

OHCHR

Open briefing of the Counter-Terrorism Committee on
“The Role of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism”, United Nations
Headquarters, New York, 9 September 2015

Distinguished Delegates,

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights warmly welcomes today’s open briefing on such an important topic.

Women and girls have been targeted by violent extremist groups as has been indicated in a number of reports issued by OHCHR and other parts of the UN system. They have used violence against them and otherwise abused women’s human rights. Accountability for such abuses is required. It is also crucial that strategies responding to violent extremism and terrorism - at a minimum - do not undermine gender equality and women’s empowerment; instead, such strategies should contribute to it by integrating a gender perspective as part of a human rights-based approach.

However, we are concerned that some anti-terrorism and CVE policies and strategies may in fact have an adverse impact on women’s human rights and women human rights defenders. For example, some CVE programmes appear to perpetuate gender stereotypes or can put women in harm’s way. Furthermore, the militarization associated with counter-terrorism measures has exposed women in some States to sexual violence by security forces. Other measures purportedly taken to combat violent extremism impose discriminatory dress codes on women. Counter-terrorism legislation in some countries has placed restrictions on financial regulations, which has impacted on the ability of women’s organizations to operate. While these are some examples, more research is needed on the complex relationship between gender equality and countering terrorism.

At the same time, OHCHR would recommend to Member States:

- Firstly, in general, to ensure that any measure aimed at combatting terrorism and/or violent extremism is human rights-compliant. This entails promoting gender equality. States should

repeal gender discriminatory legislation and implement inclusive and non-discriminatory policies as part of the response to terrorism and violent extremism. Strategies that are not fully grounded in human rights norms feed grievances that can contribute to creating conditions conducive to terrorism and violent extremism, and thus undermine the very purpose that they purport to serve.

- Second, to ensure that their support to victims is gender sensitive. As indicated, women and girls have suffered abuses and violations of their human rights at the hands of violent extremists. Yet, women and girls are more than victims; they must be part of the solution. States should therefore engage actively with women in all responses to violent extremism and terrorism as a measure that is both preventive and responsive. Women and girls also have active roles in violent extremist and terrorist groups, such as mobilizers and fighters; addressing this also needs to be human rights-compliant. Overall, women's diverse roles in terrorism and counter-terrorism require more than ensuring they are *part* of the countering violent extremism agenda: a human rights based approach to CVE and counter-terrorism entails integrating a *gender* perspective. Consultation and collaboration with civil society is a key component of such an approach.

- Finally, we encourage the CTC to further strengthen its commitment to women's human rights and gender equality as core components of all responses to violent extremism and terrorism.

Thank you.