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Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism – The Way Forward

*Organized by the United Nations
in partnership with the Government of Switzerland*

Joint Co-Chairs Conclusions

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United Nations Office at Geneva, Switzerland

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and H.E. Mr. Didier Burkhalter, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland, co-chaired the Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism – The Way Forward (the Conference). A large number of Member States, including at the Ministerial level, as well as heads of international and regional organizations, United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes and civil society organizations participated in the Conference.

The Co-Chairs thank all participants for their active participation and contributions during the two days of discussion. The discussions during the Conference will remain a valuable resource of Member State, international and regional organizations and civil society perspectives, including for sharing of experience and best practices on key issues related to the prevention of violent extremism.

The Conference programme was divided in two days. The first day of the Conference was held at senior expert level and focused on the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in the context of the larger United Nations prevention agenda; the importance to address the drivers of violent extremism; priorities for national plans of action to prevent violent extremism; and resource mobilization.

During the second day, which was the high-level segment of the Conference, the Co-Chairs, the United Nations Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and H.E. Mr. Didier Burkhalter, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland, Ministers, heads of Member State delegations, heads of international and regional organizations and heads of United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes shared their perspectives on action to prevent violent extremism at the national, regional and global level as well as on the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

The following are the non-binding conclusions of the Co-Chairs on the main points of discussion, which are meant to be indicative and not exhaustive. Regional groups and

individual Member States have also circulated their statements expressing their respective positions.

1. Strong condemnation was expressed about the recent attacks of terrorist and violent extremists killing hundreds of people in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Lebanon, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Belgium, Turkey, Pakistan and many other parts of the world. It was reaffirmed that violent extremism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. Violent extremism was recognized as a universal phenomenon that poses a direct assault on the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was also strongly condemned how violent extremism undermines collective efforts to maintain peace and security, foster sustainable development, promote the respect for human rights and deliver much needed humanitarian aid around the world. The United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism's call for concerted international action on an urgent basis to prevent violent extremism was welcomed.

2. The initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General was welcomed as a significant contribution to focusing the attention of the international community on the growing threat posed by violent extremism. The convening of the Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism by the United Nations and the Government of Switzerland was welcomed as a valuable forum to give further consideration to the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism within the context of the United Nations General Assembly's consideration of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in June 2016 as called for by General Assembly resolution 70/254.

3. It was recognized that there is a need to take a more comprehensive and balanced approach to address violent extremism, which is recommended in the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. It was also recognized that terrorism cannot be tackled by security or military measures alone. The need for a comprehensive and proactive approach was noted, which should also encompass systematic preventive measures that directly address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism as recognized in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in the short, medium and long-term.

4. It was also noted that it is essential to address the threat posed by violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism. Definitional aspects of violent extremism were also discussed. It was further noted that the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action takes a practical approach to the prevention of violent extremism in the context of Pillars I and IV of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

5. Recurring local and external factors were noted, which appear in a wide variety of countries and regions and which lead, sometimes in isolation and sometimes in combination with other factors, to radicalization and violent extremism – many of which are laid down in the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. It was also noted that important drivers include the lack of socioeconomic opportunities, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law, prolonged and unresolved conflicts as well as individual motivations and processes, collective grievances and victimization stemming from oppression, subjugation or foreign intervention; distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences; and leadership and social networks – all of

which can play a role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action. Concern was expressed about intolerance, xenophobia and Islamophobia.

6. Experiences in developing national and regional plans to prevent violent extremism were shared and the emphasis placed on the principle of national ownership by the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism was welcomed. It was noted that every Member State is best placed to address the national and local drivers of violent extremism, in full compliance with obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law. It was also noted that the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is an important building block for preventing violent extremism.

7. The more than 70 recommendations put forward by the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism for the consideration by Member States were also noted. In this regard, the importance of the seven priority areas identified in the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism was also noted as well as the role of the United Nations system in supporting Member States to prevent violent extremism. The comprehensive approach taken by the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in advocating for an "all-of-government", "all-of-society" and "all-of-UN" approach was further noted.

8. The importance of dialogue and conflict prevention to prevent violent extremism was noted. It was also noted that there is a need to foster inclusive political solutions where communities feel politically, socially or ethnically marginalized. The need for more national and regional early warning mechanisms to identify vulnerabilities and devise timely responses was further noted.

9. It was noted that upholding human rights and the rule of law and promoting good governance creates an environment that will reduce the appeal of violent extremism. All strategies and policies should be firmly grounded in and comply with international human rights law. The significance of engaging civil society and communities in preventing violent extremism was also noted. It was suggested to support confidence-building measures at the community level to reduce tensions and to increase inter and intra-community dialogue.

10. The need to positively engage young people was recognized as well as the need to engage them as partners to make a constructive contribution to the political and economic development of their societies and nations. In this regard, the contribution of Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) was recognized, which among others notes the important role youth plays as role models in preventing and countering violent extremism.

11. The importance of gender equality was also noted and the need to ensure the participation of women in building resilience and preventing violent extremism. The need to ensure that the protection and empowerment of women is a part of strategies devised to prevent violent extremism was further noted.

12. It was noted that better education, skills development and employment facilitation to counter poverty and social marginalization was needed. It was also noted that teaching respect for human rights and diversity, fostering critical thinking, promoting media and digital literacy is important in addressing violent extremism as well as the development of behavioural and socioemotional skills, which can contribute to peaceful coexistence and tolerance.

13. The importance of addressing online radicalization was further noted. It was noted that strategic communications should be enhanced, including through the Internet and social media as well as the tailoring of national communications strategies to local contexts. It was also noted that these strategies should be developed in close cooperation with social media companies and the private sector and put forward that positive messages could challenge the destructive narratives of violent extremists.

14. The importance of mobilizing the necessary resources was noted, which was essential for the success of preventing violent extremism at the national, regional and global levels. This should include the better use of existing and new resources and the promotion of public-private partnerships.

15. Support was expressed for a role of the United Nations in supporting Member States to prevent violent extremism, especially with regard to the provision of technical assistance to affected States. It was noted that the United Nations has a wealth of experience and expertise in the areas of maintaining peace and security, fostering sustainable development, promoting and protecting human rights and humanitarian action.

16. It was noted that no country or region alone will be able to address the threat of violent extremism. The call by the United Nations Secretary-General for stepped-up international cooperation and the need for a dynamic, coherent and multi-dimensional response from the entire international community was welcomed. His pledge to leverage the universal membership and the convening power of the United Nations to further strengthen international cooperation at the national, regional and global levels was also noted.

17. The prospect was noted to further consideration of the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism would take place in the context of the United Nations General Assembly review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy on the occasion of its 10th Anniversary and the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General on the review of Strategy in June 2016. Sincere appreciation was expressed to H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and H.E. Mr. Didier Burkhalter, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland, for convening the Geneva International Conference which has made a significant contribution to strengthening international co-operation in the face of the growing threat posed by violent extremism around the world.