

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen – Good Morning!

I first became aware of the trauma and stigma that women – especially widows - experience in 2009, when I witnessed how a family shunned and isolated their daughter in law because when her husband was shot, they believed she had brought them bad luck. There is no logic to this – it is superstition, but it drives so much of the behaviour in our communities – and it is a key dynamic in our communities where extremism has been spreading.

I established Coast Education Centre (COEC) a non-governmental organization based at the Coast of Kenya in 2009 to initiate our “Women Against Violent Extremism (WAVE)” project. Wave was started because traditionally respect for women makes them strong candidates to fight extremism, it also makes them targets for radicalization. Extremists have sought to actively involve women and girls in their work, knowing well about the influence they can potentially exert on people around them.

At home, mothers are often the first to observe the early warning signs of extremism in their families. While the observation of changing or changed behaviour of their children may be instinctive for many, the awareness and understanding of the process of radicalization is not. Even if mothers recognize extremists in their children, they often lack the skills needed to intervene. Women need to be equipped and supported in their efforts to prevent their children from joining extremist groups, and also to build their own capacity to reject the influence of extremism and violence.

We understood early on that -Women are strategically positioned at the center of the family, where they are the first to recognize resignation and anger in their children. They build an ideal early-warning system when their sons, daughters, or husbands travel down the wrong path. Just as illegal organizations are able to exploit latent activist energies in youth, the project seeks to identify and unlock women’s direct capabilities at the heart of the family.

Through peace building, since 2016 we have worked with 200 women whose husbands and sons have been lured to join Al-Shabaab. These women are innocent and unknowing of what their male relatives are doing – but their communities shun and isolate nonetheless. Without their husbands, they are already economically vulnerable, but they cannot find jobs – and the isolation just makes them more vulnerable to the lure and recruitment of VE groups.

The WAVE program aims to prevent and mitigate this risk and to provide women an alternative means of support. We offer psychosocial support- as well as linking women with micro finance institutions, Kenyan Government revolving fund programs to be able to get loans for their start up businesses to be self-reliant.

Today across the coastal communities where the impact of Al Shabaab is the worst on women and state response is absent, our work has expanded. We have another network of 200 affected and

traumatized women – A team of counsellors called the Counselling Rapid Unit Team (CRUT) helps them. The team uses a newly localised handbook we developed on Trauma Healing in VE to support the women.

In September 2016, Kenyan Government launched National Strategy to CVE with aims to rally all sectors of Kenyan social, religious, and economic life to reject violent extremist ideologies and minimize recruitment. However, the strategy didn't address the involvement of Women engagements in CVE. At COEC we mobilized immediately to figure out how we could get the voices and experiences of our network into the policy discussions.

We held region wide consultations for example targeting the public transport sector by hiring a 29-seater mini van led by a moderator early morning and late evening when passengers are to and from their work placements to participate in our Mini Buzz free ride and also we hire a 30 seater boat in Lamu County for a free ride to passengers , women darsas a forum like set up with 100 women in the 6 coastal counties, CVE Network forums which are headed by the respective County Commissioners of the 6 counties and roundtable meetings with National Counter Terrorism Center to listen and document women's experiences and policy directions.

Our key message and take away was that it is essential to include the voices of women, including women civil society groups and activists, in CVE work. Women's contributions to building resilience in communities vulnerable to radicalization are paramount, as women form the backbone of families and communities. Societies that empower their women are less likely to end up with large numbers of rootless young men, with a proclivity for making trouble.

With the generous technical and financial support of ICAN's Innovative Peace Fund, we created our own Coast Women's CVE Charter. We mirrored the national PVE plan's sectoral areas and identified issues and precise measures that need to be taken.

For example—we recommended the Kenyan Government establish of centers for psychosocial support at the county level,

- incorporate gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation of CVE policy and programs to enhance efficacy through adopting the charter
- and working with bilateral and multilateral partners—make available funding for women-led organizations doing this work

We validated our charter with both affected communities, and general women, plus endorsement from 1000 signatures from women leaders in our region – we presented it to our government in October 2018.

I'm happy to say that the Kenyan ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government, Department of National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) has welcomed our work – and committed to integrating the charter into the national policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen - My community, my country, like many others has challenges with resolving VE – but we also have the solutions – and commitment – because those affected are our family members, neighbours, our own friends and communities.

Taking up this work is not easy - but I do it because am a mother, am sister and a woman. On any given day you can find news reports of violent extremism worldwide. These stories include horrific accounts of war, rape and suicide bombers. Far less reported are stories of people working on the ground to rebuild their communities and stop the devastation. But these stories are important, especially those of women like me although relatively unknown are at the heart of both global, National and regional efforts to respond to violence and extremism.

Kenya Government has introduced partnership and coordination mechanism between CSO's and relevant ministries including County Governments on matters of Security and Human Rights. As we are seated here today, my Country, My County has just concluded a two-day Annual CVE Convention which is cordially organized by both the National Government, Private Sector and Civil Society Organizations to assess the Mombasa County Action Plan 2018 success and obstacles since inception. This shows how CSOs can work together with the government to curb VE and security at large. Civil society can engage effectively with governments to foster transparency and accountability and deepening knowledge. Combined, these measures can strengthen the legitimacy and sustainability of on-going processes; ensure that broader normative concerns are attended to, and that the right technical expertise is leveraged when solutions are being sought; and ultimately help builds trust between states, and between government and society.

Since meeting ICAN and joining the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) I have found out that we are not alone – that in so many other countries from Yemen to Afghanistan and Syria – women are taking a stand – and each of us is experimenting and pioneering ways to prevent and counter violent extremism, they too have established ways to give support to women undergoing trauma – whether because they are returnees themselves or because they are somehow associated with the movements. We risk our lives to pursue peace and justices. We are making peace possible, support our work.

Our recommendations for the UN missions and Governments around this table is to provide policy frameworks for the safety and security of peace builders and a framework for engagement with returnees.

I have learnt there is a massive amount of power in their stories – I have seen how our work on the Charter has inspired my partners in other countries - we are truly locally rooted and globally connected and you won't know where the connections lead until we share.