

OSCE-GCTF International Workshop on “Advancing Women’s Roles in Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism”

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I am honored and humbled to be here addressing such an audience of experts, as well as national, local, and community leaders, who dedicate their lives to the cause of peace and security for all.

I would like to thank the OSCE for hosting this very important workshop on the roles of women in countering violent extremism. I also want to thank the OSCE’s Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU) and the Global Counterterrorism Forum’s (GCTF) Administrative Unit for their hard work in organizing such a worthy endeavor and for all of the participants who have traveled to be here today.

As a former war zone correspondent, I witnessed how wars have moved from traditional battlefields to villages and homes, making women and children more vulnerable, and even targeted in order to terrorize communities. I have also witnessed the increasing power and reach of individuals in this day of globalization and global communications. No longer are declarations of war solely dependent on governments and states. The increasing power of individuals can be channeled for good, and unfortunately, as we have seen recently, for evil.

Today’s conference is focused on positive change and, as we have heard from previous speakers, is both timely and necessary. In the 13 years since September 11th, the threat of international terrorism has evolved from a centralized al-Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan to decentralized al-Qaeda affiliates and other violent extremists with a more global presence. While these terror organizations have been forced to further decentralize their recruitment efforts, advances in technology and globalization have made sharing their violent narratives easier and have contributed to a growing and dangerous trend: individuals becoming radicalized to violence in their home countries and travelling across borders to engage in terrorism abroad.

We are witnessing an unprecedented flow of fighters and facilitation networks fueling multiple conflicts worldwide in the Horn of Africa, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. This trend has been particularly destructive in Iraq and Syria, with thousands of fighters from the region and beyond joining terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al-Qaeda’s Al-Nusrah Front (ANF). And even as we continue to pursue President Obama’s stated objective to degrade and destroy ISIL, we also have to join our international partners to find ways to challenge the broader threat of foreign terrorist fighters. These fighters do not threaten just one particular state, region, or interests, but they now constitute a global threat that has to be addressed through collective action and integrated initiatives.

That is also why on September 24, U.S. President Barack Obama hosted a Security Council Summit in New York of world leaders to focus on the acute threat posed by foreign terrorist

fighters. The United States is working with partners on a Security Council resolution to give the international community new tools to address the foreign terrorist fighter problem and help ensure states are doing what they need to do, including preventing the travel of these fighters and countering the violent extremism that fuels their radicalization to violence. The UN Security Council effort is the capstone of the growing multilateral effort, including through the GCTF, to address the “Foreign Terrorist Fighters” phenomenon.

I do want to highlight the establishment of the GCTF “Foreign Terrorist Fighters”—or FTF—Working Group. Co-led by the Netherlands and Morocco, this new working group evolved from a one-year GCTF initiative and is bringing together experts in border and aviation security, criminal justice, and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), among other fields. In response to one of the most serious terrorism threats to arise in recent years, the GCTF adopted *The Hague—Marrakech Memorandum on Good Practices for a More Effective Response to the FTF Phenomenon*, which covers four central aspects: radicalization to violent extremism; recruitment and facilitation; travel and fighting; and return and reintegration.

The ongoing conflict in Syria and the flow of foreign fighters there highlights the role of women in either being targeted for recruitment or helping to counter the terrorist narrative. We look forward to hearing from the delegations here on your countries’ efforts to engage women in helping to reduce the number of youth traveling to Syria.

The international community has witnessed measurable success on the battlefield against terrorists, but in the long run our concerted partnering efforts will be more effective and have lasting impact if we match the successes we have done militarily with an equal amount of coordinated effort on the civilian side – on both national and international levels. Today we are here to brainstorm how nations, societies, individuals, businesses and organizations, such as the OSCE, can better contribute to the international fight against terrorism, especially by advancing women’s roles in countering violent extremism.

That is why the United States is pleased to join Turkey and Germany in supporting this workshop. This initiative builds, as the previous speakers have pointed out, on previous activities of both the OSCE and the GCTF, particularly in the areas of women in community engagement and community-oriented policing, women in multi-sectoral approaches to CVE, and women and terrorist radicalization. The United States recognizes the leadership that the OSCE has shown, and we are really pleased to have this opportunity to collaborate with our partners here in Vienna on this vital issue. The OSCE’s multi-dimensional approach to security recognizes that equal rights and opportunities for women and men are fundamental to achieving comprehensive security.

The United States recognizes already the collaboration of both of these organizations and this workshop and what it presents is a welcome impetus for empowering women to be leaders in all our efforts to achieve security, tolerance, and prosperity for their communities and countries. Women's voices must be heard if communities are going to be able to move past violence and victimization and invest in a shared future that rejects conflict and promotes dignity. Because women have often been the targets of the violence and the depravity that follows radicalization, we must enlist and empower them as key agents of peace and reconciliation.

In our view, the OSCE is a key implementing partner of the GCTF – they are on the ground in their field missions – supporting training and promoting the implementation of GCTF good practices throughout the OSCE region. We hope that the recommendations developed from this workshop, and your brainstorming ideas, and the prior workshop in Istanbul will contribute further to the GCTF Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism.

Previous activities of both the OSCE and the GCTF recognized that it is good practice to engage women in countering violent extremism, especially at the local level. We've seen this ourselves in Afghanistan and Pakistan: how critically important it is to engage local organizations and local community leaders.

In Afghanistan, I saw that women, especially mothers, carry the authority within their families and their communities and can be a positive influence to counter violent extremism. I saw mothers, how they critically convinced their sons fighting with insurgents to come back from the battlefield, lay down their weapons, and re-integrate into a community program. Likewise, the Department of State has worked through women run NGO's in Afghanistan and Pakistan that train mothers on how to identify when their son or daughter is vulnerable to radical ideology.

For that reason, the GCTF has recognized that women have to be part of any community engagement or community-oriented policing efforts in order to engage them as “force multipliers.” Women can be the most effective actors in a community to raise awareness and to build capacity among other local women to address radicalization.

I would encourage everyone to become familiar with the GCTF's good practices documents: they highlight this unique role of women and they have ways in which GCTF members and partners can collaborate on existing or new projects that build this capacity in women.

I'd like to discuss briefly the U.S. strategies and policies that aim to incorporate the role of women in preventing and countering violent extremism, and then I'd like to reflect on our ongoing commitment to supporting civil society as part of this integrated effort.

Though we have collectively made strides to put terrorist groups such as al-Qaida on a path of decline, violent extremist groups remain very adaptable and resilient, and they retain the capability to conduct regional and transnational attacks.

These examples make clear the need for us to continue to refine and adapt our counterterrorism policies and programs to be more comprehensive and to be more proactive, in part by involving and incorporating women and civil society actors to the fullest extent possible. We want to create networks of good actors to counter these dark networks of bad actors.

Our U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security emphasizes the need to ensure women's perspectives and considerations of gender have always been part of the U.S. approach to peace processes, conflict prevention, the protection of civilians, and humanitarian assistance.

Violence and the threat of violence creates destabilizing effects that hinders the ability of individuals and civil society to fully participate in their communities. So it isn't just about security, it is about human rights.

Global peace and prosperity depend not only on the absence of violence, but also on the active pursuit of stability and rule of law and good governance. This is why we recognize that gender equality globally is intimately tied to countering violent extremism and preventing violence. When women have a seat at the table in addressing security, societies are safer and everyone prospers. After all, no country, no society can move forward if half of its population is left behind. And when women and men are active and equal partners in building security, we are all safer.

This is the wisdom behind UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and the United States' National Action Plan, both of which recognize the critical need to elevate the role of women and civil society.

In order to do that, we are taking a holistic approach to counter terrorism by ensuring our programs maximize gender analysis and gender integration.

- First, we are building women's capacity in civil society and the security sector by training local, national, and multinational women's and peace groups on effective public outreach and ways in which women can counter violent extremism in their communities. We are helping to train them in advocacy, as well as in strategic communications.
- Second, we are also encouraging more participation from women in the development and implementation of our CVE programs, our counter-terrorism finance programs, and our anti-terrorism assistance programs. This provides specific counter-terrorism training to law enforcement agencies. Having law enforcement agencies recognize the role of women, we find, is equally important.
- Third, we are more focused on how our counterterrorism policies and programs affect women. One way we do this is by engaging with partner governments on the importance of protecting civilians, especially women and girls.
- Finally, we are working to encourage the inclusion of women in counterterrorism dialogues with governments and civil society, to elevate and amplify their voices. That's why we brought in groups of Afghan women to the peace table as well as to development and assistance programs and conferences throughout the world.

In conclusion, I would like to thank once again the GCTF and the OSCE for recognizing the importance of specifically focusing on the role of women in preventing conflict, in countering violent extremism in order to build stronger societies. The U.S. delegation and I are really looking forward to listening, to learning, and to supporting our partners in this important effort to find the best practices and advance the role of women in peace and security through this conference today. And I thank you all for your participation, and I look forward to hearing from all of these really important panels and experts in the room.

Thank you.