

Check Against Delivery

**Remarks at the Virtual Dialogue with Human Rights and Civil Society Partners on Building a Better Paradigm to Prevent and Counter Terrorism**

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Thank you to the Government of Spain and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism for convening this dialogue and for the invitation to speak as part of this distinguished panel. As a member of civil society, we appreciate the opportunity to share our views on this priority issue. The challenges of realizing counterterrorism efforts in a manner that safeguards civic space and promotes and protects human rights have been mounting; we therefore welcome the focus of this event and appreciate that this topic will receive further attention at the upcoming Regional Conference in Malaga.

Since the founding of the [Global Center on Cooperative Security](http://www.globalcenter.org) in 2004, we have worked closely together with the United Nations, governments, the private sector, and civil society partners to advance inclusive, human rights-based policies, partnerships, and practices that address the root causes of violent extremism and terrorism. While we primarily achieve this through our capacity development and training work, important forums like this one allow us to share our experience, as well as the views of our network of civil society partners around the world. Indeed, they stand to gain the most from the actions that must follow this dialogue.

In my remarks, I would like to:

1. Highlight the importance of civil society involvement in counterterrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts;
2. Draw attention to the specific areas where counterterrorism and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT) frameworks are limiting civic space; and
3. Underscore the need for greater gender and human rights integration and monitoring.

**Roles of Civil Society**

The positive contributions of civil society to peace and security have been well documented. Civil society organizations are uniquely placed to work with and within their communities to address the drivers of violence and conflict, respond to humanitarian crises, advance human rights and socioeconomic development, and support peace maintenance and good governance measures.

In the fields of counterterrorism and P/CVE, these roles have been particularly valuable as multilateral entities and governments often take top-down, security-centered approaches that may miss the mark or aggravate already difficult circumstances for populations whose human security is threatened.

Civil society also serves as a partner to governments, filling roles where governments do not have the necessary capacity, trust, or expertise. In so doing, they bring greater attention to the grievances experienced by communities and shine a light on how a lack of good governance and socioeconomic and

political marginalization have served to drive extremist violence. At the same time, while it is critical that civil society is meaningfully engaged and included, they should not be expected to take over the government's responsibility to protect its citizens and provide critical services.

Peacebuilders, human rights defenders, and other civil society actors work under extremely difficult circumstances. Over 95 percent of all deaths related to terrorism happen in countries with at least one ongoing violent conflict; the ten countries most affected by terrorist attacks are all engaged in at least one armed conflict. While the number of attacks and associated deaths resulting from terrorism have declined steadily, terrorist activity is spreading to a growing number of countries and becoming more embedded within some of the world's most protracted conflicts. As a result, a wider array of civil society and humanitarian partners are having to navigate more complex operating environments as counterterrorism laws and policies influence and govern their actions.

### **Shrinking Civic Space**

Parallel to this more diffuse threat has been an ever-expanding framework for countering terrorism and its financing over the last twenty years. Detecting and disrupting the flow of terrorism financing has proven to be critical, using proportionate and risk-based CFT measures to prevent terrorists from raising funds, recruiting new supporters, and planning and executing attacks. However, CFT measures have contributed to reductions in civic space and freedom of association, created barriers to the efficient operations of non-profits, hindered the timely delivery of humanitarian aid, and impeded financial access for non-profit organizations. Complex CFT regulatory frameworks and overlapping sanctions regimes contribute to grueling compliance measures and rising costs for financial institutions and non-profit organizations, which intersects with a lingering misconception that the non-profit sector is uniformly or inherently higher risk for terrorism financing abuse – which it is not. At best, the consequences are the unintended result of a misapplication of international CFT standards or inadequately risk-based approaches. However, they can also reflect instances of intentional abuse and misuse of counterterrorism and CFT measures to restrict civic spaces, stifle political dissent, or target human rights defenders. Examples of these negative consequences are well documented, particularly their acute impacts on women-led and grassroots civil society organizations.

### **Gender and Human Rights Integration and Monitoring**

Drivers of violent extremism, modalities of engagement in acts of violence, resources mobilized by governments to prevent and respond to political violence, and the impact of political violence vary enormously across groups of boys, girls, men, women, and people of diverse gender identities and expressions. Gender plays a substantial role in mediating relationships to power, in the allocation of and access to goods and services, as well as rights and responsibilities. At the international level, some gains have been made on promoting a more gender-sensitive approach to analyzing violent extremism and developing counterterrorism and P/CVE policies and programs, though most references continue to be limited to the roles of women and girls. A gender-sensitive approach must account for the varying experiences, needs, and challenges of people with different gender identities, alongside other intersecting identities such as (but not limited to) socio-economic class, age, disability, and ethnic and cultural identities.

For our interventions to be effective, equitable, and just, they must be gender-sensitive, prioritize human rights, and center those that are affected most by violent extremism and efforts to prevent and counter it. We must move beyond the elaboration of norms, principles, and good practices towards their operationalization in all counterterrorism and P/CVE policies and programs.

To realize lasting gains in our collective counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts, it is incumbent upon governments and multilateral entities to ensure adequate human rights safeguards. Indeed, the counterterrorism space is rife with abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms under the guise of counterterrorism. These abuses can be expected to become even more widespread with growing authoritarianism and an ever-more expansive counterterrorism agenda. Among other actions, the establishment of an independent human rights oversight mechanism in the United Nations system, as proposed within the context of the Seventh Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, should be viewed as an imperative given today's trends.

## **Conclusions**

1. Civil society will continue to work tirelessly to prevent violent extremism, self-organize to have its voices heard, and hold those in power accountable. Governments and multilateral organizations need to put in place the modalities and resources to establish and sustain meaningful partnerships with a diverse range of nongovernmental stakeholders.
2. Governments must comply with international law, including human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law, in all measures to combat terrorism and its financing. Multilateral organizations need to speak out more loudly, frequently, and consistently against the intentional and unintentional misuse and abuse of counterterrorism and CFT frameworks to shrink civic space, reduce human rights, and hinder financial access.
3. Mainstreaming and closely monitoring human rights and a gender-sensitive approach in counterterrorism and P/CVE policies and programs optimizes their efficiency and decreases unintended consequences and harms.

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