

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

U.S. Prepared Remarks

We'd like to thank the CTC for holding this open briefing and the distinguished presenters from Member States and the UN who provided very useful regional perspectives and explanations of what the UN is already doing to address this important topic.

The United States is committed to countering terrorism and violent extremism and we believe that building partnerships at the global, regional, and local levels is essential to 1.) degrading and defeating today's most pressing terrorist threat: ISIL; 2.) confronting the false ideologies espoused by terrorist groups like ISIL; 3.) addressing the underlying social, political, and economic drivers of violent extremism that terrorists exploit; and 4.) ensuring respect for human rights and rule of law and that diverse societies welcome and respect people of all faiths and backgrounds.

Women have an essential role in building these partnerships.

Secretary Kerry and British Foreign Secretary Hammond recently wrote: “We must continue to integrate women as equal partners in international efforts to counter violent extremism, prevent conflict and build peace. Women are uniquely affected by war and their perspectives are indispensable in resolving disputes, ensuring accountability for crimes, minimizing the suffering of civilians and designing long-term recovery programs.”

Furthermore, the ongoing conflict in Syria and the flow of foreign terrorist fighters there and to other conflict zones highlights the fact that many women flock to the ranks of ISIL. Women and girls are also victims of brutal violence perpetrated by violent extremist groups like ISIL and Boko Haram. But, just as women are victims and perpetrators of violent extremism, they must also be part of our efforts to counter it. Common sense and past experience tells us that women can wield significant influence in their families and in their communities. We can support women and girls in creating a new narrative that focuses on the concerns of their families and neighbors and their communities.

The United States remains a staunch supporter of dialogues and efforts to include women's perspectives in developing multi-sectoral approaches to CVE. This includes our work with partners to develop, promote and help advance implementation of good practices such as those developed by the Global Counterterrorism Forum on issues ranging from foreign terrorist fighters to the role of women in countering violent extremism.

These efforts are anchored in a simple yet powerful concept, that we are all safer, our societies stronger, our efforts to resolve conflict and gain justice for human rights abuses more successful, when women have a say in efforts to promote peace and security.

Fifteen years ago the Security Council recognized the important role women play in promoting peace and security globally and adopted resolution 1325; a landmark resolution that established the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda and asked member states to develop national action plans (NAP).

UNSCR 1325 is also of critical importance to our shared CVE goals; it has mandated women's inclusion in all areas of prevention, protection and the international response to conflict. This promise of inclusion means that we have a role in consistently demonstrating steadfast support for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights, for the protection of vulnerable populations, for women's voice and role in all peace-building efforts, and for a better understanding of women's diverse roles and agency in countering violent extremism.

Women have a unique - and, until recently, largely untapped - role to play in CVE. Mothers play an important role in their children's early education, so they must be engaged to help build and sustain resilience outside of formal schooling. For example, the international Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) network is training local women leaders in how to identify and address signs of radicalization to violence in their families and neighborhoods through "Mother's' Schools." The Mothers' Schools approach draws on social psychology and empowers women to train their peers.

Beyond their roles in a family, women are members – and often leaders – of their communities. Their influence as communicators, educators, entrepreneurs, members of the security sector, faith leaders and faith practitioners gives them unique access and nuanced perspectives about local vulnerabilities. We've seen women develop early warning and response networks, build relationships with law enforcement or service as police, and bridge divisions across their communities as

a tool to prevent violence. Those experiences and perspectives need to be at the table, but more importantly, they have a right to be there as citizens and stakeholders.

Beyond this, women have a number of other complex roles to play around violent extremism, many of which we do not yet understand. Mindful of the existing gap in research on gender and CVE, the United States is taking concrete steps to address this by investing in research so that we can develop and refine the inclusive tools that make us all safer. In addition to academic research, community-wide engagement through civil society, religion, and other methods is critical for better understanding the diverse push and pull factors that radicalize women and men to violence, and the diverse ways women and men are working together to counter violent extremism.

It is important to acknowledge the role women play in supporting and perpetrating terrorist acts-whether by legitimizing the radicalization that leads to violence or as attackers. We should ensure that our broader CVE work targets women as well as men, such as developing counter-narratives that speak to young women at-risk of recruitment by violent extremist groups or focusing rehabilitation and reintegration programs for women who provide support for terrorist acts but have not themselves committed an attack.

On July 21, 2015, the U.S. Government and the United Institute of Peace co-hosted “Women and Countering Violent Extremism: Strengthening Policy Responses and Ensuring Inclusivity.” The event was attended by over 300 policy makers, academics, civil society leaders and advocates. These participants made a number of policy recommendations that we strongly encourage partners to integrate into preparations for upcoming high level ministerial deliverables around women peace and security and countering violent extremism.

These include:

- Recommendations that UN member states should explore how a concerted effort can integrate women’s perspectives in their CT and CVE strategy making. Within these strategies, protection of women and girls from violence should be considered a key priority and not a collateral concern;
- Recommendations that the international community consider enabling and supporting networks among women and youth working to counter violent extremism;
- Recommendations that the international community expand the research base as a means for identifying promising engagement and protection

strategies as well as approaches to promoting consistent engagement with and empowerment of women; and

- Recommendations that UN member states consider integrating women into the security sector through international security partnerships, given women's role in the security sectors as an important component of improving community-police relations.

In conclusion, the current threat of violent extremism makes it even more pressing that we enlist and empower women and girls as agents of peace. We know women can be a part of the problem, which only deepens our resolve to make sure they are also part of the solution in efforts to counter violent extremism. Women can be critical actors in local CVE efforts due to their potential for identifying signs of radicalization, discouraging its occurrence, and serving as “force multipliers” to raise awareness among other women.

As we take steps to deepen our investments in countering foreign terrorist fighters through implementation of UNSCR 2178 and increase our focus on CVE, including through hosting a Summit event on the margins of the upcoming UN General Assembly on Counter-ISIL and CVE, we also want to recognize the importance of UNSCR 1325, and we call on partner governments from around the world to develop, resource, and implement National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security that make this important link and lay a foundation for realizing CVE at the national level.

Today, 15 years after the passage of UNSCR 1325 and 20 since the Beijing Platform for Action, Member States have a tremendous opportunity to energize efforts that bring women into efforts to maintain peace and security.

The United Nations also has an important opportunity to energize these efforts, including through the UN Secretary's General's Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism to be released later this year, which we hope will also address the role of women in CVE and pave the way for ensuring a comprehensive, whole of UN approach to addressing this critical issue, as well as the upcoming 10th anniversary of the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy in 2016.

Thank you again to the CTC for holding this open briefing on such an important issue.