

Slide 1

Salutations

Slide 2

- When UN Sec Gen Ban Ki Moon introduced the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in 2016, we saw a new focus on prevention that leverages a whole-of-UN approach to tackle the drivers of violent extremism;
- It covers a remarkable number of priority areas, including engaging communities, empowering youth, as well as strategic communications;
- The Digital Strategic Communications Division (DSCD), my division, at the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism, part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, had been set up in 2016 to better understand and tackle radicalization in the form of dangerously persuasive violent extremist narratives that can be easily disseminated online and through social media
- It is a problem duly recognized by the international community, as the UN Security Council Resolution 2354 was adopted in 2017 specifically to develop a comprehensive international framework for countering terrorist narratives.
- When we first started the division, we went at it alone. We developed a number of media campaigns to counter the deluge of VE material online, but something didn't feel right. We didn't seem to be getting the numbers we hoped for, and we weren't sure whether our messages were having their intended effect.
- But in 2017, we decided to try a new approach, and organised a youth workshop. Within that workshop, we ran a hackathon, just to see how well young people would do in disseminating PVE material online, and we incentivized them by making it a little competitive. We thought that maybe we can use what we learned here to help us tweak our approaches.
- Well, our approaches, as it turns out, didn't really need to be tweaked, they needed to be overhauled. The undergraduate students taking part in the hackathon had managed to outperform our results by, and I am not exaggerating when I say this, a factor of thousands.
- To give you an idea, we were getting 200 or 300 impressions a month, that is, the number of times our media products appeared on somebody's computer or mobile phone screens. The day we

ran the hackathon, our hashtag tracking revealed that our 30 students had managed to get over 440,000 impressions in the span of *one day*.

- It was a hard pill to swallow, but we learnt the greatest lesson we had to learn about preventing violent extremism: HUMILITY. We had to acknowledge that we, working from the public sector, cannot go it alone if we were to be serious about it.

Slide 3

- We need to work with those that understand how technology, how communities, how people, how certain demographics, how certain narratives, actually work with on the ground realities, and that the effort really needs a multidisciplinary, multi stakeholder approach, and the best way to achieve this is a whole-of-society approach.
- One of the stakeholder's we've been working most closely with has been young people. They are increasingly recognized as being an important piece of the PVE puzzle, as affirmed by UNSCR 2250, 2419 and 2535, which brought us to better understand not to look at them only as beneficiaries, but also as credible, worthwhile partners
- There are many reasons why this is the case, and one of them is that they are in a better position to develop more authentic and resonant messaging that really speaks to their peers. Speaking to our children, for example, can be really challenging, with all the new terms, new ideas, new passions, and If we are having such difficulties at home, how are we expected to successfully connect with youth over something as complex as violent extremism? But with their help, I believe we move closer towards that goal.
- Young people can also help us navigate the uncharted waters of the social media space. The platforms of yesterday are not the ones of today, and many practitioners find themselves at a loss in trying to understand new platforms such as tik tok and discord being used by young people when they have just barely mastered the previous platforms. Working with youth can help shorten the learning curve.
- My division has been running a number of youth related workshops to harness their potential, and even the pandemic didn't stop us from running the three workshops we ran in 2021, where we explored creative ideas on how they can express their grievances and connect with the public sphere.

Slide 4

- We also worked with Civil Society partners, as they can serve as powerful and credible voices to disseminate messages, particularly because they are seen as distinct from government stakeholders.
- They are strategically situated to offer insights about their beneficiaries as they are closer to the ground and embedded in their communities.
- Their insights also present opportunities to understand divergent opinions and even critical perspectives that are not sugar-coated, to help us achieve realistic outcomes.
- In 2021, we held the “Developing Effective and Evidence-based Programmes for Enhancing Resilience” (DEEPER) programme with Civil Society partners in collaboration with UNDP Malaysia to help them build capacity for monitoring and evaluation and programme design, with a handbook forthcoming later this year.

Slide 5

- We also had collaborations with media professionals to discuss the framing of VE-related events and ideas in the news, as they are in a position to shape the national conversation and raise public awareness over the issues;
- A set of guidelines would be useful for conflict sensitive reporting, but only if they are developed by the by media practitioners themselves and industry-led;
- We held a Media Professionals pilot programme in 2021, also in collaboration with UNDP Malaysia, and a handbook is also forthcoming later this year.

Slide 6 (skip)

Slide 7

- Former extremists also comprise another group of stakeholders, uniquely credible due to their experience of radicalization and de-radicalization;
- In our Radicalization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (3R) programme, we interviewed former extremists, their families and the rehabilitation officers, provides a rare insight into what drives Malaysians to violent extremes and how we can potentially bring them back

- This initiative could not have been possible without collaboration with our generous partners, the Prison's Department of Malaysia

Slide 8 (skip)

Slide 9

- Last year, we embarked on a project that seems to embody at least one of the aspects of a whole of society approach towards PVE. We ran two workshops on Early Warning and Early Response, where we collaborated with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime and Malaysian Law Enforcement
- The aim was to explore possible mechanisms for detecting early signs of violent radicalisation;
- We also looked at how to empower local community actors in carrying out early intervention activities;
- What we hope to develop was a set of radicalisation indicators that can help prevent casual interest in violent extremism from metastasizing into a costly and challenging problem that had to be dealt by law enforcement and the legal system;
- We found that this is something that must truly embrace a whole-of-society approach to be effective, one that needed the buy-in of a diverse range of stakeholders

Slide 10 (Briefly)

- We have also adopted a gender mainstreaming approach to our programmes by ensuring that our youth workshop had equal representation, important for peer-to-peer efforts to be successful;
- We also started the "Gendered Approaches to Outreach on Radicalization" (GATOR) programme to better understand gender dynamics in violent extremism, a workshop is forthcoming this year;

Slide 11

- Both at my division as well as in my organisation, we are committed to expanding our whole-of-society approach to include even more stakeholders and methodologies;
- We are looking to include educators in PVE programming
- Also looking to include sports communities;
- We are also looking to develop a monitoring and evaluation database that can help share the knowledge and experiences of PVE practitioners;

- We hope to develop better capacities that can help us analyse trending violent extremist narratives and how they are being disseminated;
- And we also look forward to further enhancing public, private and community participation in PVE efforts.

I would just like to end my presentation with a paraphrase of the traditional African proverb that it takes a whole village to raise a child, it also takes a whole of society approach to prevent violent extremism.