COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORIST NARRATIVES

The United Nations Security Council has recognized that acts of terrorism and violent extremism cannot be prevented through repressive measures alone, placing an increased emphasis on the need for a comprehensive approach. One aspect of such an approach is countering violent extremism (CVE). Central to the concept of CVE is the importance of addressing the “conditions conducive” to the spread of terrorism, which are defined by the General Assembly in its United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. It is essential to also take into account grievances that may be exploited by terrorists and their supporters and to develop constructive solutions.

In its resolution 2178 (2014), on stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), the Security Council underscores that CVE is an “essential element” in addressing the threat to international peace and security posed by FTFs. The Council encourages Member States to engage with relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in developing strategies to counter the violent extremist narrative that can incite terrorist acts. States are also called upon to address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism, including by empowering youth, families, women, religious, cultural, and education leaders, and all other concerned groups of civil society, and promoting social inclusion and cohesion. The adoption of resolution 2178 (2014) is in part a natural extension of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee’s long-standing approach to the implementation of resolution 1624 (2005), which calls on States to prohibit incitement to commit acts of terrorism and to counter incitement motivated by extremism and intolerance.

Initiatives for countering incitement and violent extremism can take many forms. Common to all methods is an emphasis on dialogue, inclusion, and the promotion of understanding. States have, for example, created forums for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, or platforms that bring together governmental and non-governmental actors to advise on CVE strategies. Similar steps have been taken in the fields of education.

In 2015, the Security Council adopted resolutions that highlighted in particular the importance of including women and youth in CVE strategies. The Council’s resolution 2242 (2015) urges Member States and the United Nations system “to ensure the participation and leadership of women and women’s organizations in developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism.” Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) encourages States “to consider ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict, including institutions and mechanisms to counter violent extremism.”

MORE INFORMATION

More info about CTC and CTED, including the CTC Chair and CTED’s Executive Director, can be found here:

A list of FAQs is available at
Terrorist groups such as ISIL (Da’esh) have been successful in using propaganda for multiple purposes, including for recruitment and radicalization to violence. CVE measures also incorporate initiatives for counter-messaging and the use of social media and other communications channels to counter terrorist narratives and promote alternative narratives based on respect for human rights and human dignity. Security Council resolution 2354 (2017), which builds on a Security Council Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2016/6), focuses on countering terrorist narratives. The resolution sets out a series of guidelines for implementing a “comprehensive international framework” in the area of counter-narratives and amplifying positive and credible alternatives to audiences vulnerable to extremist messages. These guidelines stress, among other factors, that UN actions in the field of countering terrorist narratives should be based on the Charter of the United Nations; that Member States have the primary responsibility in countering terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism; that relevant UN entities should ensure greater coordination and coherence with donors and recipients of counter-terrorism capacity-building; that counter-narrative measures and programmes should be tailored to different contexts; that all measures must comply with Member States’ obligations under international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law, and international humanitarian law; and that research into the drivers of terrorism and violent extremism is necessary to develop more focused counter-narrative programmes.

UNSCR 2354 (2017) requests the Counter-Terrorism Committee to “identify and compile existing good practices in countering terrorist narratives, in coordination with the CTITF [Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force] Office [now UNOCT], the CTITF Working Group on Communications, and where appropriate in consultation with other relevant non-United Nations entities.” As noted in the Sixth Report of the Secretary-General on threats posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security, the Counter-Terrorism Committee and CTED will continue to facilitate international cooperation to “implement the comprehensive international framework to counter terrorist narratives, identify and compile existing good practice,” and provide guidelines and technical support.

These efforts should recognize how counter-terrorist and alternative narratives can address the different ways that women, men, girls, and boys are impacted, and their multifaceted roles in shaping solutions and influencing decision-making pertaining to effectively countering terrorism. All initiatives should build upon the considerable research and scholarly studies that have been conducted over the last few years, including by regional organizations, to better understand the role of counter-narratives and alternative narratives, both online and offline, as well as of strategic communications to this effect.