



Seventieth session

Agenda items 16 and 117

Culture of peace**The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy****Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism****Report of the Secretary-General****I. Introduction**

1. Violent extremism is an affront to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. It undermines peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. No country or region is immune from its impacts.

2. The present Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism considers and addresses violent extremism as, and when, conducive to terrorism. Violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief. Nevertheless, in recent years, terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Qaida and Boko Haram have shaped our image of violent extremism and the debate on how to address this threat. These groups' message of intolerance — religious, cultural, social — has had drastic consequences for many regions of the world. Holding territory and using social media for the global and real-time communication of their ideas and exploits, they seek to challenge our shared values of peace, justice and human dignity. The spread of violent extremism has further aggravated an already unprecedented humanitarian crisis which surpasses the boundaries of any one region. Millions of people have fled the territory controlled by terrorist and violent extremist groups. Migratory flows have increased both away from and towards the conflict zones, involving those seeking safety and those lured into the conflict as foreign terrorist fighters, further destabilizing the regions concerned. While the Plan of Action has been developed within this context, it is intended to address violent extremism in all its forms and wherever it occurs.

3. Nothing can justify violent extremism but we must also acknowledge that it does not arise in a vacuum. Narratives of grievance, actual or perceived injustice, promised empowerment and sweeping change become attractive where human rights are being violated, good governance is being ignored and aspirations are



being crushed. Violent extremists have been able to recruit over 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters from over 100 Member States to travel to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, as well as to Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen. Some of them will no doubt be horrified by what they see and anxious to put the experience behind them, but others have already returned to their home countries — and more will undoubtedly follow — to spread hatred, intolerance and violence in their own communities.

4. Over the past two decades, the international community has sought to address violent extremism primarily within the context of security-based counter-terrorism measures adopted in response to the threat posed by Al-Qaida and its affiliated groups. However, with the emergence of a new generation of groups, there is a growing international consensus that such counter-terrorism measures have not been sufficient to prevent the spread of violent extremism. Violent extremism encompasses a wider category of manifestations and there is a risk that a conflation of the two terms may lead to the justification of an overly broad application of counter-terrorism measures, including against forms of conduct that should not qualify as terrorist acts.

5. In its resolution 2178 (2014), the Security Council makes explicit the link between violent extremism and terrorism, underscores the importance of measures being in line with international norms and recognizes the need for prevention: “violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism”, requires collective efforts, “including preventing radicalization, recruitment and mobilization of individuals into terrorist groups and becoming foreign terrorist fighters”. In that resolution, the Council “calls upon Member States to enhance efforts to counter this kind of violent extremism”, recognizing that “international cooperation and any measures taken by Member States to prevent and combat terrorism must comply fully with the Charter of the United Nations”. Definitions of “terrorism” and “violent extremism” are the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law. Just as the General Assembly has taken a practical approach to counter-terrorism through the adoption by consensus of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, this Plan of Action pursues a practical approach to preventing violent extremism, without venturing to address questions of definition.

6. There is a need to take a more comprehensive approach which encompasses not only ongoing, essential security-based counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive measures which directly address the drivers of violent extremism that have given rise to the emergence of these new and more virulent groups. In the Charter of the United Nations, Member States resolved to “take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace”. I have made it a priority to re-energize the Organization’s prevention agenda, especially with respect to preventing armed conflict, atrocities, disasters, violence against women and children, and conflict-related sexual violence, and have launched a dedicated initiative to place human rights upfront. The 2015 report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (see A/70/95-S/2015/446), the report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture (see A/69/968-S/2015/490), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ and the women, peace and security agenda have all stressed the need to build a collective commitment to making

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1.

prevention work. The spread of violent extremism makes preventive efforts all the more relevant.

7. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted unanimously by the General Assembly by its resolution 60/288, explicitly addresses prevention and foresees balanced implementation across all four of its pillars: (a) tackling conditions conducive to terrorism; (b) preventing and combating terrorism; (c) building countries' capacity to combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; and (d) ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law while countering terrorism. Over the last decade, there has been a strong emphasis on the implementation of measures under pillar II of the Global Strategy, while pillars I and IV have often been overlooked. Ahead of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Strategy, in 2016, I am launching this Plan of Action, with a focus on preventive measures for addressing violent extremism, including by reinvigorating those measures covered under pillars I and IV of the Strategy, ensuring a more comprehensive implementation of the Strategy in view of the lessons learned over the past decade and the challenges that may lie ahead. In the context of its most recent review of the Strategy, the Assembly urged Member States "to unite against violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations". In doing so, we must be principled and strategic and must calibrate our response carefully. We must refocus our priorities, strengthen our application of justice, and rebuild the social compact between the governing and governed. We need to pay attention to why individuals are attracted to violent extremist groups. I am convinced that the creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to violent extremism and the most promising strategy for rendering it unattractive.

8. While our understanding of the drivers of violent extremism has improved, enabling us to adapt and refine our actions, we have to accelerate our learning process to counter the speed with which this threat is evolving. While, collectively, we have the tools with which to address many of the grievances driving violent extremism, we have to learn to use and resource them effectively. United Nations entities, including the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat, the Peacebuilding Support Office and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), and my Envoy on Youth, as well as many other members of the United Nations family, have been working on issues relevant to preventing violent extremism. We need to build on lessons already learned to refine our actions and render them more effective.

9. We will not be successful unless we can harness the idealism, creativity and energy of young people and others who feel disenfranchised. Young people, who constitute the majority of the population of an increasing number of countries today, must be viewed as an asset and must be empowered to make a constructive contribution to the political and economic development of their societies and nations. They represent an untapped resource. We must offer them a positive vision

of their future together with a genuine chance to realize their aspirations and potential.

10. In developing this Plan of Action, I have listened closely to the views of Member States and regional organizations. We also consulted internal and external experts, scholars and practitioners. I welcome the multilateral initiatives that have stressed the need for creative and innovative action to address violent extremism.

11. The founders of the United Nations believed in the power of our shared principles, purposes and values. Member States are obliged to adapt their actions to new realities without reneging on our common commitments. The moment we consider these common commitments dispensable we help those who disrespect them to achieve their goals. With this Plan of Action, I intend to stimulate global debate on how we can best leverage our comparative advantages to effectively prevent violent extremism.

II. Impact of violent extremism

12. Violent extremism undermines our collective efforts towards maintaining peace and security, fostering sustainable development, protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law and taking humanitarian action.

A. Peace and security

13. Violent extremist groups are contributing significantly to the cycle of insecurity and armed conflict affecting many regions of the world. Al-Qaida and its affiliates have sought to intimidate Governments into changing their policies through virulent propaganda campaigns and by staging spectacular attacks. The latest iteration of violent extremist and terrorist groups, ISIL in particular, has transformed the challenge further: benefiting from existing armed conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic and instability in Iraq and in Libya, its members have managed to take over large swaths of territory and “govern” it according to their rules. They are mobile, well armed, tech-savvy and well organized. History has shown that volatile security situations and conflicts tend to be further exacerbated by “proxy” wars. Regional and international actors bear a particular responsibility for assisting countries in strife in returning to peace. I therefore welcome the recent constructive initiatives taken in the context of the International Syria Support Group, working in concert with the Security Council to promote a comprehensive solution to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic.

14. In seeking to supplant existing States and erase established borders, ISIL and Boko Haram are undermining state authority and destabilizing not just the territories most directly concerned, but also the surrounding regions. In Mali, terrorists came close to destroying the basic state structure, thereby affecting the stability of a country and of an entire region. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and other groups continue their activities in northern Mali with spillover effects in neighbouring countries. They put the presence and activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) at risk. As I noted in a recent report (S/2015/366), terrorist groups are also benefiting from transnational organized crime. Some violent extremist groups have developed

connections with transnational organized crime to increase their financial resources. They generate significant revenues from human trafficking and the slave trade, trafficking in antiquities, and the illicit sale of oil. Many of these groups are also involved in kidnapping for ransom.

15. It is critical that in responding to this threat, we recognize that violent extremists aim at provoking States into overreacting, and then exploit ill-conceived government action for their own propaganda ends. In killing 77 people in 2011, the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik was explicitly aiming at destabilizing Norway's tolerant society by dividing local communities and provoking an overreaction. The obligations that Member States have undertaken in line with international law, including human rights instruments, provide a sound framework within which to respond to such attacks.

B. Sustainable development

16. Countries struggling to cope with widespread violence have fared poorly in reaching the Millennium Development Goals which have shaped the development agenda over the last 15 years. Violent extremism aggravates perceptions of insecurity and can lead to repeated outbreaks of unrest which compromise sustained economic growth. In establishing the Sustainable Development Goals to guide our work over the next 15 years, Member States warned that violent extremism threatens to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades. By exploiting development challenges, such as inequalities, poverty and poor governance, violent extremism further exacerbates these grievances and thereby creates a vicious cycle of decline which affects marginalized groups in particular. Moreover, considering education a particular threat to the spread of their ideologies, terrorists have targeted young people, in particular girls, for their pursuit of a modern education as the path to a better life for themselves and their families and better societies. The kidnapping of girls by Boko Haram in Chibok, Nigeria, in April 2014; the killing of students by Al-Shabaab in Garissa, Kenya, in April 2015; and the attack by Tehrik-i-Taliban on the Army Public School in Peshawar, Pakistan, in December 2014, are just some of the most egregious recent examples of the threat of violent extremism.

17. Violent extremists are also disrupting the day-to-day work of development actors, including United Nations development agencies and United Nations country teams, which are trying to help Member States eradicate poverty, and reduce social inequalities and exclusion. As a consequence, United Nations field personnel and peacekeepers have been targeted.

C. Human rights and the rule of law

18. Violent extremists pose a direct threat to the enjoyment of human rights, ranging from the right to life and the right to liberty and security of person, to freedom of expression, association, and thought, conscience and religion.

19. There is credible information indicating that terrorists and violent extremist groups like ISIL and its affiliates may have committed serious violations of international law, including genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. These groups also violate the rights of women and girls, including through sexual

enslavement, forced marriages and encroachment on their rights to education and participation in public life. In areas where ISIL and other terrorist and violent extremist groups currently operate, it appears that religious communities, and women, children, political activists, journalists, human rights defenders and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community are being systematically targeted, abducted, displaced and murdered. Torture, and sexual and gender-based violence, are also reportedly widespread. Items and sites of great historical, religious and cultural significance are being wantonly destroyed in violation of the protection afforded to the cultural heritage under international humanitarian law.

20. A lack of accountability in conflict areas is contributing to an increase in these atrocious crimes. Impunity and injustice create an environment of insecurity and helplessness, undermining conflict mediation and resolution efforts, including political transitions. We need to end impunity for all those committing violations and crimes, including crimes under international law. At the same time, we must be vigilant in ensuring that Member States' efforts to address violent extremism are respectful of the rule of law and in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law, as well as international humanitarian law, if applicable. Certain rights are non-derogable even in time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation.

D. Humanitarian action

21. At the end of 2014, the world was facing a situation where the number of forcibly displaced persons was the highest on record, a situation to which violent extremism was a significant contributing factor. It is not just the volume of displaced persons that is alarming, but also the rapid increase in their numbers, which has risen 40 per cent, from 42.5 million to 59.5 million in just three years. Internally displaced persons and refugees, particularly children, are at an increased risk of forced recruitment, including by violent extremist groups.

22. Violent extremist groups actively interfere with the provision of international humanitarian assistance, including food and vital medical aid, to populations in need by limiting the access of humanitarian actors to the areas controlled by those groups, or by seizing relief supplies. In situations of armed conflict, violent extremists routinely disregard the traditional protection, enshrined in international humanitarian law, accorded to humanitarian actors in conflict zones. As a result, many humanitarian workers have become targets themselves: 329 aid workers were killed, injured or kidnapped in 2014. While violent extremists groups are not the only actors using these despicable tactics, their growing influence is a significant contributory factor to the challenging operating environment confronted by humanitarian organizations.

III. Context and drivers of violent extremism

23. In the past decade and a half, research has been conducted on the drivers of violent extremism. However, there is no authoritative statistical data on the pathways towards individual radicalization. While there are some recognizable trends and patterns, there are only a few areas of consensus that exist among

researchers. Qualitative research, based mainly on interviews, suggests that two main categories of drivers can be distinguished: “push factors”, or the conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges; and “pull factors”, or the individual motivations and processes, which play a key role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action. More research, both qualitative and quantitative, is required on this evolving phenomenon.

A. Conditions conducive to and the structural context of violent extremism

24. The available qualitative evidence points to the presence of certain recurrent drivers, which are common among a wide variety of countries and regions and which lead, sometimes in isolation and sometimes in combination with other factors, to radicalization and violent extremism.

Lack of socioeconomic opportunities

25. Countries that fail to generate high and sustainable levels of growth, to create decent jobs for their youth, to reduce poverty and unemployment, to improve equality, to control corruption and to manage relationships among different communities in line with their human rights obligations, are more prone to violent extremism and tend to witness a greater number of incidents linked to violent extremism. Citizens may consider weak development outcomes as confirmation of the lack of a government’s legitimacy, making state institutions less effective in responding to violent extremism when it arises. The absence of alternative employment opportunities can make violent extremist organizations an attractive source of income.

Marginalization and discrimination

26. No country is completely homogeneous. Diversity in and of itself does not lead to or increase a country’s vulnerability to violent extremism. However, when a country experiences insecurities such as scarce resources, and when one group, whatever its demographic weight, acts monopolistically in political and economic sectors at the expense of other groups, the potential for intercommunal tensions, gender inequality, marginalization, alienation and discrimination increases, as expressed through restricted access to public services and job opportunities and obstructions to regional development and freedom of religion. This, in turn, may incite those who feel disenfranchised to embrace violent extremism as a vehicle for advancing their goals.

Poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law

27. Violent extremism tends to thrive in an environment characterized by poor governance, democracy deficits, corruption and a culture of impunity for unlawful behaviour engaged in by the State or its agents. When poor governance is combined with repressive policies and practices which violate human rights and the rule of law, the potency of the lure of violent extremism tends to be heightened. Violations of international human rights law committed in the name of state security can facilitate violent extremism by marginalizing individuals and alienating key

constituencies, thus generating community support and sympathy for and complicity in the actions of violent extremists. Violent extremists also actively seek to exploit state repression and other grievances in their fight against the state. Thus, Governments that exhibit repressive and heavy-handed security responses in violation of human rights and the rule of law, such as profiling of certain populations, adoption of intrusive surveillance techniques and prolongation of declared states of emergency, tend to generate more violent extremists. International partners that are complicit in such action by States further corrupt public faith in the legitimacy of the wider international system.

28. The lack of adequate efforts, in line with international obligations, towards the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, exacerbated by discrimination against ethnic, national, gender, racial, religious, linguistic and other groups and the absence or curtailment of democratic space, can provide opportunities for exploitation by violent extremists. State institutions that do not adequately fulfil their international obligations to uphold these rights can fuel grievances and undermine not only their own effectiveness but also social norms and social cohesion.

29. In addition, more attention needs to be paid to devising efficient gender- and human rights-compliant reintegration strategies and programmes for those who have been convicted of terrorism-related offences as well as returning foreign terrorist fighters.

Prolonged and unresolved conflicts

30. Prolonged and unresolved conflicts tend to provide fertile ground for violent extremism, not only because of the suffering and lack of governance resulting from the conflict itself but also because such conflicts allow violent extremist groups to exploit deep-rooted grievances in order to garner support and seize territory and resources and control populations. Urgent measures must be taken to resolve protracted conflicts. Resolving these conflicts will undermine the impact of the insidious narratives of violent extremist groups. When prevention fails, our best strategy towards securing lasting peace and addressing violent extremism entails inclusive political solutions and accountability.

Radicalization in prisons

31. Research shows that harsh treatment in detention facilities can play a disconcertingly powerful role in the recruitment of a large number of individuals who have joined violent extremist groups and terrorist organizations. Several factors have been identified as spurring prisoners to seek protection by joining groups, including inhumane prison conditions and inhumane treatment of inmates, corrupt staff and security officers, gang activity, drug use, lack of security and proper facilities, and overcrowding. Safeguards need to be put in place to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies to other prisoners while upholding the protection afforded under international law to persons deprived of their liberty, including with respect to international standards and norms relating to solitary confinement.

B. Processes of radicalization

32. Although the conditions conducive to violent extremism affect entire populations, only a small number of individuals are actually radicalized and turn to violence. Both complex individual motivations and human agency play a key role in exploiting these conditions and transforming ideas and grievances into violent action.

Individual backgrounds and motivations

33. A negative personal experience which resonates with the narrative of violent extremist ideologies can heighten the chances that an individual will embrace violent extremism. Individual motivations vary from the serious to the routine: researchers have reported precipitating events as diverse as experiencing or witnessing torture, the death of a relative or friend at the hands of the security forces or a foreign power, unfair trials, the loss of property and the humiliation of a parent — and even the refusal of a personal loan.

34. While some highly educated individuals have played consequential roles in violent extremist organizations, many members are poorly educated, often not having completed secondary education. A large number have only rudimentary literacy levels and almost no religious knowledge or education, making them vulnerable to indoctrination. It is quite likely that they may have been engaged in petty crimes and illicit activities prior to their involvement with violent extremist groups. Membership in a group also promotes a sense of belonging or relief from the burden of alienation, isolation or anomie.

Collective grievances and victimization

35. Historical legacies of, or collective grievances stemming from, domination, oppression, subjugation or foreign intervention can enable narratives of victimization to take hold. These narratives can provoke simple and powerful emotional reactions which may then be exploited by violent extremists: the memory of past or present actual or perceived oppressions is upheld so as to fuel the thirst for revenge against oppressors.

Distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences

36. Violent extremist groups cynically distort and exploit religious beliefs, ethnic differences and political ideologies to legitimize their actions, establish their claim on territory and recruit followers. Distortion and misuse of religion are utilized to divide nations, cultures and people, undermining our humanity. Faith and community leaders are critical in mentoring vulnerable followers so as to enable them to reject violent ideologies and in providing opportunities for intra- and interfaith dialogue and discussion as a means of promoting tolerance, understanding and reconciliation between communities. Leaders, Governments, the international community and the media have to work together to prevent confrontation and polarization within and between countries, faiths, nations and peoples. We have to work jointly to halt this vicious cycle of provocation and response which often fuels the forces governing the nexus between conflict, terrorism and violent terrorism, as

seen in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and other countries.

Leadership and social networks

37. While contextual factors, personal experiences and collective grievances can all contribute to the emergence of violent extremism, there must also be a social context that provides some form of organization and direction for these elements. This is often established through the intervention of a charismatic leader or political entrepreneur, and through informal family and social networks. It can be difficult to join violent extremist organizations unless you already know one of their members, this being an inevitable consequence of the fact that their activities are often exclusive and clandestine. However, in recent years, online tools have served as an additional, and more accessible, pathway to group membership.

IV. An Agenda for Action: recommendations on preventing violent extremism

38. I have consistently called for the balanced implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. While we need to continue our concerted efforts to counter violent extremism, we have to broaden our responses, engage earlier and address the drivers of violent extremism. We need to complement the countering of violent extremism with preventive measures. Making prevention an integral part of our comprehensive approach will help us tackle many of the underlying conditions that drive individuals to join violent extremist groups. As with the practice of prevention more generally, results may not be visible immediately and will require our long-term and patient engagement.

39. I therefore put forward for the consideration of Member States the following recommendations, which I believe will prevent and reduce the space for violent extremism while simultaneously addressing the immediate peace and security challenges through ongoing counter-terrorism measures. My recommendations identify actions that can be taken at the global, national and regional levels with a view to promoting a comprehensive and balanced implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

A. Setting the policy framework

A global framework for preventing violent extremism

40. Preventing violent extremism is a commitment and obligation under the principles and values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights² and other international human rights instruments. To be effective and sustainable and in line with Member States' obligations under international law, all legislation, policies, strategies and practices adopted to prevent violent extremism must be firmly grounded in the respect for human rights and the rule of law.

² General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).

41. Both the General Assembly and the Security Council have acknowledged that violent extremism has reached a level of threat and sophistication that requires concerted action beyond law enforcement, military or security measures to address development, good governance, human rights and humanitarian concerns. Strengthening the rule of law, repealing discriminatory legislation and implementing policies and laws that combat discrimination, marginalization and exclusion in law and in practice must be an essential component of any response to the threat posed by violent extremism.

42. In the past two years, the General Assembly has emphasized the need for united action on violent extremism: in the fourth review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy;³ in Assembly resolution 68/127, entitled “A world against violence and violent extremism”; and during the high-level thematic debate of the Assembly on the topic “Promoting tolerance and reconciliation: fostering peaceful, inclusive societies and countering violent extremism”, convened by the President of the Assembly in conjunction with the Secretary-General and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and held on 21 and 22 April 2015, as well as in the recent general debate of the Assembly at its seventieth session. The Security Council emphasized the need for measures to address violent extremism and stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters in its resolution 2178 (2014), during the high-level open debate of the Council on the topic “The role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace”, held on 23 April 2015, and in the statement by the President of the Council of 29 May 2015 (S/PRST/2015/11).

43. While we can set parameters at the global level, it is action at the local, national and regional levels that will have the most impact. I therefore count on Member States to translate our common commitment and political will to effect real change into new ways of formulating public policy so as to prevent violent extremism in their respective countries and regions. The Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Member States’ obligations under international law — in particular under international human rights law, refugee law and, if applicable, international humanitarian law — provide a strong foundation, and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the guiding principles for counter-terrorism strategies, as identified at the International Conference on National and Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategies, held in Bogota from 31 January to 1 February 2013, provide additional guidance for national and regional plans of action. The processes for establishing national plans and regional strategies or refining existing ones should complement both the present Plan of Action and each other. The United Nations, through the 36 entities of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force and an “All United Nations” approach, is ready to support Member States in developing such policies and plans. I will also direct resident coordinators, United Nations country teams and the regional United Nations Development Group teams to support Member States, upon their request, in developing their plans at the national and regional levels.

National plans of action for preventing violent extremism

44. Each Member State should consider developing a national plan of action to prevent violent extremism which sets national priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism and complements national counter-terrorism strategies

³ See General Assembly resolution 68/276.

where they already exist. Based on the principle of national ownership and in accordance with international law, Member States may wish to consider the following elements in establishing such plans:

(a) National plans should be developed in a multidisciplinary manner, to include countering and preventing violent extremism measures, with input from a wide range of government actors, such as law enforcement, social service providers and ministries of education, youth and religious affairs, as well as non-governmental actors, including youth; families; women; religious, cultural and educational leaders; civil society organizations; the media; and the private sector. Analyses of local and national drivers of violent extremism form an important point of departure for developing national plans;

(b) National plans should fortify the social compact against violent extremism by promoting respect for the principle of equality before the law and equal protection under the law in all government-citizen relations, and developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, as well as ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making. I encourage parliamentarians to provide the legislative foundation for national plans of action for preventing violent extremism consistent with their national and international obligations, where necessary;

(c) National plans should address the issue of foreign terrorist fighters, as called for in Security Council resolution 2178 (2014). In that resolution, the Council decided that States should ensure that their legal systems provide for the prosecution of travel for terrorism or related training; and that States should also address the financing or facilitation of such activities and prevent entry or transit through their territories, including through the usage of internationally accepted databases, of any individual with respect to whom there is credible information that provides reasonable grounds for believing that this travel is undertaken for the purpose of participating in a terrorist act. The guiding principles on stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters agreed at the special meeting of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism, held in Madrid on 28 July 2015, could be useful in this regard;

(d) National plans should prevent violent extremist and terrorist groups from trading in oil and antiquities, hostage-taking, and receiving donations, in line with Member States' obligations under Security Council resolution 2199 (2015);

(e) One means of addressing many of the drivers of violent extremism will be to align national development policies with the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (Goal 1); ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4); achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Goal 5); promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8); reducing inequality within and among countries (Goal 10); making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11); and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Goal 16);

(f) National plans should dedicate funding for implementation by government and non-governmental entities and promote public-private partnerships, where applicable;

(g) Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for these plans are essential to ensuring that policies are having the desired impact.

Regional plans of action to prevent violent extremism

45. As violent extremism does not respect borders, national and global action has to be complemented by enhanced regional cooperation. Several subregions and regions have already adopted comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies. Member States should come together to complement those strategies or adopt new regional or subregional plans of action to prevent violent extremism, facilitated by regional or subregional organizations and the United Nations, with a view to complementing and reinforcing their national plans. To this end, Member States should:

(a) Strengthen subregional and regional organizations, including by creating and maintaining regional contact lists of focal points, monitoring the trafficking of small arms and heavy weapons, and facilitating intergovernmental communication and cooperation. Establishing early warning centres for the exchange of information on violent extremist activities could render this interaction more predictable and could thus be of additional value;

(b) Enable subregional and regional organizations to provide technical assistance to Member States in the respective subregion or region in building capacity for preventing violent extremism and support effective cooperation, for example, on border management.

Mobilizing resources

46. To transform our commitment into lasting change, we need to make more efficient use of existing funds and consider how, based on the interdependence of political, social and economic drivers of violent extremism, we can create synergies in our resource allocation. Moreover, within the peace and security sector, there is a growing understanding that many preventive measures, traditionally understood to be part of development efforts, can help address these drivers. The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals explicitly include goals and targets related to preventing violence and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies.

47. Investment in prevention is far more cost-effective than allocating resources to mitigating consequences. I therefore recommend considering:

(a) Adjusting the focus of existing funds dedicated to countering terrorism and violent extremism to enable them to also address the drivers of violent extremism, and thereby ultimately using available resources more effectively;

(b) Identifying other funding sources across sectors and evaluating how Governments and regional and international institutions could adapt existing funds so as to expand programming that is sensitive to preventing violent extremism.

B. Taking action

48. In developing national plans of action and regional strategies, Member States should consider addressing the elements outlined below.

Dialogue and conflict prevention

49. In my report to the Security Council entitled “The United Nations and conflict prevention: a collective recommitment” (S/2015/730), I noted that the risk of violent extremism often increases in the same conditions that lead to heightened risk of conflict. Where conflict already exists, we must redouble our efforts to promote and sustain dialogue between warring parties, since persistent unresolved conflict is proving to be a major driver of violent extremism. While we may benefit in these situations from using some of the tools already developed to prevent conflict, we have also started developing specific initiatives for the prevention of violent extremism through the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, such as a Task Force working group on the prevention of violent extremism and a Task Force working group on the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and a regional youth engagement and skills development programme. I therefore recommend that Member States:

(a) Ensure that, in circumstances where military action becomes necessary to counter the expansion of violent extremist groups, any such response is in full compliance with international law, in particular with the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law;

(b) Engage opposing parties and regional actors earlier on and seek to forge international consensus so as to give regional and United Nations diplomacy the leverage that it needs to broker solutions. Delaying engagement reduces options, and increases financial and human costs;

(c) Encourage individuals to leave violent extremist groups by developing programmes that place an emphasis on providing them with educational and economic opportunities. To avert perceptions of injustice which might result from extending assistance to these perpetrators, such programmes should not draw from initiatives addressing the needs of the wider civilian population;

(d) Explore opportunities to introduce alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation, arbitration and restorative justice, to resolve conflict and achieve sustainable peace;

(e) Engage religious leaders to provide a platform for intra- and interfaith dialogue and discussions through which to promote tolerance and understanding between communities, and voice their rejection of violent doctrines by emphasizing the peaceful and humanitarian values inherent in their theologies. Religious leaders also have a responsibility to themselves to seek such understanding. Tolerance is not passive: it demands the active choice to reach out on a basis of mutual understanding and respect, especially where disagreement exists;

(f) Preserve the heritage of cultural and religious diversity against the attempts by violent extremists to destroy manuscripts, objects and sites that are symbols of pluralism and tolerance;

(g) Convene regional and national dialogues on preventing violent extremism with a range of actors, encompassing youth engagement, gender equality, the inclusion of marginalized groups, the role of municipalities, and positive outreach through social media and other virtual platforms.

Strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law

50. When Governments embrace international human rights norms and standards, promote good governance, uphold the rule of law and eliminate corruption, they create an enabling environment for civil society and reduce the appeal of violent extremism. Policies and initiatives that are firmly grounded in human rights are essential to ensuring the inclusion of individuals or communities that are vulnerable to violent extremism. We need to find ways to strengthen trust between government institutions and communities to prevent real or perceived marginalization and exclusion. I therefore recommend that Member States:

(a) Review all national legislation, policies, strategies and practices aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism to ascertain whether they are firmly grounded in respect for human rights and the rule of law, and whether they put in place national mechanisms designed to ensure compliance. This may also involve taking measures to strengthen the rule of law, repealing discriminatory legislation and implementing policies and laws that combat discrimination and exclusion;

(b) Provide access to justice for all and strengthen fair, effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(c) Foster non-discriminatory basic service provision, ensure accountability for service delivery, and extend state services to remote areas and create an environment where entrepreneurship can flourish and societies can become more peaceful, just and inclusive;

(d) Strengthen the professionalism of security forces, law enforcement agencies and justice institutions; and ensure effective oversight and accountability of such bodies, in conformity with international human rights law and the rule of law. This may involve providing dedicated human rights training to security forces, law enforcement agents and all those involved in the administration of justice regarding the prohibition of incitement to hatred and, more broadly, respect for human rights within the context of measures taken to counter violent extremism and terrorism;

(e) Ensure accountability for gross violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including those amounting to crimes under international law, such as war crimes and crimes against humanity, through criminal procedures adhering to due-process guarantees. Accountability mechanisms should have relevant gender expertise to fulfil their mandates. In cases where national procedures are not able or are unwilling to address such crimes, the international community should support accountability efforts, including through a referral of such situations by the Security Council to the International Criminal Court or to an ad hoc tribunal, where appropriate;

(f) Reform national legal frameworks and penitentiary systems to ensure the security of inmates, personnel and facilities and establish procedures to prevent and counter radicalization in prisons based on human rights and the rule of law;

(g) Introduce disengagement, rehabilitation and counselling programmes for persons engaged in violent extremism which are gender-sensitive and include programmes for children to facilitate their reintegration into society. These programmes must be in full compliance with international human rights norms and standards, including the rights to freedom of movement, freedom of expression and privacy, gender equality and the principle of non-discrimination;

(h) Promote the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, including through human rights-based initiatives that help eliminate the conditions conducive to violent extremism. Such programmes can be particularly helpful when one group, whatever its demographic weight, behaves monopolistically in the political and economic sectors at the expense of other groups;

(i) Implement Security Council resolution 1624 (2005), promoting a comprehensive approach to incitement and violent extremism, and the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence (A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, appendix), involving all relevant actors, such as national human rights institutions, civil society, political parties and the media;

(j) Prevent the subversion of the work of educational, cultural and religious institutions by terrorists and their supporters, as highlighted in Security Council resolution 1624 (2005); take appropriate measures against all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, as exhibited in particular in the curricula of formal and non-formal educational institutions, and textbooks and teaching methods;

(k) Ensure that any restrictions on freedom of expression are clearly and narrowly defined and meet the three-part test of legality, proportionality and necessity.

Engaging communities

51. For their survival, violent extremists require the tacit support of a wider circle of sympathizers. If violent extremists can be deprived of this support, their capacity to cause harm and evade justice will be greatly reduced. While engagement with communities marked by a long history of distrust of the government can pose a challenge, there are a number of community engagement strategies that hold promise. I therefore recommend that Member States:

(a) Develop joint and participatory strategies, including with civil society and local communities, to prevent the emergence of violent extremism, protect communities from recruitment and the threat of violent extremism, and support confidence-building measures at the community level by providing appropriate platforms for dialogue and the early identification of grievances;

(b) Adopt community-oriented policing models and programmes that seek to solve local issues in partnership with the community and are firmly based on human rights so as to avoid putting community members at risk. This would increase public awareness and vigilance and improve police understanding and knowledge with regard to communities, thus enhancing their ability to be proactive and identify grievances and critical issues at an early stage;

(c) Develop local and family-based mentorship programmes, based on a one-to-one relationship between mentor and mentee, focusing on vulnerable individuals or those who have been convicted of or charged with criminal acts related to violent extremism;

(d) Provide medical, psychosocial and legal service support in communities that give shelter to victims of violent extremists, including victims of sexual and gender-based crimes;

(e) Encourage civic and professional associations, unions and chambers of commerce to reach out through their own networks to marginalized groups so as to address challenges together through inclusive dialogue and consensual politics;

(f) Support the establishment of regional and global networks for civil society, youth, women's organizations and religious leaders to enable them to share good practices and experience so as to improve work in their respective communities and promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue;

(g) Promote, in partnership with civil society and communities, a discourse that addresses the drivers of violent extremism, including ongoing human rights violations. Address any existing human rights violations, as a matter of both legal obligation and credibility.

Empowering youth

52. We must pay particular attention to youth. The world's 1.8 billion young women and men constitute an invaluable partner in our striving to prevent violent extremism. We have to identify better tools with which to support young people as they take up the causes of peace, pluralism and mutual respect. The rapid advance of modern communications technology also means that today's youth form a global community of an unprecedented kind. This interconnectivity is already being exploited by violent extremists; we need to reclaim this space by helping to amplify the voices of young people already promoting the values of mutual respect and peace to their peers. I therefore recommend that Member States:

(a) Support and enhance young women's and young men's participation in activities aimed at preventing violent extremism by prioritizing meaningful engagement mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels, as laid out in the 2015 Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security; and provide a physically, socially and emotionally safe and supportive environment for the participation of young women and men in preventing violent extremism;

(b) Integrate young women and men into decision-making processes at local and national levels, including by establishing youth councils and similar mechanisms which give young women and men a platform for participating in mainstream political discourse;

(c) Foster trust between decision makers and young women and men, especially through intergenerational dialogue and youth-adult confidence-building activities and training;

(d) Involve hard-to-reach young women and men, such as those from underrepresented groups, in efforts to prevent violent extremism, as laid out in the Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding;

(e) Establish national mentoring programmes for young women and men, create space for personal growth in their chosen fields, and offer opportunities for community service which can enable them to become leaders and actors for constructive change;

(f) Ensure that a portion of all funds dedicated to addressing violent extremism are committed to projects that address young people's specific needs or empower them and encourage international financial institutions, foundations and other donors to provide small grant funding mechanisms to women and young social entrepreneurs to enable them to develop their own ideas on strengthening community resilience against violent extremism.

Gender equality and empowering women

53. Women's empowerment is a critical force for sustainable peace. While women do sometimes play an active role in violent extremist organizations, it is also no coincidence that societies for which gender equality indicators are higher are less vulnerable to violent extremism. We must therefore ask ourselves how we can better promote women's participation, leadership and empowerment across society, including in governmental, security sector and civil society institutions. In line with Security Council resolution 2242 (2015), we must ensure that the protection and empowerment of women is a central consideration of strategies devised to counter terrorism and violent extremism. There is also a need to ensure that efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism do not impact adversely on women's rights. I therefore recommend that Member States:

(a) Mainstream gender perspectives across efforts to prevent violent extremism;

(b) Invest in gender-sensitive research and data collection on women's roles in violent extremism, including on identifying the drivers that lead women to join violent extremist groups, and on the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on their lives, in order to develop targeted and evidence-based policy and programming responses;

(c) Include women and other underrepresented groups in national law enforcement and security agencies, including as part of counter-terrorism prevention and response frameworks;

(d) Build the capacity of women and their civil society groups to engage in prevention and response efforts related to violent extremism;

(e) Ensure that a portion of all funds dedicated to addressing violent extremism are committed to projects that address women's specific needs or empower women, as recommended in my recent report to the Security Council on women and peace and security (S/2015/716).

Education, skills development and employment facilitation

54. As part of the struggle against poverty and social marginalization, we need to ensure that every child receives a quality education which equips him or her for life, as stipulated under the right to education. Education should include teaching respect for human rights and diversity, fostering critical thinking, promoting media and digital literacy, and developing the behavioural and socioemotional skills that can

contribute to peaceful coexistence and tolerance. Young women and men entering the workplace need our support — both in gaining access to continued learning and vocational resources, and in incubating their entrepreneurial talent. I therefore recommend that Member States:

(a) Invest in education, in particular early childhood education, from ages 3 to 8, to ensure that all children have access to inclusive, high-quality education, taking into account diverse social and cultural settings;

(b) Implement education programmes that promote “global citizenship”, soft skills, critical thinking and digital literacy, and explore means of introducing civic education into school curricula, textbooks and teaching materials. Build the capacity of teachers and educators to support this agenda;

(c) Provide comprehensive primary through tertiary education, including technical and vocational education, and mentoring for all vulnerable people, including the displaced, by leveraging online and mobile technology;

(d) Collaborate with local authorities to create social and economic opportunities, in both rural and urban locations; invest in equipping people with the skills needed to meet local labour demands through relevant education opportunities;

(e) Provide young people with additional career options by fostering an entrepreneurial culture and offering entrepreneurship education, facilitating employment searches and job-matching, enacting regulations to promote the development of micro and small enterprises, easing access to finance and microcredit and increasing the range of support services such as marketing and distribution, so as to unleash the full economic potential of youth;

(f) Invite the private sector and other civil society actors to contribute to post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction efforts, especially job creation, facilitation and training opportunities.

Strategic communications, the Internet and social media

55. The manipulative messages of violent extremists on social media have achieved considerable success in luring people, especially young women and men, into their ranks. While violent extremists have demonstrated some sophistication in their use of old and new media tools, it is equally true that we who reject their message have largely failed to communicate to those who are disillusioned and disenfranchised a vision of the future that captures their imagination and offers the prospect of tangible change. Thousands of young activists and artists are fighting back against violent extremism online through music, art, film, comics and humour, and they deserve our support. I therefore recommend that Member States:

(a) Develop and implement national communications strategies, in close cooperation with social media companies and the private sector, that are tailored to local contexts, gender sensitive and based on international human rights standards, to challenge the narratives associated with violent extremism;

(b) Encourage more research on the relationship between the misuse of the Internet and social media by violent extremists and the factors that drive individuals towards violent extremism;

(c) Promote grass-roots efforts to advance the values of tolerance, pluralism and understanding;

(d) Ensure that national legal frameworks protect freedom of opinion and expression, pluralism, and diversity of the media;

(e) Empower and enable victims to transform their loss and suffering into a constructive force for preventing violent extremism by providing them with online forums where they can tell their stories;

(f) Protect journalists, who play a crucial role in democratic societies, by ensuring the prompt and thorough investigation of threats to their safety, and encourage journalists to work together to voluntarily develop media training and industry codes of conduct which foster tolerance and respect.

C. Supporting Member States, regional bodies and communities through the United Nations

56. The primary responsibility for preventing violent extremism rests with Member States. As they develop their response, the United Nations can act as a natural partner. The United Nations can help foster global dialogue, uniting countries, people and communities on the basis of universally shared values and principles as enshrined in international law, including human rights instruments.

57. In cooperation with Member States, United Nations missions, programmes and projects are already addressing the underlying drivers and triggers of violent extremism. Violent extremist groups, which recognize the power of these tools, are targeting peacekeepers, human rights advocates, educators, civil society activists and aid workers in order to weaken our resolve and our results. We need to be more strategic and better coordinated in our activities in order to enhance coherence across the full spectrum of security, sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian assistance. This will require that United Nations peace and security efforts and sustainable development policy frameworks address the drivers of violent extremism, that we further strengthen the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights and the rule of law and that humanitarian principles are respected, that humanitarian actors have the necessary space within which to operate and that our humanitarian work is people-centred, supports resilient communities and does not fuel conflict.

58. I have instructed United Nations entities to redouble their efforts in coordinating and developing activities with Member States, to prioritize, sensitize and adapt existing programmes to permit them to target the drivers of violent extremism more precisely and to introduce new initiatives to close potential gaps. I therefore intend to:

(a) Adopt an All-of-UN approach to supporting national, regional and global efforts to prevent violent extremism through the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, as well as through existing United Nations inter-agency bodies and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force and its entities, which bear the primary responsibility for supporting Member States in implementing all four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. By adopting an All-of-UN approach through the Task Force framework, the Organization will

coordinate its action more closely and help channel and share initiatives that have proved effective;

(b) Integrate preventing violent extremism into relevant activities of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions in accordance with their mandates, as well as into relevant activities of United Nations country teams in order to build the capacity of Member States through such mechanisms as the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, the United Nations common country assessments, youth advisory Boards, the Global Focal Point for Police, Justice and Corrections, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform programming;

(c) Encourage United Nations governing and executive boards to enhance the capacities of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to support Member States in developing and implementing their national plans of action for preventing violent extremism;

(d) Offer capacity-building programmes 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;

(e) Launch a United Nations global communications strategy to prevent violent extremism, grounded in United Nations core values of peace, justice, tolerance and human dignity as they are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other instruments, reinforcing these shared values around the world and supporting Member States in tailoring their own national and local communication strategies, upon their request;

(f) 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;

(g) Develop a standing United Nations prevention of violent extremism platform to direct the implementation of this Plan, facilitated by the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force and supported by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre. This platform would coordinate policy within the United Nations system and support Member States in developing their institutional responses to violent extremism at the local, national and regional levels by sharing lessons learned. It should foster cooperation between Member States, including through South-South and triangular partnerships;

(h) Support Governments seeking to develop and implement education programmes that promote civic education, soft skills, critical thinking, digital literacy, tolerance and respect for diversity, including, for example, peace education modules for the use of school-age children, in order to promote the culture of non-violence;

(i) Launch a global awareness campaign to support victims of violent extremism and provide them with a global platform within which to share their stories by expanding the Victims of Terrorism Support Portal;

(j) Encourage youth exchange programmes within and among Member States, which could be further developed into global community service and global youth programmes to enhance cross-cultural understanding, promote learning of new skills and support development initiatives;

(k) Invite relevant private actors, including communications and social media companies, to support the prevention of violent extremism initiatives and generate creative ideas to help the international community effectively address the spread of violent extremism through the Internet;

(l) Develop a proposal for a Secretary-General's fund to support innovative projects aimed at preventing violent extremism, especially in the fields of communications and community empowerment.

V. An appeal for concerted action

59. Undermining our common humanity, violent extremism is inherently global. It is driven by a mixture of personal, societal and ideational factors whose manifestations vary from one individual to the next. Violent extremism has affected different societies during different eras and in different regions of the world. The present plan of action does not provide a single solution to this challenge — there is no one tool or approach that will put it to rest forever. Instead, we need to broaden the way we think about this threat and take measures to prevent it from proliferating. What is most alarming in the present context is the rapid expansion of violent extremist ideologies in different parts of the world, which is being facilitated by the technological revolution. In the true spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, we must take action now in order to save succeeding generations.

60. To be effective in preventing violent extremism, our actions have to be as agile and far-reaching as the phenomenon itself. We have to improve our set of tools dynamically and keep reviewing our responses. The Plan of Action constitutes the inaugural basis for a comprehensive approach to this fast evolving, multidimensional challenge. I have asked my staff to keep the action of the United Nations under constant review and to provide me with updates regarding what we might also be doing.

61. I am convinced that unity in principled action will overcome the rhetoric and appeal of violent extremism and, ultimately, the violent extremist groups themselves. At a time of growing polarization on a number of national, regional and global issues, preventing violent extremism offers a real opportunity for the members of the international community to unite, harmonize their actions and pursue inclusive approaches in the face of division, intolerance and hatred.

62. The General Assembly is the only body that can speak with a global voice to all parts of the world where violent extremists seek to spread intolerance and division. I therefore call upon all Member States to use that voice to send forth a resounding appeal for unity and action.