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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating Inclusive National Strategies to Counter Violent Extremism

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While nations around the globe struggle to stem the spread of violent extremism, UN member states are developing or refining tailored national strategies to prevent and counter this threat. As countries review their approaches to counter violent extremism (CVE), they should take into account the best practices that have emerged from fifteen years of national strategies around the UN Security Council's resolutions on women, peace, and security.

A critical finding: the strategic integration of women in the design and implementation of national-level CVE strategies is vital to the effectiveness and sustainability of these efforts.

In October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325,¹ declaring that women are essential actors in creating peace and stability. As a result of that landmark call, 50 countries have designed national-level strategies—known as national action plans² on women,

peace, and security—aimed at translating the resolution into reality. These action plans are comprehensive mechanisms for integrating gender throughout a country’s defense, diplomacy, and development processes, with the goal of increasing women’s participation in preventing, resolving, and rebuilding from conflict. In some cases, the development of more wide-ranging national action plans has involved nearly two dozen government agencies and institutions, requiring sophisticated coordination and monitoring to ensure successful implementation.

During the White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism, held in February 2015, ministers from nearly 70 countries and senior officials from multilateral bodies committed to an “Action Agenda” focused on addressing the underlying conditions that relate to the spread of violent extremism. Many of these countries are now developing or refining inclusive national-level plans to implement this agenda—moving away from an overreliance on military counterterrorism approaches to strategies that address the root causes of extremism.

The following recommendations reflect insights from national action plans on women, peace, and security that can inform national-level CVE strategies. These recommendations are grounded in Inclusive Security’s work with governments and civil society to create high-impact national action plans. They are also informed by Inclusive Security’s research, training, and advocacy around women and CVE.

The strategic integration of women in the design and implementation of national-level CVE strategies is vital to the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of these efforts.

1. **CVE approaches aimed at addressing the underlying causes of violence must prioritize meaningful inclusion of key stakeholders, particularly women, in their development and implementation.** This is particularly critical in the creation of preventative strategies to combat violent extremism. Without the inclusion of women, particularly from civil society and the security sector, these initiatives are likely to overlook many of the factors that have driven men and women into violent extremism. Evidence shows that when women are present in peace processes, they broaden discussions to address the underlying drivers of conflict and the structural barriers that contribute to violence.³
2. **The creation and full implementation of national action plans on women, peace, and security can, and should, be a key component of national-level CVE strategies.** These action plans coordinate across numerous government agencies and institutions and hold them accountable to integrating women into CVE-related processes. Additionally, evaluating country experiences in creating and implementing

national action plans can provide best practices that can be particularly informative for the development of inclusive and effective CVE strategies. For example, the Bosnian national action plan on UNSCR 1325 was the first in the Balkans and is a rare example of a policy that requires coordination of nearly 20 agencies and institutions, a strong commitment to involve civil society in a comprehensive and strategic way, and dedicated funds for implementation. One result: the country has seen a marked increase in its recruitment of female police, increasing its operational capacity to document and investigate crimes.

3. **National-level CVE strategies must recognize and account for the broad range of roles women play in supporting and countering violent extremism.** Though predominantly portrayed only as victims of terrorism, women perform a wide spectrum of roles in driving and promoting violent extremism as well as preventing and countering it. Throughout the history of terrorism, women have served as active fighters, spies, recruiters, fundraisers, and in support functions for different organizations. However, in many places impacted by ongoing terrorist and insurgent activity, women continue to also be at the forefront of moderating extremist influence. If preventative initiatives are to be effective, they must account for this diversity in roles.
4. **Effective development of national-level CVE and counterterrorism plans requires the full integration of women in the security sector, particularly law enforcement.** Civil society leaders in many conflict-affected countries say that lack of trust and negative experiences with law enforcement drive the corrosion of state legitimacy and generate grievances that contribute to radicalization.⁴ Having police forces that are representative of the population they are tasked to protect will help to better address these grievances. Research shows that policewomen are vital to enhancing the operational effectiveness of police forces—partially through building trust with local communities—as they are more likely to reduce the occurrence of human rights abuses, access marginalized communities, limit the use of excessive force, and more efficiently de-escalate tension.⁵

Interagency coordination mechanisms are challenging to implement, but critical for the effectiveness of any context-specific national CVE strategy.

5. **National-level CVE strategies should include a formal coordination mechanism to overcome bureaucratic hurdles.** Addressing bureaucratic obstacles can be one of the most significant challenges in developing and implementing a national-level strategy that involves numerous actors. Building a transparent and comprehensive coordination mechanism will help align policy and practice. In some cases, governments that imple-
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mented national action plans on women, peace, and security established coordination boards to facilitate stakeholder engagement in the process, including the drafting phase. Internal coordination mechanisms can also help recalibrate existing institutional rules and regulations to reflect the objectives of a CVE strategy.

6. **National CVE plans should have a central “owner” who can ensure coordination of multiple government bodies.** With so many institutions and agencies involved in CVE efforts, it’s important to establish a central owner who can, ideally, use both incentives and sanctions to hold agencies and institutions accountable. A central owner can turn strategic policy proclamations into operational, time-bound, and specific agency plans so that each institution is clear on its roles and responsibilities. For example, when developing Afghanistan’s national action plan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs served as the lead government coordinator, responsible for negotiating with almost 20 other ministries and ensuring implementation roles were clearly established.
7. **Objectives and activities of national strategies should be designed to fit within existing government structures, when possible.** Comprehensive national CVE strategies will require taking advantage of existing personnel with expertise in a wide range of fields interconnected with CVE and promoting cooperation across government sectors. New institutions, bodies, and/or personnel may be needed for coordination, but harnessing those that already exist will save resources and avoid duplicating or adding new layers of bureaucracy.

The engagement and support of civil society is crucial to the effectiveness of strategies aimed at preventing and combating violent extremism.

8. **CVE policies must recognize that civil society organizations are vital interlocutors between government institutions, particularly law enforcement, and communities.** As organizations serving communities throughout the country, they can identify the security concerns and needs of the populations most impacted by violence. Civil society also plays a key advocacy and accountability role, forcing needed institutional reforms and ensuring that state and security institutions don’t take actions that harm populations and strengthen citizens’ grievances against the state. Developers of national CVE policies should consult with civil society organizations to ensure these efforts effectively address the needs of communities.

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9. **Dedicated funding streams to support civil society organizations in CVE programming should be incorporated into all national-level CVE strategies.** This assistance should include access to technical training on program design and grant reporting. Organizations conducting innovative and organic CVE work often do not have the personnel and resources needed to go through the sometimes long processes of applying for and reporting on large-scale government grants.
10. **CVE plans must allocate adequate funding to advance multi-sectoral CVE initiatives that build bridges between civil society and actors in the security sector.** Civil society organizations can often be a greater force for change when they are able to work with and understand the challenges facing other actors, including politicians and security institutions. In particular, bringing women together from different sectors to advocate for inclusive security approaches is an effective way to bridge the sector divides.

Establishing, and continually reassessing, systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact and effectiveness of CVE-dedicated programming is essential.

11. **National-level CVE strategies must include systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of government efforts and those of grantees.** The cornerstone of monitoring and evaluation efforts is establishing clear indicators for success. But countries often do not devote the resources needed to track and evaluate the impact of the initiatives they are supporting. Any development of national CVE policies must be accompanied by dedicated staff to monitor and evaluate results and impact.
12. **CVE-dedicated funding must include financial and technical support for grantees to establish strong monitoring and evaluation systems.** Policies should prioritize resources and/or technical support for small organizations, particularly women – and youth-focused civil society entities. This will allow them to secure the personnel and/or capacity-building training necessary to evaluate programmatic impact.

Endnotes

- 1 United Nations Security Council S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000): daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement
- 2 For more information on Inclusive Security’s work on national action plans on women, peace, and security and a list of countries that have adopted them, please visit: actionplans.inclusivesecurity.org/
- 3 Marie O’Reilly, Andrea O Suilleabhain, and Thania Paffenholz, “Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes.” (New York: International Peace Institute, 2015), 11-13. www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking-rev.pdf
- 4 The Institute for Inclusive Security and Global Center on Cooperative Security, “Strengthening Rule of Law Responses to Counter Violent Extremism: What Role for Civil Society in South Asia?” (Washington, DC: May 2015). www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/May-2015_Strengthening-Rule-of-Law-Responses-to-Counter-Violent-Extremism.pdf
- 5 Dr. Kim Lonsway et al., “Hiring and Retaining More Women: The Advantages to Law Enforcement Agencies,” (Beverly Hills, CA: National Center for Women & Policing, Spring 2003), 2. womenandpolicing.com/pdf/newadvantagesreport.pdf; Allison Peters, “Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Pakistan: Why Policewomen Must Have a Role,” (Washington, DC: The Institute for Inclusive Security, 2014). www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/IIS-Pakistan-Memo-v5c-web.pdf

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