



A Global Solutions Exchange Event

#GSX2017 – Innovations in Civil Society and Other Locally Led Efforts to Prevent Violent Extremism

21 September 2017

UNOFFICIAL SUMMARY¹

Opening Session

1. In his welcoming remarks, the Director of the [Prevention Project](#), Eric Rosand, noted how the PVE (preventing violent extremism) community continues to expand, drawing in experts, practitioners, and organizations from different areas, including peace-building, conflict prevention, youth and gender empowerment, and community engagement. He stressed how deeper and broader collaboration, cooperation, and networking within and among civil society, municipal authorities, national governments, and multilateral organizations, including development agencies, are needed for the global PVE effort to achieve sustained positive impact. He noted that as a global civil society PVE platform, the Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) is committed to these objectives.
2. Sanam Anderlini, co-founder and Executive Director of the International Civil Society Action Network ([ICAN](#)), which spearheads the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), noted that extremism is growing in our communities and that we need to be honest about “why, who, and what” is driving the spread of the ideologies and related violence. In this vein, she spoke about how the GSX was formed as a platform to bring local voices—particularly women’s voices, as women are often the first to experience violent extremism and organize locally to respond to it—directly into the international space, to make sure there is an effective feedback loop so policymakers hear the sometimes “uncomfortable truths” about what drives violent extremism and receive positive, practical recommendations for locally rooted solutions to the challenge.

“We need to be honest about ‘why, who, and what’ is driving the spread of the ideologies and the related violence.” – Sanam Anderlini, ICAN and WASL
3. Anders Samuelsen, [Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark](#), emphasized the centrality of preventing the radicalization to violent extremism in the fight against terrorism. This goal requires more investments in both international cooperation and local prevention efforts. He spoke about how PVE needs to be led by local actors—municipalities, schools, and civil society—since “they know the local context and what motivates some people to commit horrible acts in the name of twisted ideas.”

¹ The GSX seeks to bring policymakers and practitioners from different sectors and perspectives together to share knowledge and solutions. Although the GSX welcomes this diversity of opinions as a means of reaching better outcomes, the views expressed at GSX events, by steering group members, or other partners do not necessarily reflect the views of all such members and partners.



“PVE needs to be led by local actors—municipalities, schools, and civil society—since they know the local context and what motivates some people to commit horrible acts in the name of twisted ideologies.” Anders Samuelsen, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Denmark

He highlighted the [Danish model](#) as a good PVE model and the emphasized importance of municipalities and other local actors from different countries and regions learning from each other, including about how to develop effective local prevention networks. In this context, he spoke about a Danish-financed project that is part of the [Strong Cities Network](#), which is, inter alia, connecting municipalities in Denmark with ones in Jordan and Lebanon, and the [local prevention networks](#) that have been spawned in these Middle East and North African countries as a result.

4. Ambassador Manuel Sager, Director General of the [Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation](#), highlighted the importance of a “whole of society” approach to PVE that includes the private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), and religious communities and leaders. He noted how providing CSOs the space to operate effectively is a matter of good governance and critical to PVE. CSOs “help us understand the local context and which local factors lead to violent extremism; they can tell us what works and does not and why some communities are more resilient to violent extremism than others.” In short, he stressed, “to restrict their space is an act of self-defeat.” He also highlighted the unique contributions that faith-based organizations can make, noting how they can either be agents for peace or instrumentalized for polarization and segregation.
5. The Director for Conflict Prevention and Security Policy, [External Action Service of the European Union](#) (EU), Pawel Herczyński, stressed the need for PVE efforts to be locally rooted because that is where the solutions lie. He underscored the priority that the EU places on supporting such local efforts, both within and outside the EU. He cited the example of the EU-funded [STRIVE](#) program, which, inter alia, identifies local drivers, empowers women and youth, promotes community dialogue, and strengthens the role of the media sector in PVE. He also highlighted the crucial role of CSOs in PVE and the need to ensure that PVE efforts extend beyond international organizations and national governments.
6. Herczyński noted how CSOs have credible knowledge of local drivers of violent extremism and evolving local trends; have trust within and access to communities susceptible to violent extremist recruitment in ways that national and multilateral institutions do not; are willing and able to be innovative and flexible to identify and tackle emerging issues; and provide a space for productive engagement between governments and local communities.
7. Steve Killelea, Founder and Executive Chairman of the [Institute for Economics and Peace](#), noted how more than 80 percent of deaths from terrorism since 2001 have occurred in countries with ongoing violent conflicts. Consequently, preventing and resolving such conflicts should be a core focus of efforts aimed at addressing terrorism. He noted how more countries have improved their responses



to terrorism and violent extremism, but reiterated that governments continue to invest too few resources on prevention, noting only 1 percent of the cost of war is spent on preventing conflict.²

Session I: A Whole of Society Approach to Prevention

This session highlighted practical ways that CSOs and communities, including women, families, and youth, are working on preventing violent extremism, enhancing community resilience, and providing positive alternatives to those promoted via violent extremist propaganda. Participants discussed how using creative means such as the arts, sports, and media can be useful to not only engage with communities in PVE, but also transform communities through their long-term effects on individuals.

8. Moderating the session, Anderlini noted that CSOs, especially women and youth-led organizations, have always been on the frontlines of the fight against violent extremism. They present innovative, positive, and sustainable solutions that tackle the structural factors and thus have direct preventive impact in the immediate near term as well.
9. Omezzine Khelifa, the founder of [Modbiun](#) in Tunisia and a member of WASL, works with marginalized youth in Tunisia to promote social inclusion and social transformation through the arts, sports, and technology. In her work with youth, she avoids the use of terms like “prevention,” “violent extremism,” and “countering violent extremism” (CVE). She finds that this language could be counterproductive, since it risks alienating the very communities with which she hopes to engage. Use of these terms may lead target groups to feel that the organization is there to *fix* something that is wrong or that youth are a threat. She insists that solutions are local, whereas resources and networks should be global to support country-led initiatives.
10. Bushra Qadeem Hyder, principal of a school in Pakistan and a member of [WASL](#), spoke about her organization’s work to promote peace education curricula in schools that helped prevent the radicalization of teenagers. She noted how educational spaces must provide a safe haven for children to think and speak freely. Her work brings together young people from different religious and cultural backgrounds and allows them to participate in sports and theatrical activities together. Students trained in her program then return to their universities to promote this approach. She said her school is the only one that includes “peace education” as part of the curriculum, but that they do not speak openly about this because of safety concerns. Hyder noted a desire to bring this approach to the

“We were able to prevent teenage boys in our community from traveling to Myanmar to become Jihadis because of the peace education values instilled in our students and the trust we garnered with their families.” – Bushra Qadeem Hyder, Educationalist, Pakistan

² “Research by DFID, IEP, and UNDP all suggest conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions are highly cost-effective when successful. This is because the economic impact of conflict is devastating on the economy. Research by IEP shows that cost-savings ratio of conflict prevention is 1:16 on average.” Institute for Economics and Peace, “New Methods to Assess Risk of Conflict and Violence: Predicting Changes in the Global Peace Index,” 2017, p. 4, http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2017/09/Risk-Report_Web_Final.pdf



national level, but that the government and some CSOs remain skeptical about what “peace education” can actually achieve. Hyder also share a recent experience in preventing teenage boys in her community from traveling to Myanmar to become Jihadis. She said she was able to do this because of the peace education values instilled in her students and the trust she has garnered with their families.

11. Arifur Rahman, the director of [Young Power in Social Action](#) in Bangladesh, spoke about his organization’s work with the now more than 500,000 undocumented Rohingya migrants who have fled neighboring Myanmar. He noted how extremist groups take advantage of the low levels of literacy and high levels of poverty within this population to recruit youth. His organization is developing new material to explain violent extremism, promote non-violence, and highlight how people from different religions and cultures can co-exist. It is promoting livelihood opportunities for school drop-outs and unemployed youth. Rahman spoke about the need for counter-narratives to focus more on issues of co-existence and daily life, and less on religion.
12. Lamia Al Saket, who manages a Mercy Corps youth-focused [program](#) in Jordan, underscored how working with youth in PVE is about promoting critical thinking and dealing with feelings of exclusion and injustice. An accumulated sense of injustice—and not religion—she argued, particularly among the Syrian refugees, is among the main drivers of violent extremism among young people in Jordan. She noted the importance of connecting with young people’s value systems, which are intrinsically linked to their productivity. Engaging in critical thinking is essential, but this skill is not taught in Jordanian public schools. Her program engages youth, while also providing psycho-social interventions that teach youth to manage their emotions related to feelings of injustice and hopelessness. The program avoids discussing violent extremism or religion, focusing instead on stress relief, self-awareness, and community. Al Saket highlighted the importance of youth mentoring, noting that it tends to reduce levels of aggression and increase a sense of productivity among mentees.
13. Salma Hemed from [Haki Africa](#) related how youth in Kenya feel that joining al-Shabaab is the only way to address their grievances when they personally experience injustice (including colleagues and friends being killed by the police). She underscored the need to engage women in PVE efforts to help them identify early warning signs of violent extremism in their sons or husbands. She stressed the importance of religious dialogue, enabling young people to hear different religious perspectives, in helping to prevent youth from becoming radicalized to violence.
14. Bjørn Ihler, [Extremely Together’s](#) young leader from Norway, highlighted the value of storytelling as a tool for peacebuilding and PVE. He spoke of the need to live together while maintaining differences, to talk and listen to other perspectives, and to resist the urge to close borders and erect walls as a response to rising feelings of violent extremism. He spoke about how extremist narratives that appear absurd still have power over those they influence; arguments that directly contradict them are thus likely to be dismissed as lies. Counter-narratives

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need to reshape extremist visions of reality, he said, and this means trying to understand the emotional, physical, and psychological needs of those to whom the stories appeal.

Ihler emphasized the need to celebrate complexity and nuance and be accepting of difference and diversity, and to treat all individuals with dignity and respect regardless of who they are or where they come from.

15. Speakers also discussed issues around trust between governments and CSOs when it comes to PVE efforts, the extent to which governments are assisting or engaging with CSOs constructively in this domain, and the capacity of CSOs to engage.
16. Rahman noted that the Bangladeshi government generally has a positive view of the role of CSOs in PVE, but that space for CSOs to operate in his country is shrinking, mostly for political reasons. He said that CSOs need permission from the government to operate, which can take time due mainly to bureaucratic hurdles, and that while many CSOs want to contribute to PVE efforts, many require further development their capacity in order to be able to engage effectively.
17. Hemed spoke about the lack of trust between young people and the police in parts of Kenya as a result of the continued extra-judicial killings, which her organization has condemned. Young people are increasingly turning to CSOs for help. She noted that the government shut down her organization for eight months because of its alleged “sympathy” for al-Shabaab.
18. Khelifa related that as Tunisia transitions from dictatorship to democracy, it continues to struggle with issues of injustice and lack of trust between young people and the government. Building state-citizen trust, however, is key. CSOs are critical to providing the government access to marginalized youth, but the youth need reassurance that CSOs are not simply government agents. Her organization is working on trust-building in a scientific, structured, and long-term manner, involving sociologists, convening discussion groups with different age-groups of youth, and conducting surveys to compare youth in communities that have been impacted by violent extremism with those that have not. The end goal is to identify the elements that make a community more or less resilient to violent extremist recruitment and propaganda. Khelifa also spoke of the need for a public-private resource mobilization effort to raise money for more youth programs in those communities where feelings of marginalization, exclusion, and injustice are strongest. Participants also noted the recent progress in government-CSO cooperation in Tunisia around PVE issues and the positive role that the international community played in encouraging bridge building between these two critical PVE actors.
19. Saket also noted the lack of trust between young people and the government in Jordan. She said that the government needs to listen to youth, who want to be heard. Tapping into their energy and skills so that they become productive citizens is critical to PVE efforts over the long term, but this requires providing them with an outlet for their feelings.



Session II: Supporting the Reintegration and Rehabilitation (R&R) of Violent Extremists

This session explored how CSOs and communities can best support the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders and returning foreign terrorist fighters, how they can most effectively cooperate with communities and the authorities on these efforts, and how governments can facilitate the involvement of CSOs and communities in this area.

20. Moderating the session, Eelco Kessels, Executive Director of the [Global Center on Cooperative Security](#), spoke of the different risks and legal challenges that R&R programs present; the range of programs (e.g., psycho-social, religious, vocational, educational, artistic, and athletic) that can be part of a comprehensive R&R effort; the opportunity to build on existing reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts and/or other traditional mechanisms, where appropriate; the need to look at and work with the family and wider community and not simply the perpetrator, and the importance of involving CSOs in R&R efforts as well as some of the legal, policy, and other obstacles to such involvement.

Sureya Roble, Executive Director at [Advocacy for Women in Peace and Security–Africa](#) (AWAPSA) and a member of WASL, reflected on facilitating engagement between the police, victims of violent extremism and state violence, and communities in Kenya. Among other things, her organization works with female family members of violent extremists, providing them with information, protecting them and giving them a sense of belonging, and working to understand their struggle, especially given that most recruits are actually family breadwinners, be it sons or husbands. She explained how the government in Kenya tends to view all returnees as criminals. The security forces mistreat them, seeing them as guilty before they are even charged, and they target and harass their families. Last year, the government gave amnesty to returning radicalized youth who surrendered to the authorities. The outcome was disastrous, however; the few who surrendered with the help of civil society groups disappeared without a trace and their families blamed the government. Roble also highlighted how the R&R of former violent extremists cannot be successful without the involvement of communities and that the R&R of victims should also not be overlooked. R&R is a process that requires political will and community engagement and Roble argued for the establishment of a legal and policy framework to enable CSOs to work with returnees and violent extremists.

21. Harouna Abdoulaye, Director of the Community Coalition for Peace and the Promotion of Living Together ([COPAVE](#)) in Niger, underscored how the R&R of individuals or groups is only possible if communities, including CSOs, are fully involved in the process. They must support and welcome these efforts. He enumerated a number of challenges CSOs face in this field. These include insufficient expertise in designing and managing R&R programs; rivalries among CSOs and between CSOs and the government; insufficient input from target communities, in particular from youth and women, in the development of R&R programs; and problems in selecting

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the right beneficiaries and understanding the vulnerabilities and risks associated. He pointed out that successful R&R efforts stem from, inter alia, the trust and respect between the government and community-based actors; clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of each actor; and a rigorous analysis of the local environment to ensure that programs are designed to take into account local nuances and leverage existing local capacities.

22. Achaleke Christian, Director of [Local Youth Corner](#), Cameroon, spoke about his work in developing a national youth center on PVE and an action agenda on R&R in Cameroon, building on the first-ever dialogue in that country among youth, government officials, and frontline practitioners. This dialogue identified a number of challenges, including the lack of an existing policy framework to support youth participation in R&R; insufficient focus of the government and the international community on R&R in the PVE context; and a lack of capacity and safe spaces for youth actors, front line practitioners, government officials, and other stakeholders to collaborate. He sees identity as a critical issue, since one cannot reintegrate an individual who has no sense of his or her own identity. He stressed that programs, which need to be multi-disciplinary in nature, should not be limited to those who are already violent extremists, but should more broadly target those with a history of or vulnerabilities to violence more broadly. Christian also highlighted the importance of identifying mentors—people who can positively influence others—and working through both social and traditional media as critical elements of R&R and other PVE programs.

“Rehabilitation and reintegration programs, which need to be multi-disciplinary in nature, should not be limited to those who are already violent extremists, but should more broadly target those with a history of or vulnerabilities to violence more broadly.” – Achaleke Christian, Local Youth Corner, Cameroon

23. Dr. Edit Schlaffer, the founder of [Women without Borders](#), Austria, stressed the importance of supporting the needs of the community into which individuals are reintegrating. This work includes engaging with the family of the returnee. Often, R&R efforts focus solely on the radicalized individual without taking into account the reaction and willingness of receiving communities. Addressing prevention efforts more broadly, Schlaffer maintained that language matters and the use of terms like “fighting terrorism” and “standing up against violent extremism” can be risky. She highlighted the Parenting for Peace model, which provides a platform for concerned mothers to develop intervention strategies and alternative narratives in the critical early phases of radicalization of their children, helping to steer them in a safer direction. The model has been piloted and implemented in Austria, Belgium, England, India, Indonesia, Kashmir, Macedonia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Tanzania (Zanzibar), and will soon be rolled out in Germany and Jordan. To date, 1,800 mothers have been trained with the goal to position women as the first line of defense in their families and communities.
24. Speakers noted the importance of ensuring that R&R programs are tailored not only to the relevant country and community, but also to the level of the individual. For example, the point was made that while over 2,000 Tunisians went to join the conflict in Iraq and Syria, some went for non-ideological reasons and some returned alone, while others returned with spouses and children; R&R programs need to take into account the different motivating factors for why individuals leave their homes to fight in other countries, their experiences engaging in foreign conflicts, and the different



circumstances surrounding their return. A lack of data on returnees can hinder efforts to develop effective R&R programs.

25. Participants also stressed the need for constructive, continuous engagement and information sharing between law enforcement and communities, including relevant CSOs, throughout the design and implementation of R&R programs, as well as the need for regional and cross-regional sharing of best practices across a range of R&R topics.
26. Participants also discussed the need for R&R to be part of a comprehensive national strategy for addressing terrorism and violent extremism, noting in particular the linkages between R&R and prevention.

Side Event Session: National Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism: Partnership and Leadership across Civil Society and National Governments (Co-Hosted by the United Kingdom and the GSX)

27. Opening this session, which was moderated by Alistair Millar, Howard S. Brembeck Fellow at the [Global Center on Cooperative Security](#), [Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon](#), Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN at the United Kingdom’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK FCO), noted that NAPs are the “heart and soul of delivering CVE and tackling violent extremism” and how the UK continues to support, including through the [Hedayah-Global Center NAP Task Force](#) (co-led by [Hedayah](#) and the Global Center) and the [Commonwealth Secretariat CVE Unit](#), the design and implementation of NAPs that embrace a “whole of society” approach. Lord Ahmad argued that “we can’t stop violent extremism without collaborative efforts between governments and civil society,” adding that “if we do not walk with civil society in seeking solutions we will not find solutions.” Lord Ahmad also noted the United Kingdom’s support for Nigeria’s recently concluded NAP process, where a civil society coalition played an important role, and the need to balance libertarian freedoms with security. This includes ensuring that violent extremists, particularly those who attached the name of Islam to their violence, are not able to mobilize others to join their cause.

**“If we do not walk with civil society in seeking solutions [to violent extremism] we will not find solutions.”
- Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
UK**

“The Government of Nigeria will work with civil society to meet the objectives outlined in the national action plan and we invite you to partner.” Commodore Yem Musa, Office of the National Security Adviser, Nigeria

28. Commodore Yem Musa, Counterterrorism Coordinator at the Office of the National Security Adviser, Nigeria, noted how Nigeria has opened up space for engagement with CSOs on PVE. He told the civil society participants that the government of Nigeria “will work with you to meet the objectives outlined in the NAP and we invite you to partner.” He shared some lessons on the Nigerian experience

in developing its NAP: a) national governments should seek a broad, multi-stakeholder platform rather than trying to do it alone; b) evidence-based research on the drivers of violent extremism in different communities is a prerequisite to NAP development; and c) NAPs should pursue a whole of society



approach that includes an emphasis on the role of women in PVE and the need to support victims of violent extremism.

29. Elaborating on the Nigerian experience, Catherine Udida, Head of CVE at Office of the National Security Adviser, noted how Nigeria formed a network of some 69 CSOs dealing with a range of PVE issues to engage with during the NAP design process. She underscored the importance of having mechanisms to coordinate between government and CSOs in order to create an atmosphere of trust and transparency and securing legislative backing for CSO involvement in PVE efforts.
30. Sarah Poole, the United Nations Development Programme's Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Director of the [Bureau for Policy and Programme Support](#), highlighted UNDP's growing PVE portfolio, emphasizing that UNDP looks at applying development solutions to the challenge of violent extremism. She explained UNDP's support to governments to develop their NAPs, encouraging plans to be developed and implemented in a multidisciplinary, inclusive, and holistic manner. Within this work, UNDP [promotes](#) collaboration with civil society, women's and youth organizations, religious leaders, academia, and the private sector. She underscored the importance of ensuring that the NAP drafting committee is inclusive and that the plan is aimed at addressing real and perceived grievances. She also mentioned how the UNDP recently signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with Hedayah to strengthen collaboration in providing support to states interested in NAP design and implementation.
31. Neila Feki, Vice-President of the [National Counter Terrorism Commission](#) (NCTC) of Tunisia, noted the NCTC was formed in August 2015, with its 19 members representing different government ministries. She said that the commission has adopted a whole of society approach to its work, with CSOs able to be invited to participate in NCTC meetings when appropriate. She added that CSOs are now regularly invited to attend NCTC-sponsored events. Among the challenges she identified were the need for more local capacity-building of both municipalities and CSOs outside of the major cities to address violent extremism.
32. Halima Salim, Executive Director of the Kenyan [Coast Education Centre](#) (COEC) and a member of WASL, highlighted the absence of women's voices and gendered perspectives in the current Kenyan PVE NAP and how COEC is filling this gap by consulting women and developing a Women's PVE Charter to inform and accompany the national strategy. In addition, Salim noted how some counties in Kenya are developing [County Action Plans](#) designed to address violent extremism in their different local contexts.
33. Mohammed Ngubdo Hassan, the Director of the [Herwa Community Development Initiative](#) in Nigeria, highlighted three relevant activities his initiative is pursuing: a) the development of community-level PVE platforms in nine communities in Borno State b) supporting each of these communities in developing PVE action plans (he noted that at the state level, a PVE plan of action is being finalized); and c) forming six higher level Local Government Platforms to avert attacks from extremists and resolve conflicts by engaging state and non-state actors using early warnings signals. His [organization has also reintegrated 28 survivors of sexual violence by Boko Haram and their children back into](#) their communities through dialogue sessions and face-to-face family-to-family peer group discussion



sessions. Through these platforms, community members, husbands, and parents of the abductees, family members, and the survivors themselves were given an opportunity to engage, thus succeeding in reducing stigma and discrimination against the survivors.

34. Alastair King-Smith, the Head of International Counter Extremism at the UK FCO, argued that preventing violent extremism and radicalization in our communities requires all sectors and levels of government and society to be involved and that governments need to protect and facilitate the different roles. King-Smith challenged participants to move beyond the status quo and develop innovative partnerships to address extremism that resonate and connect with high-level officials and also mobilize local actors. He also asked participants to work to make extremism a core theme of next year's UN General Assembly.
35. Participants highlighted how PVE, and the notion of engaging with civil society, is a new concept for many governments. This is particularly the case when it comes to involvement in what many national governments still view as predominately a security issue. It was noted that engaging CSOs in the NAP design process can be more about a change in culture than resources for some, others emphasized that NAPs will only be as effective as the resources and political will behind them.

Side Event Session: Innovative Youth-led Contributions to PVE

36. Moderating this session, Saji Prelis, the Director of [Children and Youth Programs](#) at Search for Common Ground, noted how radicalization and extremism are associated with being young, but that if not linked to violence, these ideologies are not necessarily bad. Moreover, he pointed out how extreme ideas have in fact generated some positive outcomes over the course of history. He reminded the participants of the [action agenda](#) to prevent violent extremism and promote peace, produced at the September 2015 Youth Summit against Violent Extremism in New York, which recognized that youth are generally viewed as either perpetrators of violent extremism or as possible victims of recruitment into violent groups. This narrative fails to capture the fact that a vast majority of young women and young men do *not* participate in acts of violence. Rather than turning to violence to address their perceived and/or real grievances, Prelis said, young people around the world are working to build peace and prevent violent extremism from taking root in their communities. It is therefore critical to develop a new narrative that involves young people and engages them as partners and leaders in policymaking that can contribute to preventing violence and violent extremism. After all, if violent groups can engage young people as leaders, why should governments and civil society ignore these youths when it comes to sustaining peace. It is not only a demographic reality but a democratic necessity. The 2015 youth action agenda was about recognizing young people as critical partners in the effort to prevent violent extremism and this agenda was reinforced by [UNSCR 2250](#), which highlighted how “the response to violent extremism needs meaningful youth participation at all levels” and that governments should engage youth as “partners in the design and implementation of relevant programs and policies.”

“It is critical to develop a new narrative that involves young people and engages them as partners and leaders in policymaking that can contribute to preventing violence and violent extremism.” - Saji Prelis, Search for Common Ground



37. Elvira Hadzibegovic Bubanja, Executive Director of [Forum MNE](#), Montenegro, suggested that youth need to be part of the solution to all forms of violent extremism, not simply to religious-inspired violence. Youth workers play a critical role in supporting young people and can become important interlocutors in prevention efforts, especially in marginalized communities. Bubanja noted how youth in the Western Balkans are not sufficiently recognized or engaged by governments: they need to be seen as agents of change and made to feel they can make a positive contribution in their country. As it stands now, too many young people want to leave Montenegro for the EU. She underscored the need for a regional approach to PVE in the Western Balkans. Bubanja also noted how the intra-regional youth exchanges, common before the wars in the 1990s, have long since ended and, as a result, young people in the Western Balkans do not know their neighbors, which can help fuel violent extremism under certain circumstances.
38. Rayene Bouzitoun, a Member of the [Prime Minister's Youth Council](#) in Canada, said that the first step to empower young people is to include them in policy conversations. For too long it was “all about us, without us.” She spoke of the need to stop criminalizing radicalization, but rather to try to understand it and to build a generation based on peace. She highlighted five factors that can impact the spread of extremism: a) rejection—addressing young people’s feeling of rejection and ostracization; b) “one vision for all”; c) “us against them”—not knowing or caring what others think; d) “it is none of my business”—not standing silent and understanding that we can have an effect on anything happening in the world; and e) “they are all the same”—avoiding stereotypes.
- “The need to stop criminalizing radicalization, but rather to try to understand it and to build a generation based on peace.” - Rayene Bouzitoun, Prime Minister’s Youth Council, Canada
39. Hajar Sharief, co-founder of Together We Build It, an association working on the democratic transition in Libya since 2011 and with [Extremely Together](#), an initiative of the Kofi Annan Foundation, spoke about the lack of a platform in Libya to speak out about issues of violent extremism and PVE and the need for young people to have their voices heard when it comes to these issues. She added that young people are often driven to extremism by hopelessness, rage, and false promises made to them and highlighted that young people and government leaders alike have to play a critical role in building hope, turning rage into positive action, and empowering communities to be more resilient to violent ideologies.
40. A strong focus was placed on how youth can motivate each other, as they are best placed to identify opportunities for and engage with their peers. Yet, participants noted that despite the increased focus on the positive contributions of young women and young men in PVE and peacebuilding more broadly, questions remain as to whether enough governments have realized the power and potential of engaging young people as partners in PVE efforts. The speakers and participants acknowledged the urgency for governments to take the necessary steps to allow for effective engagement and participation of youth in the democratic political process and to ensure that the voices of young people and youth-focused organizations are heard by policymakers in discussions around violent extremism and in the design and implementation of PVE policies and programs.



Session III: Engaging Cities, Local Authorities, and Grassroots Prevention Networks (Hosted by the Strong Cities Network)

This session highlighted examples of and the ingredients for effective local and municipal-led PVE efforts focusing on cities in different regions, which have built local risk profiles, developed civil society partnerships, and delivered effective mitigation efforts at the local level.

41. Moderating the session, Jonathan Birdwell, Head of Policy and Research at [ISD](#), which manages the [Strong Cities Network](#) (SCN), provided a brief introduction to SCN, the first global network of mayors, municipal-level policymakers, and practitioners focused on building social cohesion and community resilience to counter violent extremism in all its forms, and a snapshot of its recent efforts, supported by the Danish government, to do in-depth work to build local Prevention Networks in select cities in Lebanon and Jordan.
42. Throughout this session, SCN members and other participants highlighted how “top down” strategies for prevention will not work and underscored the importance of having national governments and the international community empower cities to contribute to PVE efforts, including by developing local, multi-disciplinary prevention networks and local action plans. Participants also called for stronger vertical cooperation around PVE among national, state, municipal, and community-based stakeholders, across both the law enforcement and non-law enforcement sectors. The need for better and more efficient collaboration between local and national governments and co-planning and co-designing strategies that cities and local authorities can execute was highlighted throughout this session.
43. Representing the SCN International Steering Committee and the city of Dakar, Maye Seck Sy, an Urban Security Adviser in Dakar, highlighted some of the urban challenges her city is facing and how PVE need not be seen as separate from preventing other forms of violence. She explained how Dakar leverages existing violence prevention approaches to help address violent extremism. Seck Sy noted how the SCN is equipping Dakar with the support and tools to tailor this work locally, noting the city is soon to take part in the first SCN city exchange with the city of Montreal.
44. Dakar has never been the victim of a terrorist attack, but it has devoted a number of resources towards prevention. Seck Sy highlighted a few such efforts. These include a volunteer program that was established in 2009 to regulate public spaces and reduce youth unemployment. It involves 500 youth between the ages of 18-40, with the participants divided into several brigades. Volunteers receive a small stipend during the two-year program and receive job training along the way. Inspired by a Canadian program, Dakar also launched a [Local Democracy and Citizen Participation Council](#) to facilitate dialogue between elected officials and the citizenry to reinforce the capacity to plan, manage in a participatory way, and consult the local development process while promoting social inclusion as a means to strengthen cooperation among citizens.



45. The city has also sought to raise awareness of violent extremism among its residents and to gain a better sense of community perceptions of the threat. According to Seck Sy, the lessons learned from this outreach were that while violent prevention is a priority, violent extremism is not a top concern for most residents; reducing youth unemployment is considered a top priority.
46. Fitore Pacolli Dalipi, formerly of the Mayor’s Cabinet in Pristina and currently serving in the Kosovo Parliament, stated that contrary to media coverage, Kosovars do not perceive violent extremism as one of the main challenges confronting the country. Addressing socioeconomic and political grievances was a primary priority for citizens, in many cases driven by a sense of unmet expectations in a country where 45 percent of citizens are under the age of 25. Dalipi spoke about the identity crisis that has existed since independence (2008) and how, for some, religion has filled this gap. She also raised the issue of isolation and added that for the majority of its citizens, living in Kosovo is like living in a ghetto. Kosovars can only travel visa-free to four countries and the country has made become isolated as a result. Dalipi also related how the national government has prioritized higher education to reduce unemployment by increasing the number of students and opening new universities. Local issues in different municipalities are not receiving the attention they deserve from neither the national government nor the international community, however. Municipalities need help in creating better schools and opening new kindergartens in order to help young parents, and creating conditions for development. Rather than continuing to try to interfere in local governance, Dalipi urged the national government to devolve real authority to the municipalities to deal with local issues properly at the outset in order to prevent more complicated issues such as violent extremism from emerging as a result of citizen disenchantment.
47. Chadi Nachade, a member of the Municipality Council in Tripoli, Lebanon, and a central player in the local prevention network the municipality has developed within the SCN framework, noted how Tripoli is the poorest city in the Mediterranean area, with 60 percent youth unemployment and refugees, including from Syria, comprising half its population. Challenges in the municipality include a lack of trust between the citizens and the government. He noted that despite the focus on the role of ideology in radicalization, foreign fighters in this region are motivated more by economic and political factors. He added that a local prevention network, which includes representatives from the municipality and CSOs working in parts of the city with high levels of violent extremist recruitment, is particularly focused on addressing those factors. He stressed the importance of sharing of lessons learned, experiences, and best practices among municipalities and local networks. He cited a recent exchange between Tripoli and Copenhagen on building trust between youth and municipal authorities as one such example.
48. Mohammad Zawahreh, the Head of Local Development Unit/Zarqa Municipality in Jordan, and key player in Zarqa’s SCN-linked local prevention network, noted how the city is the industrial capital of the country. With high unemployment and crime, and the added challenge of managing a large number of Syrian refugees in Zarqa, his office is focused on strengthening the relationship between

“Rather than continuing to try to interfere in local governance, national governments need to devolve real authority to the municipalities to deal with local issues that most of the time if not dealt properly can lead to more complicated issues such as violent extremism.” – Fitore Pacolli Dalipi, Kosovo



the local authorities and the community. The local prevention network in Zarqa follows the Danish model in terms of its multi-agency structure, involving teachers, community and tribal leaders, civil society, political party members, youth groups, and local police, with a focus on building social cohesion and preventing all forms of violence, including against women. One of the first set of projects underway, in addition to establishing more public spaces in the city, will work with teachers and Imams, focusing on religious discourse and promoting positive messages of Islam.

49. Ghayda Hassan, Director of the [Canadian Practitioners' Network on the Prevention of Radicalization and Extremism](#) (CPN PREV), noted how the recently established network supports the growing community of professional practitioners and civil society actors in Canada involved in assessment, prevention, and intervention with individuals at risk of radicalization to violence. She commented on how much of this work has been going on for many years, but until recently was not branded as “PVE” or “CVE.” Hassan presented Professor David Eisenman and Professor Stevan Weine’s public health model for PVE, with community members and practitioners informing policymakers and policymakers translating local knowledge and needs into a national plan: a) primordial prevention (focused on national/global level policies); b) primary prevention (focused on community, youth, and schools, as well as the wider general public); c) secondary prevention (focused on individuals with “at-risk,” “pre-criminal” behaviors and relying on health, social services, education, and community interventions); and d) tertiary prevention (focused on those with extremist violent behavior and relying on security/law enforcement interventions). She described the multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral, circular model for PVE, embodied in the CPN PREV approach, which can receive referrals on all forms of violent extremism and radicalization. She lauded the virtues of a circular, “cobweb” model, which maximizes the autonomy of each discipline or sector, while ensuring a networked plan for prevention and intervention. Hassan argued that this approach, which distributes power equitably among the actors involved—rather than one that emphasizes vertical communication but creates power imbalance—is a more effective and sustainable approach to developing a national PVE network.

Session IV: Safeguarding the Legal, Political, and Operational Space for Civil Society and Other Local Actors to Engage in PVE

This session highlighted the challenges of governments and CSOs working together to ensure the necessary legal, political, and operational space for a “whole of society” PVE approach.

50. Moderated by Rosand, this session highlighted the challenges of governments and CSOs working together on PVE, how the space for CSO involvement in PVE is too often shrinking, and the need for governments to ensure the necessary legal, political, and operational space for a whole of society PVE approach in their country.
51. Hussein Khalid, the Executive Director of [HAKI Africa](#), in Kenya, discussed Kenya’s rich and active civil society, which, despite the shrinking space for CSOs over the past five years (e.g., deregistration and blacklisting of some CSOs), has remained resilient. He also noted how the vast majority of terrorist attacks over the years have occurred in “not free” or “partly free” countries (according to the [Freedom House](#) index). He reminded participants that in 2015, his organization documented 81 instances of extra-judicial killings and how HAKI was (temporarily) blacklisted by the government. Human rights



defenders have borne the brunt of the government anti-civil society venom, with registration suspensions, medical services delays, and loss of funding. Khalid recommended that legal frameworks be put in place to protect the space for civil society, including when working on PVE issues, and that donors and other members of the international community must provide strong political support for civil society in all parts of their work.

52. Emna Jebblaoui, Executive Director of the [Institute for Human Development](#), Tunisia, spoke of the need for more research on why certain individuals may be more susceptible to radicalization, to raise awareness about violent extremism, and to empower youth and women economically. She highlighted the "Women4Peace and Security" network in Tunisia, which is designed to build women's capacity to convey messages of peace and tries to counter the culture of extremism through research, advocacy, media campaigns, conferences, and training. With support from the U.S. Embassy, the network has embarked on a civic education program that will produce 24 videos mocking Daesh, which will be shown in schools across the country. To help address the funding gap to support grassroots, community-led PVE projects in Tunisia, Jebblaoui called for the imposition of a small tax on all private companies doing business in Tunisia to generate additional funds for this important work.

53. Bahey El Din Hassan, Director of the [Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies](#), noted how in much of the Arab world, the challenge is not simply the restrictions being imposed on civil society, but how counterterrorism is being used as a "smokescreen" for cracking down on political opposition and civil society groups. He added that the [proposed NGO law](#) in Egypt would result in the closing of 70 percent of CSOs and would devastate Egyptian civil society for decades to come. He called for strengthening cooperation between multilateral counterterrorism and human rights institutions (starting with the UNOCT and UNOHCR), as part of an effort to further prioritize respect for human rights, including freedom of expression, as part of international counterterrorism and PVE efforts. Hassan also called on the new UN Under-Secretary General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism to make engagement with CSOs a priority, including by establishing a CSO advisory board for the new office to liaise with on an ongoing basis.

"The challenge [in a number of countries] is not simply the restrictions being imposed on civil society, but how counterterrorism is being used as a 'smokescreen' for cracking down on political opposition and civil society groups." - Bahey El Din Hassan, Cairo Institute for Human Rights, Egypt

54. Victoria Ibezim-Oherri, Executive Director of [Spaces for Change](#) (S4C) in Nigeria, an organization dedicated to infusing human rights into social and economic decision-making processes in Nigeria, shared her organization's recent findings from an ongoing project that monitors closing spaces for civil society in Nigeria. S4C tracked 103 incidents of CSOs and their activities being shut down, repressed, or obstructed. The affected CSO were mainly those critical of the government, political opponents, leaders of religious or indigenous movements, or those exposing corruption or gaps in governance. Categories of restrictions included: a) introduction of restrictive legislation; b) overly broad application of existing laws; and c) shaming, aggressive labeling, or propaganda. Ibezim-Oherri spoke about how terrorism and other national security concerns are often used as an excuse for introducing or adopting restrictive laws and the ways in which Nigerian CSOs are resisting the draft



NGO bill that would inter alia propose onerous registration requirements, criminalize operationalizing a CSO in Nigeria without registration, and is replete with vague phrases around the objective of “national security.”

55. Participants discussed the importance of putting in place legal frameworks that allow CSOs to conduct their important work free from government interference. These frameworks need to be backed by financial support and political will from governments and CSOs need to feel secure when engaging in the political sensitive PVE space. The inclusion of personal safety awareness and planning in [training](#) delivered by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for youth leaders and other CSOs was cited as a good practice in this area.

Closing Session

56. Tone Skogen, [State Secretary](#) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway, which is one of the principal funders of the GSX, reiterated Norway’s strong support for the GSX and the need to include civil society into all aspects of PVE to create a sustainable whole of society approach to addressing the threat of violent extremism. She called on the United Nations to put more emphasis on prevention and to involve civil society in its work to reduce the threats of terrorism and violent extremism. Skogen also announced the formation of the [PVE Group of Friends](#) at the United Nations, chaired by Norway and Jordan that will work to strengthen the UN’s PVE efforts.

“The United Nations should put more emphasis on prevention and involve civil society in its work to reduce the threats of terrorism and violent extremism.”- Tone Skogen, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway

57. In reflecting on the discussions throughout the day, Anderlini noted how trust was a theme that came up in many contexts. This includes the need to build trust between law enforcement and CSOs and communities more broadly and trusting local partners who have unique knowledge of and experience addressing local problems that national and global actors need to tap into. “When we trust them we invest in this knowledge and experience,” she underscored. In addition, she said that this event reminded us if all relevant stakeholders work together, the prevention of violent extremism can be a realistic goal, and noted how the GSX is contributing to this goal. While working together and coordinating, however, Anderlini reminded participants to continue to value the work of the individual, local actors—thus “being locally rooted and globally connected.”
58. Rosand closed the meeting by reiterating the need for more collaboration among local actors—both CSOs and municipalities—in national, regional, and global settings, and more efficient vertical cooperation between all levels of PVE stakeholders in the national context, including national, municipal, and community-based actors, the public and private sectors, and law enforcement and non-law enforcement. He noted that there are many relevant networks facilitating horizontal



collaboration, whether among governments or CSOs. However, the vertical linkage is often missing: the GSX is a civil-society-led attempt to address this gap, but it cannot do this without strong collaboration with national governments, the UN, and existing networks such as the SCN. He concluded by noting that if, five years from now, conversations on counterterrorism and PVE do not prioritize the issues discussed during the conference, e.g., the importance of identifying and addressing real and perceived grievances that drive violent extremist recruitment; prevention; partnering with civil society and more broadly operationalizing a whole of government and whole of society approach, then it is likely that we will be in the same position we are today: watching the threats of terrorism and violent extremism continue to spread.

If, five years from now, conversations on counterterrorism and PVE do not prioritize the issues discussed during the conference, for example, the importance of identifying and addressing real and perceived grievances that drive violent extremist recruitment; partnering with civil society and more broadly operationalizing a whole of society approach, then it is likely that we will be in the same position we are today: watching the threats of terrorism and violent extremism continue to spread.” - Eric Rosand, The Prevention Project, USA

About the GSX:

The Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) is an independent global civil society platform dedicated to preventing violent extremism (PVE) by enabling a “whole of society approach” through systematic engagement between local CSOs, particularly women and youth led organizations, governments, and multilateral bodies, to share knowledge and tested solutions that reduce radicalization and recruitment to violence, and promote peace, rights, equality and pluralism. **See [here](#) for more information on what GSX does and why it is unique.**

We thank the diverse group of donors that provided funding and other support to make this event possible and encourage all stakeholders to become involved in the GSX and, more broadly, to continue to champion the role of civil society and local actors in PVE at all levels.