

Scoping Project

An Independent Civil Society-UN Counterterrorism Engagement Mechanism

The Global Center on Cooperative Security (Global Center), in collaboration with Rights & Security International (RSI), an active member of the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism, are undertaking a scoping study to assess the viability of an “Independent Civil Society – UN Counterterrorism Engagement Mechanism” (Mechanism) to support sustained engagement between civil society and relevant UN actors, in particular members of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact.

Background

Ranging from community-based entities to international nongovernmental organizations, academics to journalists, social movement organizers to religious and traditional leaders, civil society has a diversity of perspectives, roles, and expertise in ensuring effective implementation of counterterrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) agendas. Civil society actors are often better placed, more credible, more knowledgeable and have more experience working within their communities than governmental and intergovernmental actors. Moreover, civil society has been profoundly impacted by the counterterrorism agenda. Globally, civic space has been shrinking steadily for more than a decade, alongside a deterioration of human rights other rights such as freedom of expression and association; 89 percent of the world’s population now live in countries where there are severe human rights violations and civic space restrictions. The proliferation of repressive security measures to counter terrorism and its financing have played an outsized role in this regard.

The Secretary-General’s 2020 call to action for human rights sets out “broad and sustained” engagement of states, civil society, and other stakeholders in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In designing a system-wide strategy on civic space, the call to action presses for a mechanism to be emplaced and guidance provided to UN leaders to “(i) positively engage with interlocutors to promote and protect civic space; (ii) respond to undue restrictions on civic space; and (iii) protect the space for different stakeholders to express their views.” However, UN headquarters has severely lagged in its engagement with civil society on counterterrorism and P/CVE matters with key institutions remaining opaque and inaccessible.

Engagement and dialogue between civil society, governments, and multilateral bodies is a prerequisite to the successful development, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of effective violence prevention efforts. In the context of UN counterterrorism efforts, civil society engagement is essential to ensure policies and programs are rights compliant and reflect local needs and perspectives of communities impacted by efforts to prevent and counter violent acts committed by terrorist groups.

There are a number of existing UN frameworks to promote and support deeper engagement with civil society, including the UN’s system-wide [Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#), the Secretary-General’s “[Our Common Agenda](#),” his [Call to Action for Human Rights](#), and the [Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space](#) developed pursuant to this.

Despite these frameworks and some 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 rather than civil society priorities or concerns. Engagement also favors Western civil society organizations, particularly those with a New York office, with insufficient attention to the needs and experiences of grassroots local and national actors, particularly among communities most impacted by counterterrorism laws, policies, and practices in the Global South.

About this project

Civil society expertise and knowledge can guide the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies in the UN, including through the creation of a new participatory mechanism. Civil society has begun organizing itself to call for greater and more inclusive engagement with the United Nations across a wide range of its counterterrorism and P/CVE issues, policies, and programs.

Drawing on good practices and lessons learned of other [engagement mechanisms](#) with multilateral entities, the Global Center and RSI are undertaking a year-long scoping study to assess the viability of a UN – civil society mechanism which will consult broadly with diverse stakeholders to gauge the need for and interest in such an engagement mechanism. Should there be a consensus from the consultations to move forward with the establishment of a Mechanism, the project team will produce guiding principles, terms of reference and a resource mobilization strategy for a Mechanism.

The Global Center and RSI will consult broadly with stakeholders to evaluate the need for, and identify the necessary components or features of, an independent engagement mechanism for civil society organizations wishing to engage with UN bodies that address terrorism or counter-terrorism issues. Consultations will be held with independent civil society actors interested in UN counterterrorism and P/CVE issues and in engaging in a constructive dialogue with UN entities. This scoping project will conclude in September 2023 and is funded by the Governments of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

About the Project Partners

Global Center on Cooperative Security

As an independent nonprofit organization working towards a more just and secure world, the Global Center has been a leading voice, partner, and implementer of global counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism efforts, with a specific emphasis on promoting human rights, safeguarding civil society space, and meaningfully engaging nongovernmental actors, and advancing rule-of-law based approaches to counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism.

Rights & Security International

RSI works to halt human rights abuses committed in the name of national security. The organization documents inequalities – including religious, racial and gender biases – in national security policies and programs, promotes justice and transparency, and ensures that the voices of communities facing discrimination are heard.

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