



REGIONAL PAPER

CIVIL SOCIETY'S VOICES ON VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM RESPONSES

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES FROM ASIA AND
THE PACIFIC



UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM
UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT)



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**WOMEN, PEACE AND
SECURITY SECTION
UN WOMEN**

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This report is informed by the contributions received from 80 civil society representatives from 33 countries, who shared their views, challenges and recommendations on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counterterrorism during the [Global Digital Consultation “Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counterterrorism responses”](#) (Global Digital Consultation). The Global Digital Consultation was organized by UN Women on behalf of the Working Group on Adopting a Gender-Sensitive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism (Gender Working Group) of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact between 25 May and 5 July 2020. The Global Digital Consultation is an initiative of the Gender Working Group and funded by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

The report is specifically based on the contributions made by participants from the Asia-Pacific region. We would like to thank all of them for their continuous engagement and insightful contributions in the consultation.

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The regional paper and feature stories were informed by a collaborative process involving participants in the Global Digital Consultation, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UN Women Country Office staff across the region, including in Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines, as well as UN Women’s Women, Peace and Security and Communication teams in headquarters.

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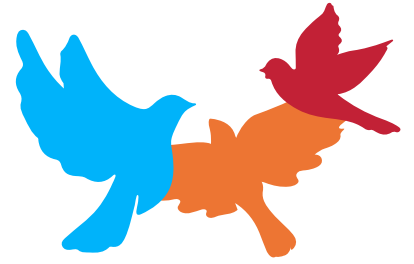
GLOSSARY

AML/CTF	anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing	UN	United Nations
ATA	Anti-Terrorism Act	UNCCT	United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre
CSO	civil society organization	UNGCTCC	United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact
CT	counter-terrorism	UNOCT	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
CT/PVE	counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism	UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council resolution 1325
GBV	gender-based violence	VEO	violent extremism organization
GWG	Gender Working Group	WHO	World Health Organization
NAP	National Action Plan	WPS	Women, Peace and Security
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism		
UAPA	Unlawful Activities Prevention Act		

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INTRODUCTION



UN Women, on behalf of the Gender Working Group of the United Nations' Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, organized the [Global Digital Consultation on “Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism responses”](#) between 25 May and 5 July 2020. The initiative was conducted as a joint project of the Gender Working Group, funded by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT).

The consultation was open to participants from civil society organizations (CSOs), including: independent women's and women-led CSOs, CSOs with strong credentials as gender equality advocates, and independent women's human rights and/or gender equality activists. Participants were offered a safe space to discuss their engagement in contexts affected by violent extremism conducive to terrorism. More than 140 CSO representatives from 43 countries worldwide participated. A total of 80 participants from 33 countries posted 393 comments, sharing their views, challenges and recommendations on the gendered dimensions of terrorism and counter-terrorism (CT), and the impact of existing measures to prevent violent extremism (PVE) on their work and human rights.

Civil society participants and moderators summarized their views and recommendations in a [Public Statement](#) based on their discussions in the consultation. Although views and recommendations were similar across countries and regions, as each region also has its particularities. As such, UN Women commissioned a set of regional papers to identify specific views and recommendations, in addition to those captured in the Public Statement. The present paper focuses on Asia and the Pacific and the contributions of participants from countries in the region.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The need for the meaningful participation of women and youth in peace and security was a major topic of discussion. Participants said women's participation is critical for the promotion and protection of their rights, as well as to achieve sustained peace. However, deeply rooted norms and attitudes about women and gender, notably patriarchal norms, are hampering women's opportunities and remain a key challenge to empowering women to lead PVE efforts. Participants from conflict-affected regions expressed concerns about States abilities to protect women and women's rights. It is harder for women to take on leadership roles in peace/security and PVE activities in conflict-zones where their rights are not upheld. Participants called for women involved in building social cohesion at the local level to be recognized as peacebuilders and leaders, and to be given opportunities to participate in peace processes. They urged the United Nations to establish concrete measures to facilitate such participation and increase the protection of women-led CSOs and women human rights defenders.

Many participants emphasized that the risk of violent extremism increases in conflict and post-conflict settings. Providing justice for survivors of violence and establishing the rule of law were highlighted as essential to bring peace and rebuild societies. Unaddressed grievances were mentioned as factors driving some women to join violent extremist groups. Providing mental health support was also flagged as critical, yet insufficiently addressed.

According to participants, women face threats both from extremist groups and from State agencies, as the securitization and militarization of civic spaces is affecting civil liberties, freedom of speech and of movement in many areas. Participants said that CT/PVE policies insufficiently address gender dynamics, including the diversity of roles and the intersectionality of women's rights. CT/PVE policies may also exacerbate long-standing inequalities. In some cases, they said CT/PVE policies/strategies are violating human rights, especially where they tend to be "reactive" and favour militarized and criminal justice approaches over human-rights-based responses.

Many participants asked for violent extremism and terrorism to be addressed as part of broader peace-building efforts and for CT/PVE responses to give a greater place to gender equality and women's human rights. They underlined the benefits of taking a multi-stakeholder approach to PVE, including improved collaboration between government actors and civil society. Participants also highlighted the importance of dialogue platforms and community peace structures for women, of enabling women to take on leadership roles at all levels, and of expanding spaces for women clerics.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated challenges. In some countries, participants shared that COVID-19 policies and regulations have prevented people from exercising free speech, and in some cases silenced "dissenting voices". Traditional gender norms have reportedly been reinforced and socioeconomic inequalities aggravated. Women have also been experiencing increasing gender and sexual-based violence. Participants called on Member States to adhere to and uphold human rights in designing mechanisms to address COVID-19, to provide space and support for civil society initiatives, and to demilitarize COVID-19 responses and instead resource and equip health professionals.

CT/PVE LAWS, NATIONAL POLICIES AND NAPs

It remains challenging to list the CT/PVE laws and policies in the various countries of the region as there is no repository for such documents. The below list is non-exhaustive and mainly covers countries from which there were participants in the consultation. The information provided was generated through online research and information provided by UN Women.

Most countries in the region have passed specific legislation on terrorism, starting from the 1970s (Sri Lanka and India), into the 1990s (Pakistan), 2000s (Indonesia and Thailand), 2010s (Malaysia and Myanmar) and in the year 2020 (Philippines). Some of them also have specific NAPs to address CT/PVE (Philippines and Pakistan).

Likewise, several countries of the region have drafted NAPs on UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security – namely, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines. Conversely, the absence of such plans in many countries means women’s protection and participation are not sufficiently addressed and they are given limited space in the State’s security apparatus. That said, the presence of a NAP is not a guarantee for such participation.¹

Country	CT/PVE laws and/or policies
India	India has some legislation in place to prosecute terrorist activities, including the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 1967; a Suppression of Terrorism Act passed in 1993; and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2002). India also has anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing (AML/CTF) legislation in place.
Indonesia	Anti-Terrorism Law (2002)
Malaysia	Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015. Policy on Anti-Terrorism emphasizing denouncing any form of terrorist acts, protection of hostages’ life and property, preference for negotiated solutions, no exchange of hostage to resolve the crisis and strike action as a last resort following failure of negotiation
Myanmar	The Government of Myanmar announced its intention to draft a counter-terrorism law in October 2013. In June 2014, the Government enacted its first official counter-terrorism legislation, which criminalizes terrorism and terrorist financing.
Pakistan	The Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), Pakistan’s primary anti-terrorism legislation, was promulgated in 1997.
Philippines	The Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, officially designated as Republic Act No. 11479, is a Philippine law whose intent is to prevent, prohibit and penalize terrorism.
Thailand	In 2003, Thailand added new counter-terrorism provisions to its Criminal Code to comply with UN Security Council resolution 1373 (2001).
Sri Lanka	Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1978; and Counter Terrorism Act of 2018.

Country	Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan
Bangladesh	NAP on WPS, including women’s role in PVE (2019)
Indonesia	NAP on WPS (2014)
The Philippines	NAP on WPS (2011–2016) and 2017–2022

1 Pakistan (2015), Bangladesh (2019), Philippines (2019)

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

The need for meaningful participation of women and youth in PVE responses and peace and security was a major topic of discussion in the consultation. Participants made a clear link between the participation of women and the promotion and protection of their rights, saying that: “raising awareness on recognizing women’s agency, leadership, diversity in voices and experiences, and knowledge is fundamental to ensuring their rights”. Participants emphasized that women’s participation is also critical for sustaining peace, as they are particularly involved at the local level in bringing communities together and building peace. They said that women have extended knowledge and understanding of peacebuilding, conflict resolution and the realities on the ground related to violent extremism and its prevention – more so, in many instances, than some international actors.

Yet women can only participate in civil society to varying degrees across the region, and the network of women-led CSOs and PVE/gender equality activists is not evenly developed. Participants noted that deep-rooted norms and attitudes about women and gender, notably patriarchal norms, are hampering women’s opportunities and remain a key challenge to empowering women to lead PVE efforts. Where women’s networks and gender equality advocates face social and cultural restrictions to their active participation in civil society, it is even harder for them to “have a voice” or to be reached for consultations like the Global Digital Consultation. In some cases, women have internalized such traditional gender roles.

The securitization and militarization of civic spaces is also affecting civil liberties, freedom of speech and movements in many areas, participants added, with one noting that “the securitization of peacebuilding and PVE has shrunken the space for women peacemakers” (participant from Pakistan). Limited political commitments by state actors to the WPS agenda leave women peacemakers and their organizations to try to fill the void, which lack the power and resources needed.

Participants from conflict-affected regions also expressed concerns about State’s abilities to protect women and women’s rights. It is harder for women to take on leadership roles in peace and security and/or PVE activities in conflict-zones where their rights are not upheld, including in post-conflict settings – whether the country has a NAP or not.

CSO representatives called for the greater participation of civil society in peace and security issues, as well as PVE responses. They urged the United Nations to put in place concrete measures to ensure such participation, notably in relation to the implementation of



NAP Consultation - Sabaragamuwa Province - Sri Lanka 2019 - WPS. Photo: UN Women/Boost Metrics

the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy; but also to provide better protection to women-led CSOs and women human rights defenders. As one participant put it: “The United Nations must develop instruments that can protect CSO who are engaged in legal and legitimate work within Member States”. Participants also called for women who are involved in bringing communities together and building peace at the local level to be recognized as women peacebuilders and leaders, including by the United Nations. They said those women should be given more opportunities to participate in peace process as experts.

Participants shared some good practices to increase women’s participation. Some said that equal interaction between men and women leaders in formal meetings should be encouraged as it increases the acceptance and recognition of women’s leadership. Another good practice mentioned is the use of gender analysis, which is currently insufficiently applied to CT/PVE responses, which participants said has proven to be a meaningful and effective way to improve women’s participation in peace and security processes.

ENABLING FACTORS AND ENVIRONMENTS CONDUCTIVE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Participants said that Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) take advantage of human rights violations, socio-economic inequalities and marginalization (especially among minority religious groups), gender stereotypes and weak and/or corrupt governance structures. As such, political, ideological, economic and historical grievances can lead people to share their feelings with like-minded people and decide to join VEOs.

Participants highlighted that human rights violations are an enabling factor for violence –when basic human rights are not in place, then violence erupts. At the same time, in contexts with laws and regulations that limit freedom of speech, opposing voices are systematically and clandestinely threatened –this,

in turn, limits women’s opportunities to address violent extremism. Participants said that the silencing of critical voices has been aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic and several expressed concerns that this situation might be exploited by extremist groups. As such, ensuring respect for human rights



The roads travelled for work - Women Migrant Workers in Singapore and Malaysia. Photo: UN Women/Staton Winter

for all and the rule of law are the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism: “When basic human rights are not in place then violence erupts”.

The absence of quality education was another factor that enables VEOs to entice youth, including young women from poor areas, to join their networks. Without opportunities to attend high-quality education, the ability to gain important skills to resist VE propaganda, such as critical thinking, is reduced. Participants said education was particularly critical to address prejudices about women that underlie discriminatory practices, such as their exclusion from political decision-making: “Unless these culturally accepted views held by women as well as men are not addressed through education and affirmative actions, we, women, will remain out of decision-making” said one participant from Pakistan.

Economic hardship and the absence of job opportunities may also provide VEOs with a breeding ground to recruit youth and marginalized groups. According to participants, women migrant workers have in some cases expressed feeling empowered after being recruited by VEOs and finding themselves in positions of authority.

Rigid views, hate speech, resentment and distrust against minority groups were also identified as factors that can fuel extremism. Participants highlighted that rising intolerance may incentivize extremist behaviour. They recommended looking for such behaviour long before the radicalization process starts, to identify structural and identity-based factors that may lead people to embrace violent extremism.

Divisions and exclusion within communities, as well as the absence of dialogue among social groups were important sources of concern. Mistrust between religious groups was also mentioned, both as a consequence of conflict as well as a cause of violent extremism. Violent extremist groups were said to create dissent and divisions in communities by “enforcing single truths”, closing dialogue, rejecting diversity and spreading “narrow-minded” teaching. The absence of dialogue between communities, and even between neighbouring countries, makes it challenging to build peace. As explained by one participant from Pakistan: insufficient dialogue leads to different views on the same conflict – a “violent extremist” to some is a “martyr” to others.

For those reasons, participants called for children to be adequately prepared to live in a multicultural and multi-faith society through “education for diversity” and “shared values” programmes in schools. They said that children should not be forced to conform to stereotypes but be comfortable being themselves, however diverse that may be. There should be no room for discrimination and prejudice in national curricula, narratives and history textbooks. Rather, they advised greater cooperation among government, CSOs and people in promoting critical thinking, a culture of peace, inclusiveness and pluralism, with one participant from Indonesia saying: “our strength is because we are a plural society, we are growing under diversities and we continue to be tolerant with diverse groups”.

The risk of violent extremism increases in conflict and post-conflict settings. Participants said violent extremist groups have found fertile ground in areas where the State is less present, where trust among social groups and between local communities and national institutions is low, and especially where grievances and post-conflict traumas are unresolved. Participants said it is easier for VEOs to mobilize people who have resentment towards the government. They added that violent extremism is more likely to rise in conflict-affected areas where ethno-religious-communal clashes exist. Transitional ties among certain groups in neighbouring countries – such as between the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia – can further exacerbate the risks of violent extremism in the region.

Providing justice for survivors of violence and establishing the rule of law in conflict-affected areas were highlighted as essential to heal traumas within communities, bring peace and rebuild societies. Some participants emphasized the responsibility of the State in this regard, while noting the challenges for civilians to report violence during/post-conflict, and seek legal action against their perpetrators (notably because of the fear of more harm against the clan and community). Supporting the mental health of women survivors of violent extremism and conflict was flagged as a particularly critical, yet insufficiently addressed, issue. As explained by one participant from the Philippines: “women have to care for their immediate families while they, too, may feel trauma due to the exposure of the violence in their lives”.

CT/PVE POLICIES AND PROGRAMMING, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Participants said that existing CT/PVE policies insufficiently address gender dynamics, including the diversity of roles and the intersectionality of women's rights. Where CT/PVE policies are in place, they may unintentionally exacerbate long-standing inequalities rather than protect and promote women's rights, including women's opportunities to prevent extremism. In some cases, CT/PVE policies are reportedly violating human rights, especially where CT/PVE strategies tend to be 'reactive' and favour militarized and criminal justice approaches over human-rights-based responses. A reason for this is that civil society, especially women's groups, are rarely consulted in the planning and drafting of such policies. Another issue is that the lack of national laws promoting and protecting women's rights can leave women vulnerable to recruitment and contribute to factors conducive to VE.

One major issue with existing CT/PVE policies and laws is the lack of clear definitions of violent extremism and terrorism and other terminology used in relation to CT/PVE. Participants reported that such terminology is sometimes used to silence dissenting voices, including the legitimate efforts of women-led organizations to challenge the policies, norms and conditions of societies in which women might be discriminated against, marginalized, exploited, and/or physically abused. Such stigmatization and threats have put the work of certain women activists at risk and in danger. For that reason, a number of CSOs sometimes hesitate to use the CT/PVE framework. A few CSOs invited to participate in the Global Digital Consultation declined the invitation for that reason.

Some participants mentioned that short-term programme planning cycles can also leave women in more vulnerable positions than before the programme's implementation, as the beneficiaries feel "left behind".



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY IN CT/PVE EFFORTS

Participants underlined the benefits of taking a multi-stakeholder approach to PVE. Improved collaboration between government actors and civil society was often mentioned as crucial to enable a “whole-of-a-nation approach”, as a participant from the Philippines formulated it. Another recommendation is to include peace-building agents from as many other sectors as possible in society, such as religious leaders, youth, academia, the private sector, etc. Working with all genders was highlighted as successful in building resilience and progressively changing gender stereotypes in communities.

The exchange of experiences among women activists was said to be very beneficial. Participants highlighted the importance of dialogue platforms and community peace structures for women’s work in the area of peace and security. Once women have gained knowledge of the issues and the requisite communication skills for dialogue, they reportedly have the confidence to speak up and hold discussions on sensitive issues such as violent extremism, its indicators and modes of addressing it.

To combat extremism and change traditional ideas of women’s roles, participants from Asia underlined the importance of enabling women to take on leadership roles at all levels of society. In Asia, religious leaders have an important role in promoting peaceful societies. Participants called for enhancing the space for women clerics and strengthening voices of women religious leaders. Participants from Indonesia said female religious leaders are playing a positive role in shaping nonviolent messages on religion, an approach that some civil society participants from other countries of the region wished to adapt to their contexts as well. They notably mentioned a pilot programme involving 36 women ulama from various backgrounds that enabled participants to appreciate and accept more diverse individual and religious views.

The use of digital platforms (radio, TV, social media, digital shows, etc.) were also mentioned as successful tools for preventing violent extremism, despite the fact that VEOs also use such platforms for recruiting, and that hate speech and misogynist narratives are also increasingly spreading through digital means. Participants from Pakistan shared experiences of how radio and TV shows have been used to discuss topics such as the role of women and gender roles and how they relate to religion – elements that VEOs are trying to co-opt to their benefit. One participant mentioned Global Women Insight – a digital live conversation that hosts inspiring women leaders from across the globe to inspire young women to learn from women leaders and change the world. The aim of these conversations is also to find solutions to the pressing challenges that women are facing in their everyday life.

Another recommendation mentioned often by participants from the region is the need to tackle the issue of transnational violent extremist networks. According to participants, extremists travelling and connecting between countries may increasingly become a threat to Asia, and such connections were said to be commonly made between Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia, as well as between the Maldives and India.

COVID-19'S IMPACTS ON WOMEN AND ON CT/PVE

Traditional gender norms have been reportedly reinforced during the pandemic while socioeconomic inequalities have been aggravated. Participants shared that while women have been on the front lines of COVID-19 responses, particularly within their communities, they have received limited recognition, visibility and resources to help their communities. At the same time, women have suffered increasing gender and sexual-based violence. In some cases, they have lost access to basic state services – such as free state medical services, including access to reproductive and sexual health advice and services – and access to justice, notably for cases of sexual and domestic violence. Women have also become vulnerable to cyberharassment, increasing mental health illness. Participants said such insecurity may lead to a loss of trust and faith in democratic institutions and it reinforces protectionist attitudes in communities.



*#MyCOVIDStory – Women frontliners.
Photo: UN Women/Louie Pacardo*

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the work of women, women-led CSOs and PVE activities. Participants expressed that in some countries, government policies and COVID-19 regulations are preventing people from exercising free speech, and in some cases silencing “dissenting voices”. They said militarized responses to the pandemic have limited women’s opportunities to enjoy their rights as well as their opportunities to contribute to PVE responses. In some regions, women are under threat from daily home visits by military units as a result of the emergency laws.

Another negative impact noted is that violent extremist groups are exploiting the effects of the pandemic to legitimize their cause(s) and existence

by providing resources that people have little to no choice to turn down. Participants observed that this could be a worrying trend as the pandemic has presented challenges in government’s ability to effectively provide resources for citizens.

While in most countries, participants spoke of the effects of the pandemic on PVE interventions and human rights as decidedly negative, one participant from Thailand said the situation has also led to some positive changes, as previously violent groups agreed to a ceasefire and put down their arms. On the one hand, the temporary ceasefire has had positive implications on the stability of the otherwise conflict-affected areas in Thailand, including that affected communities have received resources to improve food security. On the other hand, the participant warned that the reason violent groups have adjusted their roles during the pandemic is probably to portray themselves as legitimate actors who are more capable and reliable than the State in taking care of “its people” during crises.

Participants called on UN Member States to adhere to and uphold human rights in designing measures to address COVID-19; to be accountable for human rights violations committed during the response; to provide space and support for civil society initiatives aligned with World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines to combat COVID-19; and to demilitarize pandemic responses and instead resource and equip medical and health professionals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations outlined below represent those that were expressed by participants based in Asia and the Pacific throughout the consultation. They are clustered below by thematic area:



Photo credit: UN Women/Rakshya Risal

Recommendations:

Empower women and promote and protect women's human rights

- Empower women and youth, notably young women, and provide them with opportunities
- Recognize women's agency, leadership and diversity of voices, experiences and knowledge
- Promote women leadership; increase acceptance of women's leadership through concrete measures; and enhance the space for women clerics
- Address traditional gender roles and cultural prejudices against women
- Recognize women who are involved at the local level in bringing communities together and building peace as women peacebuilders and leaders. Give them opportunities to participate in peace processes as experts
- Establish dialogue and exchange platforms for women working in the area of peace and security
- Encourage countries to adopt and implement National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325.

Recommendations:

Ensure evidence- and gender-based approaches

- Define the terminology currently used (terrorism, jihadism, radicalization, extremism, etc.) and ensure that definitions are developed jointly by both State and civil society actors
- Avoid situations where laws, policies and strategies are abused politically or discriminate against certain communities
- Ensure CT/PVE laws, policies and strategies are based on evidence and research
- Invest in approaches based on solid context analysis and understanding of local dynamics
- Produce systematic gender analysis when developing laws, policies and strategies
- Mainstream gender equality in every CT/PVE policy and strategic document
- Invest in gender-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding and conflict-resolution.

Recommendations:

Invest in high-quality and inclusive education

- Prepare children to lead a life in a multicultural and multifaith society through “education for diversity”, “shared values” and peace education in schools
- Promote quality education and critical thinking.

Recommendations:

Embrace holistic, participatory and inclusive approaches

- Address violent extremism and terrorism as part of broader peacebuilding efforts
- Promote and ensure participatory and inclusive approaches to the development of peace and security responses, notably in relation to CT/PVE
- Encourage the participation of civil society in peace and security issues. The United Nations should establish concrete measures to ensure such participation, notably in relation to the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy
- Guarantee the protection of women-led CSOs and women human rights defenders.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

Recommendations:

Provide justice and reparations to victims of conflict

- Enhance access to justice for victims of human rights violations, including sexual violence, in conflict-affected contexts
- Investigate, prosecute and adjudicate grave human rights violations
- Invest in transitional justice processes and provide reparations to victims of conflict
- Provide psychosocial and mental health support to victims of conflict.

Recommendations:

Invest in a culture of tolerance, respect for diversity, human rights and democratic values

- Promote and protect fundamental human rights, civil liberties, including freedom of speech and freedom of movement
- Promote values of tolerance, pluralism, diversity and multiculturalism
- Combat discrimination and prejudice, and increase trust between institutions and people
- Promote democratic space, as it opens collaboration between government and civil society actors
- Avoid militarized and securitized approaches in CT/PVE laws, policies and strategies. Ensure that such approaches are based on human rights.
- Develop instruments that can protect CSOs who are engaged in legal and legitimate work within Member States (recommendation addressed to the United Nations).
- Support media, including social media, that promote a culture of tolerance and peace.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

Recommendations:

Invest in prevention

- Invest in prevention strategies, as violent extremism cannot be separated from peacebuilding
- Prevention strategies should be based on the detailed understanding of local contexts and developed in partnership with communities and civil society
- Develop early warning tools at the community level
- Invest in long-term programmes.

Recommendations:

In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic

- Ensure that States adhere to and uphold human rights principles in designing measures to address COVID-19 impacts
- Ensure accountability for human rights violations committed during COVID-19 responses
- Support civil society initiatives aligned with WHO guidelines to combat COVID-19
- Demilitarize COVID-19 responses and instead resource and equip medical and health professionals appropriately.



Indonesia - Safe Cities - Community Meeting. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown



Indonesia - Community Peacebuilding Discussions. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

FEATURE STORIES

The Public Statement of the Global Digital Consultation highlighted a wide range of issues and recommendations in relation to the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism. UN Women conducted 11 interviews with human rights defenders and gender equality activists across five different regions (i.e. Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Western and Central Africa, and Eastern and Southern Africa) to illustrate how they work in contexts affected by violent extremism, the challenges they face and the efforts they make to build peace in their respective communities and countries.

In the words of Yenny Wahid: “Exposure to different perspectives, religious beliefs and backgrounds is key to foster a culture of tolerance”

Indonesian social and political activist Yenny Zannuba Wahid leads the Jakarta-based NGO Wahid Foundation, established with her late father, former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, in 2004. The organization has been working to support peace and foster interreligious dialogue to counter violent extremism. In 2017, the Wahid Foundation developed the Peace Village initiative jointly with UN Women, which brings together women from diverse backgrounds to create peace through dialogue in communities affected by violent extremism. Since its launch, 10 village leaders across Indonesia have committed to pilot the concept.



Yenny Wahid, head of the Wahid Foundation in Indonesia at the “Engaging communities in approaches to countering violent extremism and incitement,” Forum in Bangkok. Photo: UN Women/Stuart Mannion

“ The Peace Village initiative was born with the aim to build peace and create tolerance by empowering people at the local level, one village at a time. We believe

it is important that ideas on how to realize peace and promote social cohesion come directly from villagers and those with local knowledge and wisdom.



Elisabet Anita Wahyuningsih, Member of Jetis Village Women's business group and Peace Agent Facilitator, takes notes with her group from Klaten, Indonesia. Photo: UN Women/Eric Gourlan

Top-down approaches rarely work: when we operate on the ground, we work closely with local women and men to foster a sense of ownership towards the programmes we introduce and help them understand how these can benefit them in the long run. You must understand the local dynamics and nuances if you want to create a paradigm shift.

The Peace Village initiative also places a special focus on the role women play in creating peace within communities, especially at the grassroots level. Women are the ones who shape the dynamics within the family and, in turn, also influence the wider community. While men are usually more prominent on social and political stages, women's work happens 'behind the scenes', where they influence how things are navigated and managed. For example, they influence how money is spent, make decisions concerning children's upbringing and education as well as other household matters, and they bring the family together.

So, it is with this in mind that we've come up with a series of programmes and activities at a village level, targeting women in particular. For example, we run programmes that enable women to come in contact with others within their community from different backgrounds, so that they become exposed

to different perspectives, religious beliefs, ethnicities and nationalities. This is key to develop a culture of tolerance and social cohesion.



We do not ask women to erase all differences; rather, we encourage them to see their diversity and understand it.

This is achieved mainly through dialogue: we provide a platform for women to share their stories, and what comes out of this is usually an understanding that we are actually not that different, that there's more uniting us than dividing us. Despite my birthplace, ethnicity or religion, I too want my children to go to school and get an education, I too want to have a happy life and I too want peace.

We also encourage women and men joining our programmes to sample different social activities, both within and outside their villages. For example, we ask village heads to let women join townhall meetings, which take place regularly to discuss village issues and are usually attended by men. At first, the women in attendance are very shy, withdrawn – but soon they start to find their voice. It is amazing to see how they become empowered: these activities help women understand that they do have rights, and that they can use them to influence local polices and decisions. It's a win-win situation: by allowing women into the village forum, village heads relish the increased level of democracy in local decision-making processes and women find the courage and voice to influence processes within their communities, benefiting the wider society.

To use a metaphor, communities are like baskets: when we understand and respect each other, our social connections become interweaved and we become stronger. We can hold more things; we can lift our whole community up and create lasting peace. We need more peace-minded people to come together if we want to build a better society.



In the words of Mossarat Qadeem: “We, women peacebuilders and mediators, move communities in crisis from stagnation and paralysis to partnership”

Mossarat Qadeem is the co-founder of PAIMAN Trust, a Pakistan-based non-profit organization that works to address violent extremism through community mobilization and empowerment. It provides peace education mostly targeting marginalized Pakistani women and youth, both to reduce their risk of being recruited into violent extremist groups and to empower them to become agents of change. Since early 2020, PAIMAN is working with UN Women to implement a social cohesion programme in the Sindh province.



*Mossarat Qadeem, co-founder of Pakistan-based non-profit organization PAIMAN Trust.
Photo: courtesy of Mossarat Qadeem.*

“ In the early 2000s, suicidal attacks and explosions became a daily occurrence here in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, north-west Pakistan. Acts of violent extremism affected everyone in my community, be it socially, economically or psychologically. Young people got recruited into violent extremist organizations (VEOs) as suicide bombers or explosive developers, and my community plunged into fear and uncertainty. The impact of conflict was colossal: it undermined social cohesion and trust within society; values of kinship and peace were replaced by dissent and division based on religious allegiance, ethnicity, class and of course gender.

I could no longer tolerate the bloodshed, destruction and trauma around me. I had studied peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and I thought it was time to put my knowledge into practice. My aim was to empower women and youth to understand how violent extremism was turning a multicultural, peaceful Pakistani society into an intolerant and violent place. My organization, the PAIMAN Trust, started a movement called ‘Let’s Live in Peace’ in 2007.

There is no one, unique path that leads to violent extremism – it is a social phenomenon. In Pakistan, it started as a movement that attracted many people,



Peace Forum commemorates 15th Anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

especially youngsters, by exploiting their emotional attachment to religion. VEOs used a more radical interpretation of Islam to justify their violent acts and to recruit new followers, who often had a rigid worldview, superficial knowledge of the Quran and a desire to 'belong' to something bigger.

In addition, violent extremism and conflict exacerbated gender inequalities and discrimination, shrinking women's space in society.

I soon realized that, in order to identify and neutralize violent extremist views, we needed to empower women to become leaders and change-makers.

To do so, we first had to address cultural dynamics – including the internalization of traditional gender roles, which see no role for women in the public domain.

In conservative and patriarchal societies, you have to introduce change one step at a time and work with men along the way: we started off by approaching local male religious and community leaders to acclimatize them to the idea of women participating in economic activities, as referenced in the Quran. With their backing, we started offering women vocational training, using economic empowerment as a tool to address violent extremism. Little by little, we expanded our scope and established community peace structures called TOLANA ('together' in Pashto), which enable women from all backgrounds (i.e. teachers, politicians, religious leaders, media experts, mothers, etc.) to come together, address current problems and become positive agents of change in their families and communities. TOLANA helped women

improve their leadership and develop the confidence to speak up about sensitive issues such as violent extremism at the community level.

I believe that when a woman works alone as a peacebuilder, she brings in change in her community – but when other women join her, they transform the values, the thinking, the culture and the whole process of peacebuilding. This is what TOLANA does.

Soon, women moved their discussions from TOLANA to other community public fora, increasing their representation in local public spaces and institutions. They found the voice and confidence to oppose alleged rigged election results and human rights violations, lead negotiations with extremists, demobilize armed youth and lead the trauma healing process within the whole community.

While this cemented the role of women as peacebuilders and change-makers at the local level, at the national level women's role in peacebuilding remains largely unrecognized. This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, but we are still behind when it comes to women's inclusion in security structures and processes. Some countries don't even have a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 yet, which leaves the onus of implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda on women activists and grassroots organizations.

There's an urgent need to recognize the role of women as peacebuilders and leaders – and this recognition must come both from national governments and the United Nations.

We, women peacebuilders and mediators, move communities in crisis from stagnation and paralysis to partnership. We must be given the opportunity to participate in peace processes, as well as in national and international fora as experts. Only then will the purpose of UNSCR 1325 be realized.



In the words of Fatima Pir Allian: “Community dialogue is an effective tool for enabling those most vulnerable in our communities to find their voice”

Fatima Pir Allian is a young leader and women’s human rights activist from the Bangsamoro – the newly established political entity in southern Philippines.² She is the Programme Manager of Nisa Ul Haqq fi Bangsamoro (Women for Justice in the Bangsamoro, a UN Women partner in 2016), an organization that provides a venue for Bangsamoro women to progressively interpret Islamic teachings on gender, women’s rights and peace and development issues.



Fatima Pir Allian, Programme Manager of Nisa Ul Haqq fi Bangsamoro (Women for Justice in the Bangsamoro). Photo: courtesy of Fatima Pir Allian.

“**Everywhere in the world, women are seen as the nurturers and carers. They are the ones who take care of the children and other immediate relatives, protect them and heal them when they are hurt. But what if they, too, are hurt?**

In contexts affected by violent extremism, women are regularly exposed to emotional and physical violence, including sexual violence. Still, they are expected to continue performing their roles as healers and as the

foundation of communities while carrying the burden of trauma and suffering.

The structural violence typical of conflict and post-conflict settings puts women’s well-being at risk and has a huge impact on the community as a whole, including on men and children. For example, in the Bangsamoro, we are all still scarred by the memory of the 1974 ‘Burning of Jolo’, a seven-day confrontation between State forces and secessionist groups on the island of Jolo. The massacre left our community deeply devastated. I was only five months’ old when this happened and, throughout my childhood and adolescence, I used to listen to community elders tell stories

² The Bangsamoro was established as a political entity/region in February 2019 after years of negotiations between the Philippine Government and secessionist groups, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.



Photo: UN Women/Louie Pacardo

of the massacre. I still remember how struck I was by the vividness of their tales: the dead bodies lying on the streets; the smell of burning houses; the screams and the hunger; the sobbing and wailing of those who had lost a loved one – a partner, a child, a parent or the whole family. One might think that, almost 50 years on, people would have recovered from this violence. Yet, the trauma lives on to this day.

In the region, extremist violence is still present: terrorist groups kidnap people for ransom, behead and rape their victims. To keep the situation at bay, the Government has turned to militarization and hard security, which have alienated civilians even more and unintentionally pushed some to sympathize with – and sometimes embrace – the terrorist cause.

If we want to eliminate violence and prevent conflict from happening again, it's important that communities look at their past and learn how to process post-conflict and post-terrorism trauma, including through mental health structures and resources. This includes specifically exploring ways for women to deal with the past, as this is an important step towards collective healing at the community level.



Photo: UN Women/Staton Winter

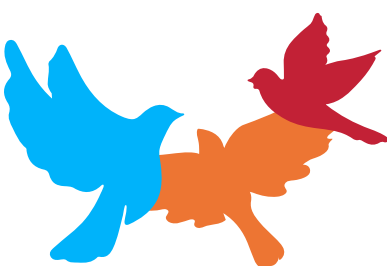
At *Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro*, we invite Bangsamoro women and men over for a cup of 'kahawa', which means coffee in the local language, and we provide a safe space to discuss their history and deal with shared trauma. We also listen to the stories of women who lived through the period of Martial Law in the 1960s and 80s – how they took care of their families and communities while the men were fighting, and the emotional toll that this has taken on them.

Community dialogue is an effective tool for enabling those most vulnerable in our communities, including women, to find their voice, share their stories and acknowledge that our journeys may be more similar than different.

Still, healing and overcoming post-conflict trauma is a complex and lengthy process and cannot be achieved only through civil society work on the ground.

We need the support of state institutions, which must address pervasive lawlessness in society by ensuring justice and introducing change at the policy level.

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Indonesia - So... - preventing violence at a neighborhood level. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown



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