

12 Principles for National Action Planning

Meeting Report UN Side Event 30 June 2016



Photo: UN CTED

On 30 June 2016, the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT), together with the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#) and the [Global Center on Cooperative Security \(GCCS\)](#), convened an event on **'National Action Planning on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Mechanisms and Lessons Learned'** as a side event to the 2016 Review of the [UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#) at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Over the past few years, there have been numerous efforts to support the development of national strategies on counter-terrorism and countering and preventing violent extremism. Some were, for instance, initiated under the mandate of the UN Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UN CTED), based on Security Council Resolutions [1624](#) (2005) and [2178](#) (2014), or the mandate of a regional organisation such as the OSCE, and some were developed by individual member states themselves or partners like the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF). These efforts are in line in many respects with the ambitions of the [Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism](#) presented by the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) on 15 January 2016.

The UNSG's Plan of Action calls on each member state to **"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 where they already exist."** The Plan of Action also points out the importance of national ownership and respect for international law, and among other things, emphasises the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach, reinforcing the message in numerous Council resolutions and other national and international frameworks.

Sponsored by the Permanent Missions of the Netherlands, Kenya and Nigeria, this event convened a panel during which experts shared their experiences in designing and implementing national strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism. Panelists included **H.E. Arthur Andambi**, Chargé d'Affaires of the Republic of Kenya; **Mr Anthony Bosah**, Chargé d'Affaires of Nigeria; **Mr. Edward Flynn**, Senior Human Rights Officer UN CTED; **Mr. Thomas Wuchte**, Head on Anti-Terrorism Issues, OSCE and **Mr. Alistair Millar**, Executive Director GCCS. The panel was chaired by **Dr. Bibi van Ginkel** ICCT Research Fellow, and Senior Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'.

The panelists shared insights into key dos and don'ts for the design and implementation of national action plans on Counter-Terrorism (CT) / Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) in various countries. All agreed that every approach should be context-specific, as a one size fits all strategy does not exist. Every design of a national strategy should therefore start with a thorough analysis of the security threats the country is facing, as well as an analysis of the underlying causes of the problems. Twelve key suggestions were offered:

1. **Shifting concepts.** The fact that concepts, frames, paradigms and perceptions on how to deal with the threats that undermine peaceful and free societies are constantly shifting, reflects the learning curve of the international community on how to effectively respond to these threats and correct policy mistakes of the past. Beyond the labels of the newly-introduced policy approaches, it is key that one goes beyond the understanding of hard security in the sense that more is needed than the absence of violence, but approaches should also encapsulate a positive interpretation of security, sometimes referred to as human security, including respect for human rights, and economic development, therefore also looking at the role of education, social affairs, gender and youth issues, security, religious affairs to name a few.
2. **National ownership.** Outside actors can offer support or guidance in designing a national action plan when requested but it is important to maximise national ownership of the process.
3. **Multi-stakeholder approach engagement.** It takes a multi-stakeholder approach to alleviate the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. This involves breaking down silos, and investing in meaningful engagement between state and non-state-actors, in order to realise context-specific and sustainable solutions. The first step in this engagement trajectory is to come to a common and shared understanding of the security threats and underlying factors. Next steps that were identified included information sharing; consultation; involvement; collaboration; and empowerment of the partners.
4. **Mainstream youth and gender-balanced participation.** There is a need for credible voices in effectuating change in society. Women and youth should be part of the analysis phase, the design phase and the execution phase of national strategies.
5. **Taking time to build trust, to establish a common understanding.** It takes time and commitment to identify relevant stakeholders and generate trust, in creating a safe environment for all stakeholders to come to a common understanding of the security threats as well as the underlying causes and grievances that are specific to the area or region.
6. **Identify sustainable solutions.** To come up with sustainable, well-balanced and effective solutions, all stakeholders must also assess and recognise different risks or consequences of measures governments take in dealing with counter-terrorism. Donors and implementing parties should ensure follow-up of capacity-building activities.
7. **Governance structure.** Setting up a national action plan requires a clear governance structure including an appointed focal point for coordination purposes. Another important element is that all constituents who are brought to the table know what their role is and that the focus lies on resilience and tolerance.

8. **Work towards a theory of change.** Once a common understanding of the problem has been established, all stakeholders can work together to formulate a theory of change with clear and tangible goals and objectives for which policies need to be designed and implemented.
9. **Identify areas for capacity building.** During such a trajectory it might become clear that certain technical assistance or training is required to create and implement mechanisms for multi-stakeholder exchange and consultations, for instance in the areas of rehabilitation and reintegration of former offenders or returnees, or in counter-narrative campaigns.
10. **Accountability.** There is a need for a form of formal functioning implementation mechanism which takes time to set up but there need to be committees, regular meetings in which views can be exchanged.
11. **Monitoring and evaluation.** There is a need for effective monitoring and evaluation to help guide recalibration of the strategy when necessary.
12. **Strategic communications.** It is an essential element of any strategy as the government needs to be able to communicate effectively what the strategy is, what the objectives are, and who plays what part in the execution of the strategy.