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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*

7 and 8 April 2016
Geneva, Switzerland

CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND

The virulent spread of violent extremism has greatly troubled the international community over the last several years. Violent extremist groups are posing a direct assault on the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and are undermining our efforts to maintain peace and security, foster sustainable development, promote the respect for human rights and deliver much needed humanitarian aid.

In General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/254 on the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, adopted by consensus on 12 February 2016, Member States stressed that it is essential to address the threat posed by violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism, and recognized that violent extremism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. They welcomed the initiative of the Secretary-General and took note of his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (the Plan) ([A/70/674](#) – [A/70/675](#)). Member States also decided to give further consideration to the Plan at the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy review in June 2016 as well as in other relevant fora.

Building upon the Plan of Action and the formal debate of the General Assembly on the Plan in February, 2016, the Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism provides an opportunity for the international community to share experiences and good practices and to



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discuss challenges and opportunities to prevent violent extremism at the global, regional and national level.

CONFERENCE FORMAT AND PARTICIPATION

The Conference programme is divided in two days. The first day of the Conference will be held at senior expert level, with a focus on thematic issues related to the prevention of violent extremism. Discussions on the second day will commence with opening remarks from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, followed by interventions at the ministerial level. Heads of international and regional organisations and heads of UN agencies will also participate in the discussions on action at the national, regional and global level during the day.

Each of the Conference's thematic sessions during the **first day of the Conference (7 April)**, will be followed by interventions from the floor, which will provide Member States and other invited participants an opportunity to exchange views. Interventions from the floor will be invited by the respective chairpersons and to encourage discussion, each intervention should be strictly limited to **three minutes**.

As indicated in the invitation letters to Member States and regional organizations, Ministers and Heads of international and regional organizations that would like to speak during the High-level Ministerial Segment on day two (**8 April**) can be inscribed on the list of speakers by sending an e-mail to Mr. Tobias Peyerl at peyerl@un.org and shah4@un.org. Kindly specify delegation, full name and position of the speaker. The morning session is reserved primarily for statements by Ministers and Heads of International and Regional Organizations, and, if time permits, by Heads of delegations on a first come, first served-basis.

No formal outcome document will be adopted during the Conference. A non-binding Co-Chairs Summary will be presented during the concluding session. Contents of the summary will not be attributed to any participants.



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SECRETARY-GENERAL'S PLAN OF ACTION TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The Secretary-General's Plan of Action highlights that violent extremism is an affront to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Violent extremism undermines peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. No country or region is immune from its impacts.

In the Plan, the Secretary-General calls for a comprehensive approach encompassing not only essential security-based counter-terrorism measures but also systematic preventive steps to address the drivers of violent extremism. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted unanimously by the General Assembly by its resolution 60/288, explicitly addresses prevention and foresees balanced implementation across all four of its Pillars: (a) tackling conditions conducive to terrorism; (b) preventing and combating terrorism; (c) building countries' capacity to combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; and (d) ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law while countering terrorism. The Plan notes that over the last decade, there has been a strong emphasis on the implementation of measures under Pillar II of the Global Strategy, while Pillars I and IV have often been overlooked. Ahead of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Strategy, in 2016, the Secretary-General launched the Plan of Action with a focus on preventive measures for addressing violent extremism, including by reinvigorating those measures covered under Pillars I and IV of the Strategy, ensuring a more comprehensive implementation of the Strategy in view of the lessons learned over the past decade and the challenges that may lie ahead.

The Plan of Action underlines that violent extremism encompasses a wider category of manifestations and there is a risk that a conflation of the two terms may lead to the justification of an overly broad application of counter-terrorism measures, including against forms of conduct that should not qualify as terrorist acts. The Plan of Action addresses violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism and underlines that it is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief. It also notes that the Security Council, in its resolution 2178 (2014), made explicit the link between violent extremism and terrorism, underscores the importance of measures being in line with international norms and recognizes the need for prevention: "violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism", requires collective efforts, "including preventing radicalization, recruitment and mobilization of



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individuals into terrorist groups and becoming foreign terrorist fighters”. The Plan of Action also notes that definitions of “terrorism” and “violent extremism” are the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law. Just as the General Assembly has taken a practical approach to counter-terrorism through the adoption by consensus of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/60/288), the Plan of Action pursues a practical approach to preventing violent extremism, without venturing to address questions of definition.

Drivers of violent extremism

The Plan of Action notes that some research has been conducted on the drivers of violent extremism in the past decade and a half. However, there is no authoritative statistical data on the pathways to individual radicalization. While there are some recognizable trends and patterns, there are only a few areas of consensus that exist among researchers. More qualitative and quantitative research is required to adapt and refine actions and accelerate the learning process to match the speed with which this threat is evolving. The Plan distinguishes two main categories of drivers:

- “Push factors”—the conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges. These include: Lack of socio-economic opportunities; marginalization and discrimination; poor governance, violations of human rights and the Rule of Law; prolonged and unresolved conflicts; and radicalization in prisons.
- “Pull factors”—the individual motivations and processes, which play a key role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action. These include: Individual backgrounds and motivations; collective grievances and victimization stemming from domination, oppression, subjugation or foreign intervention; distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences; and leadership and social networks.

Recommendations and appeal to concerted action

The Plan is an appeal for concerted action by the international community. It provides more than 70 recommendations to Member States and the United Nations System to prevent the further spread of violent extremism. The recommendations aim to integrate prevention as an



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integral part in a comprehensive approach that will help tackle many of the underlying conditions that drive individuals to join violent extremist groups. The Plan calls for national ownership, recommending that Member States consider adopting their own National and Regional PVE Plans of Action. The recommendations identify actions that can be taken at the global, national and regional levels, including developing policy frameworks, the mobilization of resources, and concrete actions in seven priority areas, which Member States could consider in developing national and regional plans of action.

A. Setting the Policy Framework

- **Global Framework for Preventing Violent Extremism:** The UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, General Assembly resolutions, such as the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and Security Council resolutions, such as resolution 2178 (2014), provide common commitments and political will that can be translated to effect real change and new ways of formulating public policy to prevent violent extremism in each country and region, recognizing that solutions will be unique in each case. The UN, through the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) Office, its Country Teams and an “All-of-UN” approach, is ready to support Member States in developing their own policies and plans.
- **National PVE Plans of Action:** Each Member State should consider developing a National PVE Plan that sets national priorities to address the local drivers of violent extremism and complements national counter-terrorism strategies where they already exist. Such Plans should be developed in a multidisciplinary manner with input from governmental and non-governmental actors to fortify the social compact against violent extremism; address the Foreign Terrorist Fighters threat; prevent the financing of violent extremist and terrorist groups; align national development policies with the Sustainable Development Goals; promote public-private partnerships; and include effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure impact.
- **Regional PVE Plans of Action:** Regional cooperation needs to be enhanced, for instance through adopting comprehensive PVE strategies and strengthening sub-regional and regional organizations.
- **Mobilizing Resources:** Existing funds dedicated to countering terrorism and violent extremism should be adjusted to also address the drivers of violent extremism, other funding sources need to be identified—e.g. adapting existing funds to expand programming that is sensitive to preventing violent extremism.



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B. Seven Priority Areas to Take Action

1. **Dialogue and Conflict Prevention:** In the framework of the broader prevention efforts of the Secretary-General, recommendations include the need to engage opposing parties and regional actors, forge international consensus and engage religious leaders.
2. **Strengthening Good Governance, Human Rights and the Rule of Law:** To strengthen trust between Government institutions and communities to prevent marginalization and exclusion, recommendations include providing access to justice and strengthening fair, effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, reforming national legal frameworks and penitentiary systems and fostering basic service provision in a non-discriminatory manner.
3. **Engaging Communities:** For genuine community engagement, recommendations include developing participatory strategies with civil society and local communities, adopting community-oriented policing models, and developing local and family-based mentorship programmes.
4. **Empowering Youth:** To harness the idealism, creativity and energy of young people and others who feel disenfranchised, recommendations include supporting and enhancing young people's participation in PVE activities and integrating them into decision-making processes at local and national levels.
5. **Gender Equality and Empowering Women:** To foster women as a critical force for sustainable peace, recommendations include mainstreaming gender perspectives across efforts to prevent violent extremism and investing in research on women's roles in violent extremism.
6. **Education, Skill Development and Employment Facilitation:** To promote respect for human diversity and prepare young people to enter the workplace, recommendations include investing in programmes that promote "global citizenship" and provide comprehensive primary through tertiary education, including technical and vocational education.
7. **Strategic Communications, the Internet and Social Media:** To communicate a vision that offers tangible change to the disillusioned and disenfranchised, recommendations include developing and implementing national communication strategies and empowering victims to turn their suffering into a constructive force.



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C. Supporting Member States, Regional Bodies and Communities through the United Nations

- While recognizing that the primary responsibility to prevent violent extremism rests with Member States, the Secretary-General will encourage UN entities to prioritize, sensitize, and adapt existing programmes to target the drivers of violent extremism more precisely; and to introduce new initiatives to close gaps.
- Among other recommendations, the UN will adopt an “All-of-UN” approach to support national, regional and global efforts to prevent violent extremism; develop a standing UN PVE Platform, facilitated by the CTITF and supported by the UNCCT, to direct the implementation of the Plan; integrate PVE in relevant activities at the field level through UN Peace Operations and Country Teams within their existing mandates; offer relevant capacity-building programmes to assist Member States; support Governments to develop education programs that promote civic education, tolerance and respect for diversity; launch a Global UN PVE Communications Strategy; strengthen early and effective action through the Human Rights up Front initiative; launch a global awareness campaign to support victims of violent extremism; and encourage youth exchange programmes within and among Member States.

The Plan of Action sets an initial basis for a comprehensive approach to the fast evolving, multidimensional challenge of violent extremism.

This concept note provides a summary of the main elements of the Plan of Action and also provides the basis for discussion during the Conference.