



## OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister*



**WOMEN'S ALLIANCE FOR SECURITY LEADERSHIP**  
Preventing Extremism by Promoting Rights, Peace & Pluralism

### **Global Leadership – Local Partnerships**

## **Women's Leadership and Gender Perspectives on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism**

### **Concept Note**

Terrorism and violent extremism are among the greatest security threats of our time. As the international community strengthens its efforts to prevent and counter these threats, the UN must show strong leadership. In particular, member states and the wider UN system need support on the “whole of society” approach recommended in the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

The inclusion of a gender perspective and the need to listen to women's voices when governments formulate their plans and strategies are inherent to the ‘whole of society’ approach. These points were emphasized at the European Conference on Countering Violent Extremism in Oslo in June 2015, hosted by Prime Minister Erna Solberg, and at the Leaders' Summit in New York in September 2015, hosted by President Barack Obama. These meetings were calls to action advocating a broad approach to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy takes a comprehensive approach. The importance of this approach was reiterated in the 2016 review of this strategy, which also calls upon all Member States to highlight the important role of women in countering terrorism and violent extremism. The Security Council has adopted several resolutions emphasising the need for a gender perspective, including resolution 2178 (2014) on foreign

terrorist fighters and resolution 2242 (2015) on women, peace and security. Moreover, countering extremism and promoting peace and pluralism are essential for achieving the Agenda 2030 goals, particularly SDG 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies.

### **A gender perspective on violent extremism**

Much attention is being paid to the role of women and girls, who are both victims and perpetrators of terrorism. Women have been among the first to raise the alarm about, and urge action to prevent and counter, terrorism and violent extremism.

The manipulation, and strategic use, of gender norms and dynamics by terrorist and violent extremist groups highlights the importance of adopting a gender perspective in this area. The underlying ideologies and mindsets of these groups tend to fuel violence against women. In areas where violent extremism has spread and militant groups have gained or are contesting territorial control, women's rights and freedoms are often attacked; women's mobility is restricted and their security is threatened. Sexual violence is widespread. Women are less able to take part in public life, to access education, employment, or health services, and to express themselves without the fear of repercussions; in other words, to live as equal citizens.

Even so, extremist ideology appeals to many women. Groups such as ISIL specifically target women and girls in their propaganda. More than 10% of the estimated 5000 western foreign terrorist fighters who have travelled to Syria and Iraq are women. There is considerable variation in what motivates these women – particularly the young. There are also examples of violent right-wing groups in the United States and Canada that operate dedicated websites to generate support among – and to recruit – women.

Precisely because women are so directly targeted, women's rights movements have been at the forefront in mobilising against the rise of religious and ethno-national political extremism. They are leaders in this arena, having developed practical knowledge and expertise in offering alternative narratives, life skills, and care and livelihood options. Many have also been at the forefront in building community resilience by engaging with all who are involved, including security forces. Their efforts to promote rights, support rehabilitation and deradicalisation, and provide a space for civic engagement are vital to preventing and countering violent extremism.

Because of their influence and impact, many women who work for peace and women's rights risk being attacked by violent extremist movements. These women are crucial to efforts to mitigate and turn the tide of extremism. Women-led organisations that are pro-rights, peace and pluralism are locally rooted and globally connected. They enjoy trust, access and credibility on the ground and offer an alternative vision of the future.

In addition, they know how to address the aspirations and grievances of young men and women who may be vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists.

### **The aim of the meeting and the expected outcome**

The meeting will build on the existing knowledge base, including the Secretary-General's Plan of Action, the GCTF/OSCE Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent

Extremism, the Global Study on UNSC resolution 1325 and the vast amount of research that has been carried out within the fields of women, peace and security, and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), as well as women's networks. The aim of the meeting is to:

- recognise the importance of women's expertise and the role of civil society in P/CVE;
- establish a better understanding of the gender aspects of terrorism and violent extremism;
- share good practices and highlight concrete solutions to strengthen the impact of P/CVE efforts;
- encourage more in-depth focus on issues and solutions in security, governance, education, the economic and other spheres that are relevant to long-term prevention and peacebuilding; and
- launch a mechanism for regular substantive consultations between governments and women's organisations.

### **Global Solutions Exchange on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism**

A Global Solutions Exchange (GSE) will be established to provide an opportunity for regular interaction and dialogue on issues, ideas and solutions between senior representatives of governments and members of the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), as well as with other independent civil society organisations that have experience in the area of preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism.

The Global Solutions Exchange will enable governments to access first-hand accounts of critical issues and useful solutions, strengthen the importance of women's work and their contributions, and provide a safe arena where women can share their knowledge and activities, thereby debunking myths and stereotypes that are used to marginalise or discredit them.

WASL was formally launched and spearheaded by the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) following the Leaders' Summit in New York in September 2015. WASL is an independent alliance of women-led civil society actors and organisations working to prevent and counter all forms of extremism. Their purpose is to bring synergy and greater coherence to existing efforts, to advance gendered understandings of and responses to extremism, and to collaborate strategically in providing clear alternatives rooted in rights, dignity, peace and pluralism for all.

### **Meeting details**

The meeting will be in the form of an interactive debate, with short statements by civil society leaders in WASL, followed by remarks from heads of state or government and an open discussion. The meeting will take place on 20 September 2016 from 1:30 pm to 2:45 pm in Conference Room 4, the United Nations Headquarters, New York. The contact person for the event is Senior Adviser Marita Sørheim-Rensvik (e-mail: [Marita.Sorheim-Rensvik@mfa.no](mailto:Marita.Sorheim-Rensvik@mfa.no)). The event will be open to the press.