also engage the UNOCT on policy and strategic levels to help shape UN counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts. Analogous examples can be found in the Global NPO Coalition on the FATF's engagement with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Secretariat and the ways it formally and informally provides input into FATF processes, as well as UN Women's engagement with women in negotiating peace and the close working relationship between civil society and UN human rights mechanisms.³²

5. Ensure proactive and multidirectional communication among the United Nations, member states, and civil society. Engagement platforms should encourage and facilitate reciprocal communication between the United Nations and platform members. Currently, communication between the United Nations and civil society representatives is largely in one direction and inconsistent. It typically involves civil society actors sharing expertise and input with UN entities but receiving little feedback on how or whether that information is used. By establishing a centralized contact point, independent platforms could encourage and facilitate more proactive, consistent, and impactful communication between various UN entities and civil society actors on counterterrorism and P/CVE issues. They can also support their members and reduce duplication by sharing information about UN activities and engagements and giving members opportunities to exchange and coordinate in advance of engagement opportunities (e.g., assessment missions by CTED, UNOCT briefings or meetings, and other occasions).

31 Andreas Bummel, Caroline Vernailen, and Mandeep Tiwana, "Towards a More Democratic & Inclusive UN this International Day of Multilateralism," Inter Press Service News Agency, Opinion, 22 April 2021, <https://www.ipsnews.net/2021/04/towards-democratic-inclusive-un-international-day-multilateralism>.

32 Civil Society Advisory Groups are set up at headquarters, regional hubs, and country offices. The nomination, election, and selection of individuals to the advisory groups is determined in consultation with civil society networks and organizations in accordance with practices well-suited to local and national contexts to achieve a diverse membership, including individuals from academia as well as representatives from grass-roots communities. UN Women's work provides insights into the definition of "meaningful" civil society participation and how it can be accomplished. Since the adoption of 1325 (2000) the term "meaningful" has increasingly been used by the international policy community when referencing the aspirational direction of more inclusive decision-making processes. "The concept of 'meaningful' participation has evolved to become a conceptual reference point to describe a multifaceted set of elements to realize the tangible and urgent demands that women not only be present, but that their concerns are heard and taken on board, they have the opportunity to articulate their contributions and expertise, to ensure that gender perspective and analyses inform and shape peace processes, and that outcomes benefit the whole of society." UN Women, "Women's Meaningful Participation in Negotiating Peace and the Implementation of Peace Agreements: Report of the Expert Group Meeting," Convened by UN Women in preparation for the UN Secretary-General's report on Women, Peace, and Security, 2018, p. 11, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2018/EGM-Womens-meaningful-participation-in-negotiating-peace-en.pdf>.

Recommendations for the United Nations

1. Defend and advocate for civil society and condemn

abuse. First and foremost, the United Nations must be a fulsome advocate and full-throated defender of civil society, especially in the counterterrorism space. As outlined in the UN Guidance Note, recalling the UN Charter, “[D]evelopment, peace and security, and respect for human rights are interdependent, and achieving them requires meaningful, inclusive and safe public and civil society participation.”³³ In upholding its Charter, the United Nations must recognize that counterterrorism, including CFT measures and P/CVE efforts, sometimes target civil society or can be harmful, particularly to human rights defenders. They can undermine attempts to build lasting peace and security, including by securitizing civil society’s work and imposing restrictions on the freedoms of expression and opinion, association, assembly, and religion.³⁴ Without adequate safeguards, UN counterterrorism and P/CVE policy, coordination, technical assistance, and advocacy risk causing more harm than good by reinforcing these harmful trends. In fact, civil society actors’ very engagement with the United Nations may put them at risk from their own governments. Except for human rights-specific UN mandate holders such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, the United Nations has consistently failed to publicly speak out against the misapplication of counterterrorism measures by its members. The United Nations should consider the health of civil society and its relationship to the state when interacting with member states and evaluating their counterterrorism efforts. The UNOCT, the Secretary-General, and the UN Secretariat more broadly should raise these issues in their interactions with states. CTED should also include these matters in its country visits, its comprehensive assessment missions, and related follow-up activities, as well as in its trend analyses. The UN counterterrorism entities, not just its human rights bodies, must do more to defend civil society and condemn

abuse. They should actively and publicly advocate for revising existing counterterrorism laws that adversely affect civil society and should include protection mechanisms in counterterrorism policy and programming.³⁵ By remaining silent, the organization risks legitimizing state misconduct toward civil society and abusing the United Nations’ own counterterrorism framework, failing its mission to pursue the common good and address common interests.

2. Provide concrete opportunities for civil society to provide input into the negotiations of UN resolutions and other policy formulation processes.

The United Nations is an intergovernmental organization made up of sovereign states. Although the process of negotiating resolutions, including the General Assembly’s seventh review of the Strategy or the Security Council’s renewal of CTED’s mandate, is inherently intergovernmental, there is scope to open those to increased input from civil society. UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the landmark UN resolution on women, peace, and security, which largely grew out of civil society advocacy, is an example of how civil society can contribute to and strengthen UN resolutions and influence other policy formulation processes. Early in these processes, opportunities should be identified to ensure the inclusion of civil society voices. As the example of Resolution 1325 suggests, the results will be stronger, more contextualized, and have a greater chance of implementation when civil society is part of the development process.

3. Highlight the positive contributions that civil society actors make to counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts.

In addition to ensuring that counterterrorism measures do not harm civil society, the United Nations has a unique role to play in advocating for and facilitating the meaningful participation of diverse civil society actors in the design, development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of member states’ counterterrorism-related policies and programs. UN member states have highlighted these contributions in various resolutions, including successive renewals of the

33 United Nations, “Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space.”

34 Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri and Lotanna Nwodo, “Harms from Abroad: Impact of the Global Security Measures on Civic Space in Nigeria,” Action Group on Free Civic Space, <https://closingspaces.org/harms-from-abroad-impact-of-global-security-measures-on-civic-space-in-nigeria>.

35 Melinda Holmes, Sanam Anderlini, and Stacey Schamber, “Protecting Women Peacebuilders: The Front Lines of Sustainable Peace,” International Civil Society Action Network, 2020, https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ICAN_ProtectingWomenPeacebuilders.pdf.

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Strategy and multiple Security Council resolutions. UN entities should continue their vocal support for civil society and highlight its many positive contributions, while leading by example by more consistently engaging civil society in their own counterterrorism and P/CVE policy formulation and programming.

4. **Engage civil society via the Global Compact, its working groups, and members.**

The Global Compact brings together more than 40 UN entities from across the UN pillars on peace and security, human rights, and development to improve coordination and coherence in UN counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts. The UNOCT should explore ways to better engage civil society in the Global Compact and its working groups beyond project- and event-specific partnerships. This could include a level of participation by civil society in the Global Compact itself (e.g., by representatives of self-organized civil society engagement platforms) by establishing a civil society working group and inviting them to provide input and advice in the other working groups. At a minimum, the UNOCT should open its quarterly member state briefings to civil society actors to update them on the work of the Global Compact and its members. Similar efforts have been successful in the UN Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security. The UN Secretary-General has urged all UN entities in “Our Common Agenda” to set up civil society focal points. To ensure a clear division of labor, the relationship among the focal points and their relationship to the Global Compact and other focal points across the UN counterterrorism architecture must be clearly defined.³⁶

5. **Support funding for civil society engagement on counterterrorism and P/CVE.**

The United Nations should support a wide range of civil society actors in engaging in counterterrorism efforts nationally and at the multilateral level in the same way that UN bodies help states to improve their counterterrorism capacities. UNOCT resource mobilization and CTED technical assistance facilitation efforts can highlight civil society-led initiatives and partnerships, not just United Nations-led initiatives, in their dialogues with donors.

Civil society should also be included as a beneficiary of UN technical assistance along with state actors, where appropriate.³⁷

6. Facilitate national and regional engagement. The offices of UN Resident Coordinators are responsible for national and regional-level engagement with a broad range of civil society organizations, particularly community-based organizations, though some of these have shied away from counterterrorism and P/CVE issues. Nevertheless, the Resident Coordinators are best positioned to connect local civil society to UN counterterrorism entities at headquarters and communicate their insights, concerns, and opportunities for collaboration. Resident Coordinators can also play a leading role in building a wider, more diverse network of civil society organizations to engage with.

7. Improve the transparency and accessibility of the CTC and CTED’s work and engagement with civil society. The work of the CTC is quite opaque, which makes it difficult for civil society to engage, particularly grassroots actors that are well placed to help the CTC and CTED better understand the nuances of terrorism threats in different contexts and the impact of national counterterrorism measures on local communities. The most recent mandate renewal requests the CTC to publicize CTED’s schedule of country visits and more consistently engage civil society in country assessments. Member states should make their assessments more widely available to allow civil society actors to benefit from these insights. During country visits, states should grant CTED the discretion to consult broadly with civil society. Currently, CTED requires the consent of the state to be visited, which often means that no civil society actors participate or that participation is limited to groups deemed appropriate by the government. CTED also should further engage with independent experts and national human rights institutions and provide additional opportunities for civil society perspectives to inform assessments. The diverse views and experiences of civil society should also be reflected in CTC briefings during discussions of regional and thematic priorities.

36 Mandeep Tiwana, “From ‘We the Peoples’ to ‘Our Common Agenda,’ the United Nations Is a Work in Progress,” Inter Press Service News Agency, Opinion, 22 September 2021, <https://www.ipsnews.net/2021/09/peoples-common-agenda-united-nations-work-progress>.

37 The UN should, however, ensure that it does not duplicate existing funding mechanisms, e.g., the Global Community Engagement Resilience Fund but, rather, opt to support their efforts.

8. Reduce practical barriers to civil society participation in UN counterterrorism meetings. The United Nations should make it easier for civil society actors to participate in UN counterterrorism meetings and official high-level events. It should also emphasize regional and gender diversity as well as the inclusion of youth representatives. Civil society actors often cite obstacles such as logistical and administrative challenges, language barriers, visa restrictions, and lengthy process requirements, with unreliable internet and disparate time zones further complicating virtual gatherings. Onerous registration and accreditation processes can also represent significant barriers to entry for civil society actors. Consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, an accreditation some larger civil society organizations maintain, often involves a lengthy, arduous, and highly politicized application process that is too high a bar for many smaller grassroots organizations.³⁸ The UNOCT and other UN entities should also consider the security concerns and risks for organizations which engage with the United Nations, as well as the barriers created by the use of overly bureaucratic terminology and technical or jargonistic language. Key information should be made widely available in all official UN languages and should ideally be further translated and disseminated.

Recommendations for UN Member States

1. Provide the necessary political and financial support for civil society to engage the United Nations on counterterrorism and P/CVE issues. Member states should support financially and politically independent, self-organized, and diverse civil society engagement mechanisms modeled on the above recommendations that can engage systematically and strategically with the UN counterterrorism architecture. It is critical that such mechanisms include and represent the diversity of civil society actors, themes, locales, and stakeholders. States should also make sure that the UNOCT uses existing, unearmarked Trust Fund³⁹ contributions to support the office's civil society

engagement rather than continuing to rely on a select few Western governments to fund it.

- 2. Fund civil society engagement as part of voluntary, regular contributions to UN agencies.** To realize a meaningful partnership between civil society and the UN counterterrorism architecture, member states must make voluntary contributions to UN agencies that support civil society engagement. These voluntary contributions should be considered in addition to a portion of regular budget funding to support civil society engagement. The UN Peacebuilding Fund, for example, allocates 15 percent of its contributions to civil society engagement. A similar allocation could be required under the UNOCT Trust Fund.
- 3. Provide leadership on civil society engagement.** There is tremendous scope for individual member states to engage diverse civil society actors in UN work on counterterrorism issues and more loudly and consistently promote and protect civic space. For example, Spain and Oman, the co-facilitators of the 2021 Strategy review process, were able to increase engagement with civil society during their tenure. Among other efforts, the co-facilitators hosted a high-level event with civil society actors to share reflections on the 2021 report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the UN system in implementing the Strategy and the seventh Strategy review. The event provided an opportunity for member state and UN representatives to hear directly from a wide range of civil society actors during the review process, complimenting both member state negotiations and member state-only briefings organized by the UNOCT.⁴⁰ Similarly, recent CTC chairs Peru and Tunisia have increasingly involved civil society speakers and participants in Security Council events, including in Arria formula meetings and other processes. This progress needs to be institutionalized—and not just depend on civil society-friendly Strategy co-facilitators and CTC chairs—as a demonstration of the UN commitment to the engagement of civil society in counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts at all levels.

³⁸ United Nations Economic and Social Council, "Introduction to ECOSOC Consultative Status," <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/ngo/consultative-status>.

³⁹ The United Nations Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism was created by the Secretary-General in 2009 under DPA and transferred to UNOCT in June 2017. See United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Funding and Donors, <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/funding-and-donors>, accessed 4 February 2022.

⁴⁰ Global Center on Cooperative Security, "Civil Society Reflections on the 2021 Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," 10 March 2021, <https://www.globalcenter.org/events/civil-society-reflections-on-the-2021-report-of-the-united-nations-secretary-general-on-the-un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>.

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Presidents of the Security Council also have the opportunity to lead by example. Most recently, Norway, as Security Council president for January 2022, led several initiatives to enhance civil society engagement and transparency, such as the inclusion of a civil society briefer in all open debates, which preceded all closed meetings during its presidency. Norway also fulfilled its commitment to making details of the closed meetings publicly available where possible.⁴¹

- 4. Consider calling for a UN Special Envoy for Civil Society to promote civic space and civil society engagement.** UNmute civil society and others have advanced a proposal to create a Special Envoy for Civil Society to advocate for civic space at the United

Nations.⁴² UN member states should consider the merits of appointing such an envoy to directly liaise with independent civil society engagement mechanisms and support the representation of civil society in high-level policy discussions. The appointment of this envoy could help promote more consistent participation and representation of civil society in the work of UN agencies and offices while enabling better outreach by the United Nations to civil society globally, in line with “Our Common Agenda” and similar documents. The United Nations must carefully consider whether such a position might potentially dilute other mandates, get siloed, or add more bureaucracy to an already muddled system. The merits of such a proposal should also be considered in dialogue with civil society.

⁴¹ Civil Society Dialogue with Ambassador Mona Juul of Norway, 6 January 2022, <https://wfuna.org/posts/civil-society-dialogue-ambassador-mona-juul-norway>.

⁴² “Recommendations to Ensure Meaningful Civil Society Participation at the United Nations: From Ambition to Action,” https://action4sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Recommendations-for-meaningful-civil-society-participation-at-the-UN_Feb2021.pdf.

Annex – Examples of Civil Society Engagement Mechanisms

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee Civil Society Resource Group (DAC-CSO Reference Group)

Background: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has increasingly recognized the roles that civil society organizations have to play in development, including in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. It also sees the creation of an environment that enables civil society actors to maximize their contributions as vital for success. Access to multi-stakeholder dialogue forms, such as the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), that address development policies and practices is a key component of this environment.

Civil society engagement mechanism: The DAC-CSO Reference Group was established in 2017 as an open platform to facilitate and coordinate civil society engagement with the DAC.¹ It is based on the principle of self-organization and membership is open to any civil society organization interested in DAC-related work. The group does not, however, act as a gatekeeper for such engagement. More than 100 organizations, including national and local civil society organizations from DAC members and non-members alike, are currently members of the group. The Reference Group is guided by a "core group" of 17 civil society organizations that reflects both a regional and constituency balance. The group also features several thematic working groups, and its responsibilities include organizing and coordinating engagement with the DAC.²

Engagement and impact: Civil society engagement with the DAC takes multiple forms. Civil society actors are 1) consulted in DAC decision-making processes; 2) invited to attend high-level and senior-level DAC meetings; 3) allowed to interact directly with the DAC to promote policy debate and exchange information and experiences; 4) able to engage in the various OECD Development Cooperation Directorate (DCD) work streams; and 5) invited to participate in OECD peer reviews.

Cooperation between the DAC and civil society became more systematic, strategic, and institutionalized with the July 2018 DAC-CSO Dialogue Framework,³ which was drafted in cooperation with civil society organizations. The framework has three aims: 1) to facilitate interactions between the DAC and civil society organizations with the latter in the role of development actor; 2) to allow civil society organizations to contribute to policy debates, consultations, and exchanges on DAC policies and initiatives; and 3) to build trust between civil society organizations and the DAC to facilitate understanding and the sharing of experiences on issues of mutual concern. For example, by establishing thematic working groups, the DAC-CSO Reference Group contributed to the official development assistance (ODA) modernization process, with a particular focus on the ODA rules on peace and security⁴ and the DAC reform process.⁵

Coordination and resources: The DAC-CSO Reference Group is supported and led by a secretariat housed in the Reality of Aid Network. The secretariat supports coordination and consensus building among DAC-CSO Reference Group members. The DCD also includes staff dedicated to civil society engagement and to promoting and protecting civic space and, more broadly, the role of civil society organizations in advancing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

1 DAC CSO Reference Group Terms of Reference, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OgOzuis6U27fotcpsPs16HELBgUXus3s/view>.

2 In addition, the OECD launched an Observatory for Civic Space (OSC) in 2019 to 1) monitor the legal, institutional, and policy framework in which civil society organizations operate in OECD member/partner countries; 2) promote/protect civic space; and 3) act as a platform for dialogue between OECD bodies and key civil society actors and networks.

With a view toward serving as a forum for multi-stakeholder dialogue among government, private sector, and civil society actors "committed to advancing democracy, open government, and inclusive growth," the OSC's activities include 1) conducting a tri-annual survey on the state of civic space and CSO-engagement in policymaking and programming in OECD countries; 2) undertaking "civic space scans" with recommendations on how to promote/protect civic space in specific countries; and 3) convening international, regional, and national conferences and workshops to take stock of trends in civic space, which provide civil society organizations the opportunity to meet with government representatives to share and discuss their concerns.

The Observatory operates under the Public Governance Directorate and includes an advisory group, with some overlap between CSO representation in that group and the DAC-CSO Reference Group that coordinates civil society engagement in dialogue with the DAC and DCD.

3 OECD, Development Co-Operation Directorate Development Assistance Committee, "Framework for Dialogue between the DAC and Civil Society Organizations," 3 September 2018, [https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DCD/DAC\(2018\)28/FINAL&docLanguage=En](https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DCD/DAC(2018)28/FINAL&docLanguage=En).

4 DAC-CSO Reference Group, "ODA, Peace, and Security," <https://www.dac-csoreferencegroup.com/oda-peace-and-security>.

5 DAC-CSO Reference Group, "OECD-DAC Reform," <https://www.dac-csoreferencegroup.com/dac-reform>.

The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security (NGOWG)

Background: The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security (NGOWG) was created as a civil society mechanism to hold key actors at the international level accountable for the implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda.⁶ Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000, the NGOWG has focused on the full implementation of the resolution.

Civil society–led mechanism: Initially a project of the Tides Center, the NGOWG consists of 18 organizations with diverse areas of expertise related to peace and security, international human rights and humanitarian law, and disarmament. The member organizations currently work across 50 countries and collaborate with more than 200 nongovernmental organizations and 75 networks of civil society actors to develop recommendations on integrating the women, peace and security agenda into the work of the United Nations and the international policy community.

Engagement and impact: The work of the NGOWG as it relates to the United Nations and its Security Council can be divided into three categories: conducting gender analysis, advocacy, and monitoring. Advocacy undertaken by the NGOWG includes the organization of meetings and speaking engagements at the UN and elsewhere, and producing “Monthly Action Points,”⁷ which provide recommendations for integrating the women, peace, and security agenda into the UN Security Council’s program of work. The NGOWG’s monitoring activities follow the entire decision-making process of the Security Council and analyze how the agenda is discussed and included across different agenda items. The NGOWG utilizes a gender analytical framework to monitor the implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda using both quantitative and qualitative indicators, and applies the obligations set forth in Security Council resolutions as benchmarks to measure progress. The NGOWG also works with rotating Security Council presidents to ensure that they are upholding the commitment made in 2015 to include civil society representatives in country-specific briefings and consider their perspectives. The NGOWG is credited with increasing the Security Council’s engagement with civil society and women peacebuilders.

Coordination and resources: The NGOWG employ three full-time staff based in New York and a network of fellows. Full-time staff are tasked with the management of programs and initiatives, including the development of the Monthly Action Points. Senior fellows predominantly focus on research, policy analysis, and the working group’s advocacy efforts. The NGOWG is funded by the Compton Foundation, UN Women, and the governments of Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.⁸

6 PeaceWomen, “Solutions: Innovative WPS Agenda,” <https://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions>.

7 NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, Monthly Action Points, <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/our-work/advocacy>.

8 As listed on the website of the NGOWG, <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/about/funding>, accessed 13 January 2022.

The Global Nonprofit Organizations Coalition on Financial Action Task Force (Global NPO Coalition on FATF)

Background: The Financial Action Task Force (FATF)⁹ is an intergovernmental standard-setting body on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism and proliferation. The FATF Standards¹⁰ outline a set of legal, regulatory, and operational measures to prevent and combat illicit finance and protect the integrity of the global financial system. One such measure, known as Recommendation 8, directs states to understand the risk and undertake measures to protect nonprofit organizations from abuse for terrorism financing purposes. Although the FATF is an informal body and its standards do not hold the weight of law, countries deemed deficient in meeting those standards can face significant consequences in terms of their ability to fully access the international financial system.

Civil society engagement mechanism: The Global NPO Coalition on FATF¹¹ is a loose network of civil society organizations that self-organized to engage the FATF on the negative effects of countering the financing of terrorism measures on civil society and civic space. As stated on its website, the Global NPO Coalition focuses on advocacy for the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the FATF Mutual Evaluations and the effective implementation of FATF Recommendations, particularly Recommendation 8.¹²

Engagement and impact: The FATF has demonstrated increasing willingness to recognize and act to mitigate the consequences of its recommendations on civil society in direct response to the engagement efforts of the Global NPO Coalition and others.¹³ The FATF amended its Recommendation 8 to encourage a proportionate and risk-based approach. It also allows for limited civil society participation in its Private Sector Consultative Forum meetings, holds public comment periods on proposed changes to its amendments or guidance materials, and created a dedicated page to share information on its work specific to civil society issues.¹⁴ The FATF also began facilitating direct input from civil society organizations to the assessors reviewing a country's implementation of FATF Standards and continues to publish the findings of these assessments. In March 2021, the FATF launched a new project "to study and mitigate the unintended consequences resulting from the incorrect implementation of the FATF Standards. The project focuses on four primary areas: de-risking; financial exclusion; undue targeting of NPOs; and curtailment of human rights (with a focus on due process and procedural rights)."¹⁵

Coordination and resources: The NPO Coalition includes 13 core members and is led by four organizations that are responsible for developing strategies and facilitating and coordinating the Coalition's activities.¹⁶ It benefits from a technical advisory group of five individuals with expertise on countering the financing of terrorism, sanctions, and other related topics. The NPO Coalition and its members are supported by funding from private philanthropic foundations that support civil society and civic space. The four lead organizations are in part supported by the Open Society Foundation's Human Rights Initiative and the Sigrid Rausing Trust.¹⁷

9 The Financial Action Task Force website, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org>.

10 International Standards on Combatting Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism & Proliferation: The FATF Recommendations, updated in October 2021, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/fatfrecommendations/documents/fatf-recommendations.html>.

11 The Global NPO Coalition on FATF, <https://fatfplatform.org>.

12 As stated on the website of the Global NPO Coalition on FATF, <https://fatfplatform.org/about-us>.

13 Vanja Skorac and Fiona de Londras, "Protecting Civil Society in Global Counterterrorism: FATF Leads the Way, UN Should Follow," *Just Security*, 23 March 2021.

14 Financial Action Task Force, "Financial Inclusion and NPOs," [https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/financialinclusionandnpoissues/?hf=10&tb=0&cs=desc\(fatf_releasedate\)](https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/financialinclusionandnpoissues/?hf=10&tb=0&cs=desc(fatf_releasedate)) and Financial Action Task Force, "Mutual Evaluations FAQ," <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/faq/mutualevaluations/#d.en.448461>.

15 Financial Action Task Force, "High-Level Synopsis of the Stocktake of the Unintended Consequences of the FATF Standards," 27 October 2021, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/financialinclusionandnpoissues/documents/unintended-consequences-project.html>

16 The organizations are the Charity & Security Network, the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law, the European Foundation Center, and the Human Security Collective.

17 As listed on the website of the Global NPO Coalition on FATF, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org>.

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