

SUBJECT: Input of the United States concerning best practices and major challenges in addressing the negative effects of terrorism on the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly the right to life, liberty, and security of person.

The United States appreciates the opportunity to provide the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with a brief overview of our best practices with regard to respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights while countering and preventing violent extremism. The following input is slightly updated and amended from our response on best practices for countering and preventing violent extremism, which we provided to OHCHR in April 2016. Our response highlights our new national strategy on countering violent extremism; identifies best practices, including working closely with civil society, and our work with expert bodies and regional organizations; and recognizes developments within the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to mainstream countering terrorism and violent extremism across the UN system.

The United States believes that security and respect for human rights are not only compatible but can and must coexist. A comprehensive countering violent extremism (CVE) approach highlights the importance of good governance and respect for human rights in preventing and countering violent extremism. The United States will continue to support an all-of-UN and whole-of-society approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism while promoting human rights, including by co-chairing the Human Rights Council's Group of Friends on Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism.

To be effective, sustainable, and consistent with our obligations under international law, all legislation, policies, strategies, and practices adopted to prevent and counter violent extremism must be firmly grounded in respect for human rights and the rule of law.

As President Obama said at the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism (White House CVE Summit) on February 19, 2015:

When people are oppressed, and human rights are denied — particularly along sectarian lines or ethnic lines — when dissent is silenced, it feeds violent extremism. It creates an environment that is ripe for terrorists to exploit. When peaceful, democratic change is impossible, it feeds into the terrorist propaganda that violence is the only answer available.

And so we must recognize that lasting stability and real security require democracy. That means free elections where people can choose their own future, and independent judiciaries that uphold the rule of law, and police and security forces that respect human rights, and free speech and freedom for civil society groups. And it means freedom of religion — because when people are free to practice their faith as they choose, it helps hold diverse societies together.

The spread of violent extremism and terrorism pose significant challenges for U.S. national security and the security of the international community. Violent extremists speaking a variety of languages, born of many races and ethnic groups, and belonging to diverse religions continue to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize people — especially young people — to engage in terrorist acts. Their actions not only increase threats against States, but also undermine our efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, foster sustainable development, protect human rights, promote the rule of law, and expand prosperity.

The U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism

In May 2016, the U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development released its first-ever Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism, which carries forth the work of last year's White House CVE Summit and provides a roadmap for mobilizing America's diplomatic and development tools to prevent and counter violent extremism through five objectives:

- Expand international political will, partnerships, and expertise to better understand the drivers of violent extremism and mobilize effective interventions.
- Encourage and assist partner governments to adopt more effective policies and approaches to prevent and counter the spread of violent extremism, including changing unhelpful practices where necessary.
- Employ foreign assistance tools and approaches, including development, to reduce specific political or social and economic factors that contribute to community support for violent extremism in identifiable areas or put particular segments of a population at high risk of violent extremist radicalization and recruitment to violence.
- Empower and amplify locally credible voices that can change the perception of violent extremist groups and their ideologies among key demographic segments.
- Strengthen the capabilities of government and non-governmental actors to isolate, intervene with, and promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals caught in the cycle of radicalization to violence.

A full version of the new U.S. strategy can be found in the following link:

<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/257913.pdf>

The U.S. National Strategy for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States and its Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP)

In December 2011, the United States released its National Strategy to Empower Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States and its Strategic

Implementation Plan (SIP). Respect for the rule of law and for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression, including for members of the media, is central to our National Strategy for Empowering Local Partners and the execution of the SIP.

https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/sip-final.pdf>

The guiding principles include the following:

- We must do everything in our power to protect the people from violent extremism while protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- We must build partnerships and provide support to communities based on mutual trust, respect, and understanding.
- We must use a wide range of good governance programs — including those that promote immigrant integration and civic engagement, protect civil rights, and provide social services — that may help prevent radicalization that leads to violence.
- We must support local capabilities and programs to address problems of national concern.
- Government officials and the public should not stigmatize or blame communities because of the actions of a handful of individuals.
- Strong religious beliefs should never be confused with violent extremism. Although we will not tolerate illegal activities, voicing opposition to government policy is neither illegal nor unpatriotic and does not make someone a violent extremist.
- In September 2015, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established the Office for Community Partnerships. The Office is dedicated to the mission of Countering Violent Extremism. The Office for Community Partnerships is the primary source of leadership, innovation and support for the improved effectiveness of partners at federal, state, local, tribal and territorial levels. In July 2016, the Office issued a notice of funding opportunity for a new Countering Violent Extremism Grant Program, the first federal grant funding available to non-government organizations and institutions of higher education to carry out countering violent extremism programs.
- In January 2016, DHS and the Department of Justice announced the creation of an interagency CVE Task Force to synchronize and prioritize our domestic efforts on CVE. While the Task Force focuses on CVE in the United States, members of Task Force regularly consult with partners at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State to align our

domestic work with international efforts. The CVE Task Force is organized into several areas, including:

- Research and analysis
- Engagements and technical assistance to CVE practitioners
- Communications and digital strategy
- Multidisciplinary interventions

The principles outlined in our national CVE strategy not only reflect our values, but many are supported by empirical research on the drivers of violent extremism. For example, in analytical work conducted by the U.S. Department of State we have observed the following trends on human rights issues:

- State-sponsored violence and abuse (as measured by the Political Terror Scale) is highly correlated with the emergence of new violent extremist organizations. A review of terrorism data since 1995 found that countries with above average levels of state-sponsored violence double their risk of a violent extremist group emerging. Countries with the highest levels of state-sponsored violence quadruple their risk of a violent extremist group emerging.
- Low levels of voice and accountability — a measurement of political rights and civil liberties collected by Freedom House — are significant predictors of increased levels of state-sponsored violence and abuse, which is associated with both the emergence and expansion of violent extremism.
- Perceptions of government discrimination against members of ethnic or religious groups may be associated with violent extremist behavior (according to analysis from surveys administered by Afrobarometer). This is supported by a number of studies that indicate that perceptions of injustice and the belief that one's religion or identity is under threat can drive violent extremism.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also often has found in its research at the country level that failures of governments to respect and protect rights, such as corruption, strained relations with security forces and challenges participating in public life, has helped drive recruitment and radicalization to violence.

The multiple dimensions of countering and preventing violent extremism — protecting rights, providing economic opportunity, mentoring youth, holding security forces accountable, supporting families — go beyond a military response to take a citizen-centered approach to the threat. To be effective in the long run, we must also address how these groups draw local support and attract new recruits. In addition, although governments have a critical role in this work by ensuring security, respect for human rights, and the rule of law, they cannot effectively address these complex factors on their own. This is why we are working with a broader set of actors, including civil society, business, religious leaders, women, youth, international bodies, and former violent

extremists. We believe that an integrated CVE approach depends on coordination among these various stakeholders. That often requires building trust and repairing fraught relationships between the government and actors in civil society or marginalized communities, as well as safeguarding space for these actors to operate and peacefully express their views.

The United States is carrying forth its CVE work with global partners from organizations with credibility, reach, and resonance in the communities most targeted by violent extremists for recruitment and radicalization to violence. For example, Hedayah, the CVE Center of Excellence based in Abu Dhabi, provides a platform, training, and tools for governments and civil society. Separately, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) funds grassroots organizations in places like Bangladesh, Mali, and Nigeria to prevent and counter violent extremism at the local level. The newly created Strong Cities Network and the RESOLVE (Researching Solutions to Violent Extremism) Network were created to ensure that local, sub-national leaders and researchers continue to advance the CVE agenda by creating common agendas, sharing best practices, and connecting regularly beyond traditional annual conferences and emails. For example, these organizations could help researchers who have studied disengaging youth from violent extremist groups in Europe to share their research with peers in East Africa who are looking to do the same with groups like al-Shabaab. USG-funded development assistance programs designed to address the drivers of violent extremism are working with a broad set of actors, including national and local governments, civil society, private sector representatives, women, and youth to provide them the tools to address this challenge and mobilize action on all levels. USAID, moreover, has issued the “12 Principles on Counter-Extremism Programming.” Additional best practices are described further in the attached addendum.

A recent critical accomplishment within the global community was the General Assembly’s adoption on July 1, 2016, by consensus of UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/291, which reviewed the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, on the occasion of its 10-year anniversary and endorsed the recommendations of the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. The resolution recommended that Member States consider the implementation of relevant recommendations of the plan, with the support of the United Nations.

According to the Plan of Action, violent extremism undermines our collective efforts towards maintaining peace and security, fostering sustainable development, promoting human rights, promoting the rule of law, and taking humanitarian action. Strengthening good governance, respect for human rights, and the rule of law is one of seven priority areas for the Plan of Action that the United States strongly supports. We encourage OHCHR and its field offices to engage with Member States to assist them in implementing these recommendations. The United States also strongly supports a particular role for OHCHR in the following recommendations:

- Offer capacity-building programs aimed at strengthening national and regional capacities to develop institutional plans designed to prevent violent extremism and share good practices, and assist Member States in adopting relevant legislation and policies in close coordination with the relevant United Nations country teams, special representatives of the Secretary-General, peace operations where deployed, and entities of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, including the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre.
- Further strengthen early and effective action through the Human Rights Upfront Initiative to prevent or respond to large-scale violations of international human rights law or international humanitarian law at both the policy and the operational level.

U.S. Response - Additional Guidance and Good Practices

The United States has worked closely with international partners and expert bodies such as the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ) in Malta to develop non-binding good practices for preventing and countering terrorism that are grounded in respect for international obligations and commitments and for the rule of law.

Examples of such good practices can be found in the following guidance documents. We have highlighted a number of specific practices we believe are particularly applicable to promoting and protecting human rights and countering and preventing violent extremism:

Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) Abu Dhabi Plan of Action and Countering Violent Extremism

- United States (NGO-World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE)): Cultural Competency Training:
 - § “This program educates policymakers and law enforcement officials about Muslim communities in the United States to enhance shared values and raise awareness of cultural and customary sensitivities to Muslim communities.”
- United States (Foundation-The Sanneh Foundation) Summer Camp:
 - § “Originally aimed at youth in Minneapolis, Minnesota, this sports camp has reached immigrant youth from the Somali community and helped to develop opportunities for leadership, teamwork, collaboration, and social inclusion in areas where immigrants have difficulty assimilating into U.S. culture and have sometimes resorted to acts of violent extremism.”

GCTF Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism

- **Good Practice 7:** *States, in cooperation with both governmental and nongovernmental actors, are encouraged to consider comprehensive action in preventing and countering violent extremism. Although the role of the government is crucial, a strategy that involves a “whole-of-society” approach in addition to a “whole-of-government” one can be effective.*
 - § “Effectively addressing the conditions conducive to violent extremism requires a broader range of actors than security agencies. Different governmental agencies are responsible for ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, creating new job opportunities, sustaining community stability, regulating migration flow, and increasing the level of resilience to radicalization and recruitment into violent extremist groups. States and their structures would benefit from establishing or intensifying information work with the public in the interest of more effectively explaining the effort undertaken by state authorities to counter violent extremism, as well as all detrimental consequences related to violent extremism. Government-initiated efforts, however, may not be sufficient for a successful CVE program. A range of actors, including civil society, (e.g., international and local partners, NGOs, religious organizations, universities, and communities) might be encouraged to take part in these efforts and this could be addressed within the appropriate legal and/or policy framework. States might benefit from positive voices emanating from different groups in any given community, in order to counter obstacles a CVE program might face in the implementation process.”
- **Good Practice 11:** *States can help civil society in CVE activities.*
 - § “Many civil society groups function in different fields (e.g., human rights, social services, cultural activities) and often might not be aware that these efforts also contribute to countering violent extremism. They might not be aware of the fact that they can play a vital role in CVE. They may also lack sufficient resources. In other respects, there may be robust NGOs that may not possess CVE-specific expertise. State actors can support civil society to increase their awareness and capacity in CVE.”
- **Good Practice 12:** *States should promote tolerance and facilitate dialogue in society to build communities which appreciate their differences and understand each other.*
 - § “It is important to identify the ways to stimulate inter-cultural, inter-religious, and inter-ethnic dialogue. An exchange of views might enable one to understand how others see the world. Creating dialogue channels serves as a first step for communities to get to know one another. Once different communities start to socialize, they might acknowledge the fact

that there are communalities that they can use as a common ground for further dialogue. States might also work to promote democratic values, human rights, pluralism, and freedom through education and outreach programs. Religious communities can work together to promote tolerance and to stem support for violent extremism. As a part of their efforts, they might create exchange programs of young theologians and might offer meetings for students to promote inter-religious dialogue and tolerance. Educational projects to raise awareness of different forms of prejudice and hostility might be implemented to prevent intolerance and discrimination.”

GCTF Good Practices on Community Engagement and Community-Oriented Policing as Tools to Counter Violent Extremism

- **Good Practice 10:** *Tailor community engagement and community-oriented policing trainings to address the issues and dynamics of the local community and to instill awareness of potential indicators and behaviors.*

§ “To maintain the trust and respect integral to community engagement and community-oriented policing, practitioners should be trained properly on the parameters of engagement and how it relates to the local contexts where they are engaging. For example training manuals on community-oriented policing as well as smaller ‘pocket guides’ aimed at informing front line officers on potential behaviors and indicators to raise awareness of violent extremist threats versus behavioral norms could be distributed to local police. Furthermore, front line law enforcement should be trained on community cultural, societal, and religious behavior and be able to distinguish it from potential criminal and violent extremist indicators and behaviors. Training methods and materials should be continually updated and revised to keep up with the evolution of threats and with conclusions/good practices developed by members of GCTF and other relevant entities.”

GCTF/OSCE Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism

Introduction: “It is also important to recognize the larger framework of human rights in which this discussion takes place. Practical integration of women and girls into all aspects of CVE programming can only occur in the context of broader guarantees of the human rights of women and girls in particular; these include addressing the causes of gender inequality such as the subordination of women and discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age, and other factors. The promotion and protection of women’s rights and gender equality needs to underlie CVE programs and strategies. The human rights of women and girls, as with all human rights, should be promoted and protected at all times and not just as a means for CVE.”

- **Good Practice 4:** *Protect the human rights of women and girls, including their equality, non-discrimination, and equal participation, and ensure that CVE efforts do not stereotype or instrumentalize, women and girls.*

§ “The promotion and protection of women’s human rights are integral to efforts to include women and girls and mainstream gender in CVE.

Women’s human rights concerns often underlie the incentives for, as well as the difficulties in, their engagement in CVE. For example, the victimization of women and girls by terrorists may motivate them to participate in CVE, but gender-based discrimination and stereotyping can hinder their full and equal engagement. These barriers need to be addressed to enable women and girls to safely and productively contribute to CVE efforts. This must happen in a nuanced way, as there is significant variation in women’s rights and gender equity. In certain environments, women and girls risk being instrumentalized and their rights compromised for counterterrorism and CVE objectives. The use, real or perceived, of government relationships with women and girls for security purposes (e.g., for gathering intelligence) can generate distrust and become counterproductive to CVE. A too obvious association of women and girls’ human rights with a CVE agenda can also further expose women and girls as targets for violent extremism.”

- **Good Practice 5:** *Prevent and address the direct and indirect impacts of violent extremism and terrorism on women and girls.*

§ “Violent extremist and terrorist groups often target women and girls for gender-based violence, including abductions, forced marriages, sexual violence, forced pregnancies, attacks on women human rights defenders and leaders, attacks on girls’ access to education, and restrictions on their freedom of movement. Preventing these attacks, providing protection for women and girls who are most at risk, rejecting societal acceptance, prosecuting perpetrators, and developing assistance including livelihood opportunities for women survivors are essential. These efforts will not only provide critical improvements in human security but also foster social cohesion and resilience in communities affected by violent extremism and terrorist violence. Addressing these impacts also enables women and girls to safely and productively engage in CVE activities.”

- **Good Practice 7:** *Include gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation in CVE policy and programs to enhance effectiveness.*

§ “The effectiveness of all CVE efforts will be enhanced by integrating a gender perspective and including women and girls in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Sex-disaggregated data can provide a nuanced picture of the outputs and differential impact of CVE activities, to evaluate positive gains in areas such as skills, awareness, capacity, social cohesion, and resilience, and also to ensure that CVE does not contribute to an increase in human rights violations, such as gender-based violence by all

parties. Sex-specific indicators and baseline information should therefore be incorporated in the assessment of both general CVE initiatives and those that specifically seek to advance women and girls' roles in CVE.

Quantitative indicators should be used for instance to track the proportion of men and women among target groups of CVE activities, as well as the numbers of women and girls recruited into violent extremism. Qualitative monitoring, such as through polls, interviews, community roundtables, and focus groups, before, during, and after a given CVE initiative, should explicitly include women and girls. Women and women's groups should be included in the independent evaluation of all CVE efforts, particularly those that seek to advance the roles of women and girls in CVE. Monitoring and evaluation of CVE programs focused on women and girls should also take into account the particular context and operational constraints in engaging with them. Developing and sustaining engagement with women and girls to counter violent extremism will likely need to be a long-term process; realistic metrics should be devised to measure effectiveness at each stage of that process. This might include improved performance management systems and evaluations, which could include gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data."

- **Good Practice 15:** *Engage and empower women in civil society and civil society actors working in the field of women's and human rights, especially women's organizations, as critical CVE stakeholders.*

§ "Engaging women in civil society and civil society actors who are working to advance women's rights, particularly women's organizations, is vital for CVE efforts to be effective and sustainable. These actors already contribute in many ways to CVE through activities which build resilience to violence and intolerance, though these activities are not necessarily oriented towards CVE or described as such. These activities include conflict prevention, peacebuilding, economic growth, security sector reform, and the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, other activities to advance the women, peace, and security agenda, as well as service provision, particularly in areas where the government lacks presence. These activities should be encouraged to continue. Women in civil society and civil society actors working with women are well positioned to act as a bridge to women in local communities, having better access to reach, empower, and build the capacity of women and girls for CVE, especially those that may be isolated or marginalized. CVE efforts should empower these actors to use this access. Other important CVE contributions these stakeholders should be encouraged to make include: (1) participating in community-oriented policing initiatives; (2) developing and disseminating alternative and inclusive-narratives; (3) advising on the design and implementation of CVE activities; and (4) supporting monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of CVE efforts. Coordination and clear modalities of engagement are essential

to engage and collaborate effectively on CVE with women in civil society and civil society actors working with women, in order to ensure their safety, independence, and credibility.”

- **Good Practice 18:** *Engage girls and young women through education and within informal and formal educational environments to counter violent extremism.*

§ “Education can be utilized in myriad ways to build resilience and reduce recruitment and radicalization to violent extremism and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. This requires promoting access to and protecting formal and informal religious and secular educational institutions as a safe space for all, including girls and young women. Education enhances the capacity of young women and girls to help build resilience among their peers, their families and their communities. Educational materials and activities for girls and young women centered on, inter alia, civic education and responsibility, community engagement, tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and human rights can be particularly important.”

- **Good Practice 22:** *Highlight women victims of violent extremism and terrorism, including as part of CVE efforts.*

§ “As with all victims of violent extremism and terrorism, women and girls should be highlighted to emphasize their equal human rights, counter their dehumanization and promote solidarity with them. Establishing platforms that amplify the voices of women victims of violent extremism and can also contribute to effective CVE. Victims should also be offered ongoing support and assistance to deal with the emotional complications that can arise from public discussion of the terrorist event. Improving media coverage of willing women victims of terrorism is key to these efforts and highlighting women victims more broadly. The capacity of media should be built for gender-sensitive reporting that recognizes the particular impacts of terrorism on women and girls and also respects their privacy and agency and ability to heal from physical and emotional trauma.”

GCTF Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders

- **Good Practice 2:** *Good prison standards and practices can offer an appropriate starting point for building an effective, safe and smoothly operating rehabilitation program.*

§ “Counter-extremism and rehabilitation programs have the best chance of succeeding when they are nested in a safe, secure, adequately resourced, and well operated custodial setting where the human rights of prisoners are respected. It is important that there is a clear legal basis and procedural framework for detention which complies with human rights and

international law obligations and clearly delineates the institutions and agencies involved, as well as their respective roles, responsibilities and powers in this area. Prison officials must respect judicial decisions regarding incarceration, and ensure that inmates are not subject to extra-judicial punishment. The UN's Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (1957) is a good starting point. As stated in the Rabat Memorandum, 'the principles and philosophy' espoused in the UN standards provide a 'useful and flexible guide that countries should use when deciding what conditions of confinement are appropriate for prisoners.' Some countries face problems of prison overcrowding, lack of resources, and deficient services. In developing effective responses, it is important to try to address these types of problems. Good management also improves the safety of facility staff and other prisoners. Properly managing terrorists and other high risk criminals reduces the opportunities for escape, conspiratorial misconduct, and inappropriate or dangerous external communications. Improving the prison environment also can help ensure that prisons do not become incubators of radicalization to violence. Interactions with prison staff who are engaging in humane and positive behavior towards the inmates can create cognitive dissonance and openings for changes in thinking and behavior."

IIJ Prison Management Recommendations to Counter and Address Prison Radicalization

Introduction: "In addition, it is important to note that there is already substantial professional experiences and expertise, as well as many documents and handbooks regarding overall prison standards and operations, including the newly adopted and updated United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (now known as the Mandela Rules). The Mandela Rules provide a good framework for countries to utilize in reviewing the operations of their prisons. A core underlying principle found in these rules is the idea that all prison-based interventions and policies must respect international norms, treaties, and conventions regarding good governance, human rights and due process."

Introduction: "A well-managed prison is understood to mean a prison that functions based on the principles of good governance and adherence to human rights standards."

Sources:

- <https://www.thegctf.org/home>
- <https://theij.org/1020-2/>

Counterterrorism Laws and Their Implementation

Since the emergence of al-Qaeda as a global threat, the passage of domestic counterterrorism legislation has become a common international practice. Unfortunately, such legislation's respect for international human rights obligations and commitments varies, with some countries passing laws that increase state power at the expense of respect for civil and political rights and sometimes other rights. Some components of current counterterrorism laws that can contribute to this tension include: overly broad definitions of terrorism and terrorist attacks; overly broad limitations and restrictions on the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly; overly broad police powers; provisions condoning incommunicado detention; and overly broad property seizure provisions.

When developing counterterrorism legislation, States must take all measures in compliance with their obligations under international law, including international human rights obligations, such as the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association as well as those related to due process. It is important that each law be appropriately drawn to ensure State authorities are able to effectively investigate and prosecute acts of terrorism, while limiting the opportunity for abuse and ensuring that States fulfill obligations to respect human rights.

The Importance of Respect for Freedom of Expression

Respect for freedom of expression is a foundation of democratic society. Efforts to unduly restrict expression can too easily be used as a tool to silence critics and oppress members of minorities. For example, some governments use sweeping and vaguely-worded anti-terrorism laws to justify crackdowns on political expression.

Respect for freedom of expression means accepting the expression of opinions that may be offensive to some or unpopular. Curbing political expression can also add to a sense of frustration and estrangement that is conducive to the spread of terrorism. Civil society voices play an important role in countering terrorism and violent extremism; their participation should be promoted and protected by freedom of expression.

Promoting freedom of expression through all media is an important element of CVE. Promoting access to diverse media, substantive independent reporting with integrity, and unimpeded communications networks have positive effects on CVE efforts, including the following:

- Exposure to diverse editorial viewpoints builds community resilience by bolstering critical thinking skills, as viewers engage with and assess competing claims.
- Integrity of reported information builds a context in which news information can be accepted by the public as more credible. This can help reduce the attractiveness

and efficacy of violent extremist claims, especially in cases where inaccurate information is inspiring people to become foreign fighters.

- A media environment where reporting is credible can also enable successful counter messaging; counter messaging efforts will not be effective if they are not considered credible.
- Promoting freedom of expression contributes to the space for a variety of political and religious voices; expression in these areas can mitigate perceived grievances that violent extremists exploit to recruit fighters.