

Concept Note

**Preventing Violent Extremism in the Arab States**

**Regional Workshop - Exchange of Experiences**

**25-26 February 2019**

**Tunis, Tunisia**

**Background**

The 2018 Global Terrorism Index notes that although the number of terrorist-related casualties have decreased globally, the Middle East and Northern Africa continue to face huge challenges. Of all territories, this region has had the highest number of deaths from terrorism since 2002, and despite the fact that most territory that was captured by the so-called Islamic State (IS) has been retaken by Government authorities in Iraq and Syria, both states continue to face pockets of instability and future risks of resurgence. Although the fall in the impact of terrorism has been consistent for the past three years, there are also areas in which the threat of terrorism looks set to increase in the near future. The collapse of ISIS in Iraq and Syria has moved the group’s activities elsewhere, in particular to the Maghreb and Sahel regions. 98 per cent of IS attacks are still carried out in the Arab States.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The need to prevent radicalisation as well as engage in rehabilitative and re-integrative work of those that have left extremist groups remains pertinent. This need is most acute in the Arab States, which are not only continuously affected by the highest number of violent extremist incidents, but also coupled with the highest number of foreign fighters, and the associated looming threat of violent returnees as well as potentially associated cells on their ground, with less people traveling to other countries to take up the cause.

The regaining of territorial control has also increased concerns related to the return of foreign fighters to their countries of origin. In October 2017, the Soufan Center estimated that 5,600 people with 33 different nationalities returned to their home countries after supporting and/or fighting for ISIS in Syria and Iraq[[2]](#footnote-2), out of an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 total foreigners.[[3]](#footnote-3) At national levels, their return poses a significant policy challenge to mitigate the security risk they may pose, to conduct penal processes based on evidence and respectful to the rights of the defense, and to adopt specific measures for their reintegration and rehabilitation.

The factors leading to violent extremism are complex, intertwined, and heavily impacted by local context, regional dynamics, and global politics. Because radicalization and subsequent push to involvement into violence may be driven from a multitude of individual and environmental factors, they are often difficult to identify and therefore difficult to address. Despite these challenges, there is growing recognition that military and security-based approaches to countering violent extremism are not sufficient, and more must be done to address the complex circumstances and conditions in which violent extremism rises.

The Secretary-General’s Plan of Action for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) from December 2015 calls for a comprehensive approach, encompassing “*not only essential based counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups*”.[[4]](#footnote-4) Because underlying conditions and drivers vary between states and localities, so too do interventions. UNDP developed the global framework ‘Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity,’ highlighting the need to look beyond strict security concerns to development-related causes of, and solutions to, preventing violent extremism.[[5]](#footnote-5) The foundation of this framework is the belief that better governance of diversity through inclusion and tolerance will lead to societies being more resilient towards violent extremism.

At country level, several governments are developing national action plans for PVE, as per the call in the Secretary-General in the Plan of Action, including through consultation processes and setting up coordination mechanisms such as Inter-Ministerial Committees and PVE entities and focal points. Programmes are being implemented at community level, involving different stakeholders such as police and civil society. Education and curricula is being reviewed and the role of youth and women as agents of change highlighted. National action plans also address the specific and complex dynamics related to the penal and carceral systems, and prevention work takes place in prisons as well as outside, through reintegration programmes.

**Objectives**

Several governments have expressed the desire to exchange techniques, ideas and lessons learned relevant to the general field of policies surrounding PVE and returnees. Recognizing this as an opportunity for cooperation and collaboration on regionally pressing issues, UNDP will create the space for such exchange of ideas and experiences regarding developmental and rights-based approaches to the prevention of violent extremism and approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration of former violent extremists. The creation of this platform will enable countries to discuss what works in different contexts and why, enhancing creativity, innovation and collaboration, and potentially saving ressources by sharing experiences.

The objective is to create a better understanding of progress made at the national and local levels in the region, and how the context has changed over the last few years, while also benefiting from global knowledge generation including the recent UNDP conference in Oslo, Norway. Gaining insight into the local level applications will allow the region as a whole to showcase and share successful experiences as well as distil lessons on PVE relevant policy, programming and implementation. Working collaboratively will positively contribute to countries understanding of how current projects may be improved, or how future projects should be implemented. Additionally, information sharing throughout the region will increase understanding and potentially regional coordination.

The workshop will focus on:

* Promoting exchange of policy, research and practical experiences on PVE, focusing on regional developments and policies, but including global practices.
* Bringing together collective experiences of state and non-state actors, enhancing collaboration as a key prerequisite of PVE programing impact.
* Sharing research, guidance and new findings in thematic areas across the PVE domain.
* Feeding into recommendations for future policy development in this area, including the localization of PVE activities

The workshop is organized by UNDP through its Regional Hub for Arab States and the UNDP Country Office for Tunisia, in cooperation with the Tunisia National Counter Terrorism Commission (NCTC). Tunisia has early on acted to prevent violent extremism, including the creation of a National Counter-Terrorism Commission (NCTC), set up in 2016. Similarly, a National Counter Extremism and Terrorism Strategy was adopted in December 2016 which contains four main pillars on prevention, protection, prosecution and response. Under the leadership of the NCTC, the Tunisian Government has been elaborating sectoral action plans that convert into concrete operational measures the national PVE priorities.

Key areas such as local capacity building for PVE, youth engagement, community security and policing, PVE in prison, gender and PVE, Behavioural Insights for PVE, and rehabilitation will be included with a focus on good practices and programming responses. The modus of the workshop will be action oriented with a focus on experience sharing between countries.

**Participants**

This platform will bring together Governments in the region, specifically PVE Units or similar departments charged with coordination of development and implementation of PVE National Strategies and Action Plans, as well as UNDP Country Offices. Key partners will also be invited, such as regional platforms, global experts, civil society and UN entities.

**Date and Location**

The workshop will take place at end of February 2019 in Tunis, Tunisia.

1. Global Terrorism Index 2018, p.15 and 36. Available online: http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Beyond The Caliphate: Foreign Fighters And The Threat Of Returnees.” Soufan Center, October 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. James R. Clapper, *Worldwide Threat Assessment Of The US Intelligence Community* (USA: Senate Armed Services Committee, 9 February 2016), Pp. 1–33 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Https://Www.Un.Org/Counterterrorism/Ctitf/En/Plan-Action-Prevent-Violent-Extremism](https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/plan-action-prevent-violent-extremism) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/conflict-prevention/discussion-paper---preventing-violent-extremism-through-inclusiv.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)