



PUBLIC STATEMENT BY CIVIL SOCIETY:

VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ON THE GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM



Public statement

We are members of civil society organizations (CSOs) promoting women's human rights and gender equality within our work to prevent violent extremism (PVE) and counter terrorism (CT). We participated in the Global Digital Consultation "Voices and Perspectives of Civil Society on the Gendered Dimensions of Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism Responses", organized by UN Women, on behalf of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact — Gender Working Group. The consultation took place online from 25 May to 5 July 2020 and gathered more than 140 participants from 43 countries. We welcome the opportunity given to us to discuss the gendered dimensions of PVE/CT in a safe space and would like to state the following:

Women's rights are regularly violated by various actors, both State and non-State, in contexts affected by violent extremism. Human rights violations, the absence of democratic and accountable institutions, disrespect for the rule of law, intolerance and discrimination against minorities can be fertilizers for violent extremism in any context — conflict or non-conflict. Such situations create a breeding ground for violent extremist organizations to recruit people — particularly those who have experienced human rights violations. They reinforce gender inequalities, limit women's rights, and make it difficult for women to exercise any agency. The presence of violent extremist organizations affects women's rights, health, livelihood opportunities and security. Many women who live in areas exposed to violent extremism — including women who work to prevent violent extremism — have experienced rape, sexual harassment, abduction, but also brutality by security personnel. Women survivors of violent extremism fear for their lives and those of their family members and should be protected by States.

Violent extremist groups often take advantage of societal inequalities posed by weak governance structures, limited rule of law and absence of development policies. In areas impacted by the climate crisis and characterized by profound inequalities, poverty, high unemployment rates and low-quality education systems, feelings of hopelessness that may arise are often exploited by violent extremist groups. The lack of inclusive and quality educational opportunities, especially for girls, opens avenues for recruitment into violent extremism. In post-conflict settings, the risk of violent extremism may increase, especially where grievances and post-conflict traumas are not dealt with. Mounting intolerance, distrust and hate speech against minority groups can also fuel violent extremism.

Women's involvement in violent extremism is a phenomenon with multiple and complex forms. In most communities, women play different roles and have diverse identities. However, PVE/CT policies insufficiently address gender dynamics, the diversity of roles and intersectionality of women's rights. They also tend to exacerbate longstanding gender inequalities. The lack of gender-sensitive national laws promoting and protecting women's rights can leave women in vulnerable positions for recruitment and contribute to the rise of violent extremism. Extremist groups exploit gender stereotypes in their recruitment strategies and propaganda messaging. While the factors driving violent extremism are many, we believe that gender inequalities as well as sexual and gender-based violence are both a pull and push factor for women — either to engage in acts of violent extremism or to resist them.

It is our experience that norms that are not in line with human rights may hamper the advancement of gender equality and the protection of women's rights. In several instances, efforts to advance gender equality have been hindered by patriarchal norms, which can intensify the factors contributing to violent extremism. For instance, some formal and informal leaders (including women) are still not ready to be led by women. In this regard, we emphasize the importance of having both men and women as champions for gender equality. In many countries, religious leaders play an important role in promoting human rights, gender equality and peaceful societies, including in the reintegration of former combatants and survivors of sexual violence within their communities. Media, both digital and non-digital, also play a critical role in shaping public opinion and should address gender stereotypes when discussing men and women in the context of terrorism. Freedom of expression is a cornerstone for tackling gender stereotypes and inequalities and it contributes to an environment conducive to peace.

Our experience with PVE/CT laws, strategies and practices is that they often lead to human rights violations, make it challenging for women to have any agency, and often create more problems than they seek to solve. We believe "terrorism" and "extremism" are ambiguous terms that can be abused politically and that generate biases against certain communities. We observe that current PVE/CT strategies tend to be "reactive", favouring militarized and criminal justice approaches, over human-rights-based responses that should be at the core of any PVE/CT strategy, as States have the obligation to protect their population and fulfil their human rights obligations.

PVE/CT laws, strategies and practices tend to be exclusively State-centred. They are not inclusive enough because they were developed in a non-participatory manner and offer insufficient legal protection mechanisms. Current approaches often do not allow for effective participation of civil society, and women in particular, although women represent a significant percentage of the victims of violent extremism — both direct and indirect. Young women in particular are insufficiently involved. As a result, issues such as women's rights, justice, education, employment, as well as the need to confront structural social injustices and discrimination — that should be at the core of any PVE/CT approach — are not included. There cannot be sustainable peace without the meaningful participation of half the population.

We strongly believe that there is a need to go beyond the conventional remedies enforced by many States and think of inclusive, restorative and long-term peaceful solutions that are evidence-based. We believe that the root causes of violent extremism are complex, structural and interconnected with a range of inequalities and discriminations that must be addressed. It is our conviction that, regardless of the PVE/CT laws and practices in place, the work of women-led organizations, particularly at local and community levels, have a greater impact in addressing the root causes and consequences of violent extremism. Such efforts should be supported and adequately resourced.

We strongly believe that the responses to violent extremism need to be mindful of realities on the ground, which require local solutions that are locally driven, because effective prevention often takes place in local communities. We notice that, too often, the CSOs that participate in drafting PVE/CT laws and frameworks are not operating in areas where acts of violent extremism are most intense and prevalent. Meanwhile, many CSOs that do operate at the subnational level do not have the opportunity to contribute to shaping national frameworks and responses. Whole-of-society approaches and partnerships between State and civil society actors should be promoted to create synergies in the implementation of PVE/CT policies, National Action Plans on United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), as well as national human rights and women's rights action plans. Such approaches would equally ensure that those policies and plans are in line with international human rights and humanitarian law.

We believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the inequalities in societies and reinforced gender discriminations, while responses to the pandemic have highlighted the shortcomings of current PVE/CT approaches. In fact, these challenges occur in all emergencies. We believe the COVID-19 response should be an opportunity to reset PVE/CT interventions. This can be done by valuing the role women play during crisis and emergencies, by including women in decision-making processes at all levels, as well as by promoting and protecting human rights and women's rights in particular.

Recommendations

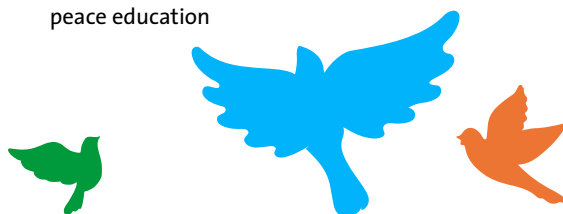
The following recommendations were put forward by civil society participants as part as the Public Statement:

1. CLEARLY DEFINE THE TERMINOLOGY ASSOCIATED WITH PVE/CT AND ENSURE EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES

- Define the terminology currently used (terrorism, jihadism, radicalization, extremism, etc.) so that there is conceptual and legal clarity and avoid situations where laws, policies and strategies are abused politically or discriminate against certain communities. Terminology should be context-specific and based on a good understanding of the phenomenon it is meant to describe
- Ensure laws, policies and strategies are based on evidence and research

2. INVEST IN HIGH-QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

- Invest in quality education, for both in-school and out-of-school students, and promote gender equality in educational curricula. Include education in peace agreements and treaties
- Create a conducive environment in all educational institutions, which encourages exposure to diversity and inclusion and promotes a culture of peace
- Facilitate the development of critical thinking and innovation, while teaching universal values of religion and ethics through peace education



3. INVEST IN A CULTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS, ACCOUNTABILITY, RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY AND CRITICAL THINKING



- Move away from military and security-centred approaches and support policies and strategies that are human rights-based
- Develop a culture of human rights, accountability, respect for diversity, inclusivity and critical thinking. Promote and protect human rights, develop good governance and promote gender-equality
- Guarantee freedom of expression, including for the media and for human rights defenders. Ensure that media address gender stereotypes
- Address multiple forms of discrimination, as these lead to loss of trust and faith in institutions
- Ensure laws, policies and practices related to PVE/CT are in line with international law and treaties, including international human rights and humanitarian law, and are compliant with the rule of law

4. DEVELOP A CULTURE OF CONFLICT PREVENTION

- Enhance spaces for exchange among diverse groups and individuals; establish dialogue mechanisms that promote understanding among people with diverse backgrounds; and institutionalize conflict-resolution mechanisms that exist in communities
- Enhance trust between the State and the people. Address grievances of individuals and communities, including through transitional justice processes
- Provide long-term support for victims and survivors of violent extremism. Develop national policies detailing the rights of victims of violent extremism and guarantee their access to reparations, such as medical and psychosocial support, economic empowerment and financial compensation
- Establish gender-sensitive early warning systems at the community level, where the role of women is central; monitor gender-based violence and violations and use these as an early-warning indicator to assess the vulnerability of communities. Organize trainings on conflict analysis and early warning systems for CSOs and relevant stakeholders
- Support security institutions to work on new approaches based on gender equality and women's human rights. Emphasise the role of women in generating security for their communities and support women's leadership roles in security institutions

5. EMBRACE COMPREHENSIVE, INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

- Focus on democratic governance and human rights, economic empowerment, poverty eradication, addressing the climate crisis, as well as ending inequalities and discriminations. Ensure that the State delivers services to the population. Address socioeconomic vulnerabilities to prevent women and girls from being recruited
- Build bridges and synergies between the gender equality and PVE agendas (CEDAW, UNSCR 1325, PVE, etc.)
- Favour participatory and inclusive approaches when developing laws and policies

6. UNDERSTAND LOCAL CONTEXTS AND INVEST IN LOCAL SOLUTIONS

- Organize inclusive consultations with communities, in local languages, to understand and respond to their issues and ensure responses to PVE/CT are context- and evidence-based
- Invest in local solutions:
 - Engage directly with grass-roots and community-based women's organizations, activists and networks without intermediaries to strengthen local women's leadership
 - Support local women's organizations to be catalysts, along with community stakeholders and credible voices for the implementation of programmes
 - Strengthen the capacities of governments, including local governments, as well as community activists to use existing tools and strategies
 - Support interventions that strengthen socialization practices

7. PROMOTE AND PROTECT WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

- Protect women from gender-based violence and discrimination
- Promote and protect women human rights defenders and support their work through flexible and long-term resources

8. PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

- Ensure that the promotion of gender equality is grounded in the dignity of each woman and the community they represent, to prevent their efforts from being instrumentalized
- Develop gender analysis that gives equal consideration to the different experiences of women and men and builds greater understanding of their experiences in the context of violent extremism, in all areas – prevention, protection, participation, rehabilitation and reintegration
- Recognize women as important actors on PVE/CT, whether as peace-makers, victims or perpetrators
- Address the dynamics of masculinity to better understand why women and men engage in violent extremism
- Engage men and boys as partners in ensuring respect for women's rights and participation, while also partnering with men in positions of influence when addressing human rights and gender norms

9. PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

- Increase the participation of women and girls in the public sphere, at all levels. Include them in decision-making and peacebuilding processes by promoting and protecting their rights — improving their access to education, health care, social participation, politics and the economy
- Recognize the history of women clerics' contribution to development, humanity and peace. Promote the engagement of women in religious leadership positions to prevent violent extremism and include women ulemas (scholars trained in Islamic law and theology) in United Nations-led PVE projects
- Develop capacities and leadership skills for women from marginalized groups



10. FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTING HUMAN-RIGHTS-BASED FRAMEWORKS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Implement existing national and international accountability frameworks, including in relation to the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy
- Ensure coherence across all UN strategies, policies and frameworks developed to deal with PVE/CT and align them with international human rights and humanitarian laws. This includes making sure that the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is based on a human-rights framework and has dedicated provisions on women's human rights, gender equality, non-discrimination and women's empowerment. Efforts should also seek to ensure that the United Nations applies UNSCR 1325 in conflict situations and enables the substantive participation of women in peace negotiations
- Ensure that PVE/CT frameworks and implementing tools such as NAPs are used in concert with human rights treaties and are reviewed by human rights treaty bodies
- Measure the impact of PVE/CT responses against human-rights and gender-based indicators
- Ensure that all relevant UN human rights mechanisms and national laws are leveraged to deal with the causes and consequences of violent extremism and to strengthen prevention

11. DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS, EXCHANGES AND RESEARCH

- Create a framework for collaboration between civil society and national and international NGOs
- Support dissemination of good practices led by women and women's organizations at the local level
- Create platforms for awareness and exchange on PVE-related issues; support research and share good practices and scientific studies with pluri-disciplinary approaches to understand the complexity of violent extremism; and encourage and finance South-South exchanges

12. IMPROVE REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION

- Take into account gendered dimensions in the reintegration of former combatants. Collect and provide gender-sensitive data so that sufficient support can be provided to women in areas affected by violent extremism, including women living in camps and displacement sites
- Build trust with all stakeholders in communities to increase acceptance for reintegration
- Strengthen the capacities of local governments and all direct services dealing with rehabilitation and reintegration at the local level.

About the Global Digital Consultation



UN Women, on behalf of the Gender Working Group (GWG) of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (UNGCTC), organised the **Global Digital Consultation on “Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counterterrorism responses”** from 25 May to 5 July 2020.

The consultation was open to participants from the civil society, including independent women's/women-led civil society organizations (CSOs), CSOs with strong credentials as gender equality advocates and independent women's human rights and/or gender equality activists. More than 300 civil society representatives from around 50 countries and regions across the world — including Africa, Asia, Eastern-Europe, Latin American and the Caribbean, and the Middle-East — were invited. Over 140 of them, from around 40 countries worldwide, participated in the consultation.

OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPATION

- **142 participants** from **43 countries** logged in into the consultation
- **80 participants** from **33 countries** posted comments
- **393 comments** were received in total

Aim of the consultation was to offer a safe space for civil society participants to express their views, challenges and recommendations on the gendered dimensions of terrorism and counterterrorism, their engagement in contexts affected by violent extremisms, and the impact of that current measures to prevent violent extremism (PVE) and counter terrorism (CT) have on their work and rights.

The views and recommendations of civil society were gathered in the **Public Statement** above. This was developed by civil society members through a participatory approach — including through engagement in the consultation's Discussion Room 4, dedicated specifically to debating the Public Statement — and it was approved by the participants.

Views and recommendations gathered in the Public Statement will be presented to Member States and members of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact ahead of the 7th revision of the [United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#) (GCTS) in 2021, informing UN-led global policies on counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism.

The Global Digital Consultation on “Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counterterrorism responses” was organized by UN Women on behalf of the Gender Working Group of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, and funded by UNOCT/UNCCT.

