

Uncomfortable Truths, Unconventional Wisdoms

*Women's Perspectives on Violent
Extremism & Security Interventions*

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*This report draws on consultations with over 70 women's
rights and peace practitioners across 15 countries.*

The Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL)*

brings together existing women rights and peace practitioners, organizations, and networks actively engaged in preventing extremism and promoting peace, rights and pluralism, to enable their systematic and strategic collaboration. WASL partners have deep experience in:

- Providing religious literacy and alternative narratives
- Alternative narratives or religious texts and cultural practices
- Deradicalization & rehabilitation
- Security sector reform (SSR) and training
- Upholding human rights and gender equality
- Building community resilience and addressing grievances through social and economic programming and
- Promoting a culture of peace and active citizenship.

* 'Wasl' means to 'connect' in Arabic, Urdu and Persian

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We have had 15 years with counter-terrorism policies in place, but no results."

— Pakistani woman peace activist

A Shared Security Threat

Violent extremism has emerged as one of the most critical global security threats of our time. In 2016, some 120 countries worldwide face risks from violent extremism.¹ Increasingly couched in religious and ethno-nationalistic identities, the ideologies that are spreading into the mainstream challenge the pluralistic nature of societies and if left unchecked could threaten the social cohesion of many nations. Acknowledging the complexity of the issues, in 2015 the international community led by the United States highlighted Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) as a global policy priority. The importance of gender analysis and the work of women-led organizations, both globally and locally, in preventing and countering extremism are highlighted in key policy frameworks.

For good reasons: across the Americas, Asia, Africa and the Middle East world, women's rights groups have been warning against the rise of extremism for nearly three decades. They were first to notice, and often bear the brunt of, these regressive forces that represent the antithesis of basic principles of human rights, democracy and pluralism. Internationally, organizations such as the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) have led research and analysis of these issues for the past decade.² In recent years,

¹ Magnus Ranstorp presentation at the UNDP Global Meeting on Preventing Violent Extremism and promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Diversity. Oslo, Norway (16 March 2016).

local women-led NGOs and community-based organizations in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, and elsewhere have developed innovative approaches to tackle the spread of extreme ideologies and violent practices of both state and non-state actors in their communities.

Despite increasingly restricted public space and limited resources, they have found ways to engage these actors, de-radicalizing those who have been drawn into extremist movements and preventing the recruitment of those who are vulnerable to the lure of movements. Working at the grassroots, nationally and transnationally, they have a unique credibility and authenticity to provide insights into the problems and guidance on the solutions. They understand the complexity of the challenges and the need for systems-wide, multi-sectoral approaches notably addressing the security sector, economic development, education reform and other issues.

This brief is the first in a series of policy papers produced by the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) based on consultations with over 70 women peace and rights practitioners in 15 countries across the MENA/Asia regions.³ It highlights their experiences and perspectives on the security dimensions of the P/CVE agenda and offers critical lessons to inform international and national policies and interventions. It also touches on their own efforts in addressing state and non-state military and security actors.

This brief covers four key areas: (1) security concerns for civilians and civil society organizations; (2) experiences and engagement

with local police; (3) outreach to militias and experiences of de-radicalization work; and (4) perspectives on international military and security presence and interventions. The findings reveal strikingly common and shared critiques of the current P/CVE concept, policies and practices across contexts, and practical recommendations for the international community on how to support indigenous solutions and work effectively with women peacemakers and human rights defenders.

Snapshot of Key Policy Initiatives on P/CVE

- ✓ **The White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in February 2015 referenced the importance of women and gender perspectives in addressing extremism.** Aiming to broaden the scope of debate and response to rising extremism beyond the narrow lens of military and security-oriented, anti-terrorism approaches, the Summit drew in US-based and international actors, highlighted the need for socio-economic responses and encouraged support for innovative practices by civil society, youth, and women. It also noted the importance of gender perspectives in the analysis of drivers and mitigators of extremism.⁴ (continues next page)

³ These consultations were conducted under Chatham House Rules to protect the security of individuals; as such names of those quoted have not been disclosed.

⁴ This "Fact Sheet: The White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism" gives an overview of key policy developments: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/fact-sheet-white-house-summit-countering-violent-extremism>

✓ **The European Conference on Countering Violent Extremism in June 2015 called for support to women’s networking.** Focusing on youth and women’s activism, the Summit concluded that improved networking among women-led civil society organizations is essential.⁵

✓ **UN Security Council Resolution 2242 adopted in October 2015 emphasized the critical need for women’s leadership and support for the inclusion of women’s organizations in strategy development and programming to address extremism.** The resolution also “Urges Member States and the United Nations system to ensure the participation and leadership of women and women’s organizations in developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism... including through countering incitement to commit terrorist acts, creating counter narratives and other appropriate interventions, and building their capacity to do so effectively, and further to address, including by the empowerment of women, youth, religious and cultural leaders, the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism...” Further, it calls for “adequate and increased UN funding to address the gender dimensions counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism...”⁶

⁵ Referenced here: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/09/247449.htm>

⁶ The full text of UNSC Res. 2242 is available here: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2242.pdf

✓ **The UN Secretary General’s Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism calls on all to “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.”** The plan cites gender equality and women’s empowerment as critical forces for sustainable peace and emphasizes the need to ensure that efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism do not impact adversely on women’s rights by (a) mainstreaming gender perspectives, (b) investing in gender-sensitive research and data collection on women’s roles in violent extremism, (c) including women and other underrepresented groups in national law enforcement and security agencies, (d) building the capacity of women and their civil society groups to engage in prevention and response efforts related to violent extremism, and (e) ensuring that a portion of all funds dedicated to addressing violent extremism are committed to projects that address women’s specific needs or empower women.⁷

✓ **The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security adopted in December 2015 calls for meaningful inclusion of youth in global policy development.** Citing the intersection with resolutions on Women, Peace and Security and Counter-Terrorism, the resolution aims to reframe youth as partners for peace and security, not only threats as has been the dominant discourse.⁸

⁷ The full text of the UN Secretary General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism is available here: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674

⁸ The full text of UNSC Res. 2250 can be found here: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015))

Agreeing on a shared definition of 'violent extremism' is itself a challenge:

*"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."*⁹

— UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon

Radicalization is when a person's beliefs move from being relatively conventional to being radical, and they want a drastic change in society. This is not necessarily a bad thing and does not mean these people will become violent... Increasing religious devoutness or commitment to unconventional beliefs is not the same as radicalization towards violent extremism.¹⁰

Religious Extremism is defined as rigid interpretations of religion that are forced upon others using social or economic coercion, laws, intolerance, or violence. It is accompanied by non-fluid definitions of culture, religion, nationalism, ethnicity or sect, which move citizens into exclusionary, patriarchal and intolerant communities. Only a small percentage of religious conservatives are extremist in this sense. The use of violence justified for religious ends is a characteristic of some extremist movements, but not all.¹¹

Violent extremism is the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence. All forms of violent extremism seek change through fear and intimidation rather than through peaceful means.¹²

¹⁰ The Australian Government has one of the most useful definitions, outlined in "Preventing violent extremism and radicalization in Australia" (2015) available at: <https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Documents/preventing-violent-extremism-and-radicalisation-in-australia.pdf>

¹¹ ICAN. "Extremism as Mainstream: Implications for Women, Development & Security in the MENA/Asia Region," 2014.

¹² <https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/aboutus/Pages/what-is-violent-extremism.aspx>

⁹ An excerpt from the UNSG's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, see previous.

1. A Vibrant Civil Society is Vital to Preventing Extremism

But counter terrorism/extremism is used as an excuse to suppress democratic forces and civic activism

Strong, open, and vibrant civil societies are critical to articulating a positive alternative vision of society and the prevention of extremism. But states, including strong allies of the US and Europe, are using the fight against extremism and terror to suppress legitimate NGOs, media outlets, political groups, and individuals who criticize state policies and actions. Governments are cracking down on moderate forces and social movements. Meanwhile more radical and extreme elements flourish underground or through religious institutions, peer networks and the media. In Tajikistan, for example, extremist movements are becoming the only avenue through which people can learn about Islam or express legitimate dissent against the state. For women-led organizations, spaces to inform and educate the public around basic human rights, women's equality, or religious tenets that foster pluralism and coexistence are diminishing. Meanwhile, extremists fill the vacuum, spreading intolerant versions of religion and ideology and attacking and slandering women's human rights defenders (WHRDs) who challenge them.

Governments are using the fight against extremism as a pretext to crack down on civil society. State repression of civic activism and public dissent fuels radicalization, and reduces the likelihood of future democracy and stability.

The newer crackdowns exacerbate historic challenges in these countries, as civil society was already weakened by the restrictive

regimes of the past few decades.¹³ In Tunisia, in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, women were increasingly threatened in public for their dress and simple presence in demonstrations. The Islamists, says one female scholar “started preparing the country for an increased role for shari’ah in regulating people’s lives. Warnings about training of militia taking place were left unheeded.” In Iraq and Afghanistan, international organizations did not put sufficient resources into strengthening local institutions, even though they relied on local actors to implement programming. Now even those spaces are being closed. From Egypt to Turkey, governments are closing space for human rights and women’s rights groups.¹⁴ Some claim that NGOs are agents of foreign powers and a threat to national security. Many have also passed laws to restrict access to external funding or to support organizations that are in-line with state positions.¹⁵ Violent extremism will not be erased if the only alternative is a strict, authoritarian state that prohibits dissent and pluralism in expression and actions.

Journalists, bloggers, activists are under constant threat of arrest or attack from both state and non-state forces. In Libya, a number of women activists have been assassinated. The most prominent was Salwa Bughaighis who was shot by gunmen in her Benghazi home on June 25, 2014 shortly after casting her vote in the Libyan parliamentary elections.¹⁶ In Egypt, the government and

¹³ See Sarah E. Mendelson, “Why Governments Target Civil Society and What Can Be Done In Response,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (April 2015).

¹⁴ “Women’s rights organisations decry discrimination by State Council,” Daily News Egypt (February 9, 2016) <http://www.dailynewsegyp.com/2016/02/09/womens-rights-organisations-decry-discrimination-by-state-council/>

¹⁵ Egyptian bill to give the government the authority to approve or deny foreign grants and “suspend the activities of a civil society organization if it sponsors activities that would threaten national unity or that are contrary to the public order or morality.” See Khalid Hassan, “NGO bill sparks controversy in Egypt,” Al-Monitor (January 3, 2016), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/ngo-bill-controversy-freedoms-egypt-parliament.ht>

¹⁶ Beenish Ahmed, “Activists Inspired By Libyan Human Rights Lawyer Want To Know Why No One Is Investigating Her Murder,” Think Progress (June 28, 2015), <http://thinkprogress.org/world/2015/06/28/3674652/libya-salwa-bugaighis/>

security forces have either shut down NGOs and media outlets or threatened individuals and limited their ability to mobilize, speak out, or act collectively. On February 17, 2016, the Cairo governorate closed the El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation for Victims of Violence and Torture for operating outside the scope of its mandate by publishing reports of torture within the country.¹⁷ This is a direct attack against the human rights community.

Journalists, bloggers, activists are under constant threat of arrest or attack from both state and non-state forces.

Additionally the turmoil and tensions across the region that are prompting mass displacement also impact local civil society organizations. Faced with economic insecurity and risking exile and de facto statelessness, activists struggle to find a semblance of normality despite repression by both state and non-state actors. This reality, combined with closing public space, constrains their ability to organize peace or rights activism.

Women's Organizations on the Frontlines without Adequate Support

For women's organizations, the problems are even more complex. They often have to navigate a narrow path of maintaining independence and legitimacy in the face of immense pressure from governments to co-opt their agenda. Across the Middle East (and the world) governments are forming and funding their own shadow NGOs advocating regressive messages on rights.¹⁸ In the

¹⁷ "Egypt's Decision to Shut Down El Nadeem Center 'Final,' NGO Vows to Fight Back," Egyptian Streets (February 22, 2016), <http://egyptianstreets.com/2016/02/22/egypts-decision-to-shut-down-el-nadeem-center-final-ngo-vows-to-fight-back/>

¹⁸

Arab world, women's organizations also have to contend with the negative legacies of past regimes that espoused 'state feminism.' In the aftermath of the 2011 revolutions, women's organizations have been fully targeted by Islamists and extremists who equate them with past regimes or western interests and immorality.

Western governments that frame women's empowerment and gender equality as beneficial to their national security interests have compounded the problem by feeding into the rhetoric of extremist groups who are vehemently against women's equality. High rhetoric in the UN Security Council regarding the importance of women's organizations (as in Resolution 2242) is inadequate if unmatched by resources, security guarantees and political actions to ensure their active presence in decision-making forums. Failure to do so signals that the commitment to women's organizations is easily overtaken by geo-politics and short-term state interests, thus erasing any semblance of assurance women have against backlash for their activism.

Early attention to women and gender by the P/CVE community largely focused on women, and especially mothers, as counterweights or informants against extremism. This one-dimensional analysis instrumentalizes women and is dangerous for activists on the ground. Simultaneously as part of their efforts to limit funding of extremism, many governments have instituted financial restrictions making it impossible for local NGOs to access international resources. Funds that do exist often are for short project terms and do not cover core costs, making it difficult to operate flexibly or to become financially sustainable.

Recommendations for Supporting Civil Society Effectively in P/CVE

1. *Improve context analysis by consulting with civil society, particularly women's groups to:*
 - a. Identify increasing repression and human rights violations as warning signs of extremism;
 - b. Identify credible and independent CSOs; and
 - c. Support better collaboration with the pro-peace and pro-rights forces at the local level.
2. *Offer political support to women activists by :*
 - a. Demonstrating solidarity with women's movements and organizations working to address the root causes of extremism by advancing rights, peace and pluralism;
 - b. Seeking guidance from local, independent organizations to ensure approaches to engagement are appropriate to the local context and 'do no harm' to civil society, and women activists in particular; and
 - c. Speaking out against repression and hold states accountable for failures to support rights, peace, and civic activism. In particular, engage non-Western states and leaders to ensure protections for activists through reiteration of the strategic value of a vibrant civil society.

3. *Increase technical support to expand fora for civil society voices including through:*
 - a. Capacity development for journalists to critically cover rights, peace, and activism; and
 - b. Supporting existing platforms for women to share their knowledge and perspectives on violent extremism, within and across countries and sectors (notably with parliamentarians), to deepen debate with inclusion of gender and human security dimensions.
4. *Provide logistical and financial support to civil society actors, including by:*
 - a. Reducing barriers to inter-regional networking (e.g. onerous visa policies) and
 - b. Ensuring funding is directed to credible and independent CSOs, especially women-led groups.

2. The Power and Potential of Police

The police are at the frontlines of the fight against extremist violence and responsible for security on the ground. As women activists have noted, when police provide community security and are trusted by local populations, their presence has positive impact. But too often, law enforcement forces are either under-resourced or they themselves play a key role in spreading violence and injustice, further fueling extremism. The discussion below highlights the experiences of women's organizations vis-à-vis police forces in their countries.

From Iraq to Afghanistan, men and women volunteering to serve in the police know that they are likely to become targets of extremist violence. Yet despite the risks, police continue to be treated as the 'poor cousins' of the military. They tend to receive lower quality training, work in poor conditions, and have limited resources including pay and equipment. While the responsibilities they shoulder are tremendous, it is not uncommon to hear of police officers working with no pay for months, as they did in Kunduz, Afghanistan when the Taliban took control of the city in October 2015.¹⁹ These conditions likely contribute to the high dropout rate and corruption facing the Afghanistan Local Police.

In Egypt as in many other cases, police impunity is a critical and legitimate public grievance. Since the ascendance of the current regime, the situation has worsened. The mentality within the

police force, says one human rights activist, is "that it doesn't matter what they do, they will never be held accountable." There is no monitoring of their behavior or internal mechanisms to punish officers who have violated the law. Although the Egyptian police have been accused of everything from petty corruption to crime, rape and brutality, justice is never served. Thousands of Egyptian doctors gathered in Cairo on February 12, 2016 to protest police impunity, a rare occurrence since the tightening of anti-protest laws, after two doctors were assaulted in a hospital. Despite the Egyptian Medical Syndicate's calls for the prosecution of the police officers involved, no actions have been taken against them.²⁰ These injustices have driven both violent and non-violent resistance to state violence.

What's Missing in Security Assistance: Human Rights and Gender Training and Accountability

The international community, including the US and European governments, provide significant funding for train and equip programs to enhance policing (in addition to military and other security assistance) across countries affected by crisis and extremism. In the US in 2016, Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act allocated more than \$340 million to support foreign military and police forces in counterterrorism and stability operations.²¹ This does not include the separate train and equip funds for Iraq and Syria, which were approved for \$715 and \$600

²⁰ "Thousands of Egyptian doctors protest over alleged police brutality," Reuters (February 12, 2016), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-protests-police-idUSKCN0VL21O>

²¹ Security Assistance Monitor, "Military and Police Aid by Country," http://www.securityassistance.org/data/country/military/Section%201206%20Train%20and%20Equip%20Authority/2010/2017/is_all/Global (Accessed February 10, 2016)

¹⁹ Sune Engel Rasmussen, "Afghan police struggle as US watchdog finds holes in payroll data," The Guardian (January 12, 2015), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/12/afghanistan-police-payroll-data-watchdog-report>

million respectively, or the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund for \$3.8 billion.²² As many local communities have experienced, when done without coordination or emphasis on public service, or the protection of civilians' human rights, the impact of security assistance can be negligible or even counter-productive.²³

In Iraq and Afghanistan for example, internationally trained police have been implicated in corruption, repression, and the sexual abuse of women. Interviews with US service members stationed in Afghanistan confirm that the sexual abuse of women and children among the US-trained Afghan police is rampant, but a policy of nonintervention is followed to maintain good relations.²⁴ These transgressions reflect poorly on the states that provided the assistance. The message, rightly or wrongly, conveyed to local communities is that either these countries condone the aggressive actions of the forces they trained or they are not concerned about the security and well being of civilian populations. The Taliban and others can manipulate these perceptions to generate sympathy and support from local communities.²⁵ Many fear that the corruption of the Afghan Local Police forces, supported by the US, is pushing some to join the Taliban or choose not to interfere with their activities.²⁶

²² Security Assistance Monitor, www.securityassistance.org

²³ "Revealed: Pentagon's Link to Iraqi Torture Centers" *The Guardian* (6 March 2013) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/06/pentagon-iraqi-torture-centres-link>

²⁴ Joseph Goldstein, "US Soldiers Told to Ignore Sexual Abuse of Boys of Boys by Afghan Allies," *The New York Times* (September 20, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/21/world/asia/us-soldiers-told-to-ignore-afghan-allies-abuse-of-boys.html>

²⁵ For more on the intersections of violent extremism and corruption see Sarah Chayes, *Thieves of State* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2015).

²⁶ Ryan Grim, "Why Afghanistan Is Going To Fall To The Taliban Again. And It's Not Why You Think." *The Huffington Post* (October 3, 2015), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sarah-chayes-kunduz_us_56103348e4b0768127024d1b

The marginalization of human rights or gender sensitivity training is a key concern across many settings. At the time of the 2011 revolution, the Tunisian government used the police as a tool of repression. Invariably, public trust in the police, especially among youth, was low and fear was high. The revolution emboldened the public, and clashes ensued. In the aftermath of the revolution, international security sector funds and technical assistance poured into Tunisia, which strengthened the security, intelligence and police capacities. However, Tunisians saw little evidence that human rights, protection and service were integrated into the ethos of this sector. In fact says, one women rights defender, the situation worsened for women. "Previously, the police would never harm women. But, after the revolution, the police seemed to take their revenge on women, with reports of rape and other abuse. Insecurity prevails because hardline Islamists have infiltrated important government sectors." The excuse, according to Tunisian human rights activists, was 'they had no time or space for that training.' Because there was more opening for free speech in the country, Tunisians were able to learn about police abuses through media reports.

In Pakistan, local activists report that police training while human rights training may be provided, it is rarely practiced or monitored. Police impunity remains a profound concern. Many international entities claim to integrate these issues into their training policies and programs, but close inspection reveals they are short, stand-alone sessions and not integral to the core mission of the police. This misses a critical opportunity to reorient the security services in ways that build public trust and prevent community, and especially youth, support for extremist groups.

Recommendations for Improving Policing Policies and Practices

1. *Consult with civil society to ensure that transparency and inclusion of 'service' to and protection of all civilians are guiding principles in security sector reform (SSR).*
 - a. In determining security assistance, assess country context and history of police relations with public through participatory stakeholder mapping;
 - b. Before design of policies and programs, consult civil society to identify critical issues of concern and tailor to the local context the integration of gender sensitivity and human, women's and children's rights into police training.
2. *Encourage the implementation of transparent and effective internal justice mechanisms to convey a clear message of zero-tolerance and punishment for violation of the law.*
 - a. Place human rights lawyers/experts in each police station to inform and guide officers.
 - b. Do not limit gender sensitivity efforts to the recruitment of female officers. All officers must be adequately trained and held accountable.
 - c. Protect the rights of detainees, including the right to legal counsel (and provision of counsel by the state if necessary) before any interactions with police (e.g. this is now a requirement in Tunisia).

3. *Establish community-police fora to build community trust and support.*
 - a. Integrate community policing and interactions with women's civil society groups within international policy discussions and dialogues with city and local/provincial leadership.
 - b. Encourage police to reach out to their communities to establish trust through social and sporting activities.
4. *Provide necessary technical support for sustained and systematic civil society consultations in the design, implementation, and follow up of police trainings.*
 - a. Invite local CSOs to provide trainings whenever possible (see Sri Lanka case).
 - b. Share regional and international best practices for community policing and invite women's groups to share community perspectives with police.
 - c. Include women's groups and civil society in independent monitoring and evaluations especially police-civilian relations regarding minority and marginalized sectors of the population.
5. *Provide technical and financial support for police professionalization.*
 - a. Ensure provision of adequate and timely pay and benefits, and dignified work and living conditions commensurate to the professional role and personal risks of the job.
 - b. Support women's groups to engage directly with political, security, and military leaders on improving policing, including providing opportunities for their participation in security sector events.

3. The Rise of Militias and Militarization

Da'esh's brutality and its expanding control over terrain and populations have captured the world's attention. In Iraq, the first of these groups arose after the fall of Saddam Hussein, as the country was awash with weapons and the army disbanded. In Libya too, the fall of Gaddafi led to a transition into fracturing militias and warlordism. While Libyans fought for civil society, nonviolence, and democracy, the international community froze the country's assets hobbling transitional self-governance efforts. Regional and international powers filled the vacuum by supporting militias with weapons and money to further their own influence in the oil-rich country. According to one Libyan journalist, "It is not uncommon to find two brothers joining opposing militias." The money also flowed directly into the hands of the poorest youth and those in prison, and the militias recruited them in droves.

In Nigeria, the situation is out of control, according to activists living in the Northern areas of the country. Boko Haram, a movement with roots in social mobilization and injustice, has become a 'hydra-headed' operation involved in crime, kidnappings,

"After ISIS, the biggest concern for Iraqi women is the rise of militias and militarization of society. We had a fatwa that everyone has to carry weapons to fight ISIS – as Jihad... They abuse Iraqi children by recruiting them under the pretext of religion."

— Iraqi woman activist

assassinations, and politics. In Asia, the trends are also alarming. A former government minister of the Maldives explains, "We never had bombs, now we have [sic]," referring to a cache of weapons found hidden underwater. Weapons are sold and extremist groups are recruiting men and women among the island state's 400,000 population. In Tajikistan, activists working with former prisoners are seeing radicalization in state prisons: "They go in for petty crimes," says a human rights lawyer, "and come out as extremists making their way to Afghanistan and elsewhere." Meanwhile Afghanistan is experiencing the rise of ISIS inside the country: "They make the Taliban look like the good guys," observed one peace activist.

Militarization seeps easily into the mindsets of the youth and spreads through communities. In June 2015 faced with the threat of Da'esh, Iraqi Shiite Cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issued a fatwa urging everyone- Shias, Sunnis, Christians - to carry weapons and take up 'righteous' jihad temporarily until the threat was dissipated.²⁷ An Iraqi peace activist in Basra explained that the young men and school-aged boys were quick to respond, and it is estimated that 65,000 have volunteered.²⁸

Poor Governance, Absent States, and Rising Warlordism

In every instance, activists link the rise of militias to a mix of poor or oppressive governance at the national level and interventions by international or regional actors. In Nigeria they speculate that the rag tag boys and men of Boko Haram cannot be so well

²⁷ Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, "Will Sistani be able to control popular mobilization forces?" Al-Monitor (March 12, 2015), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/iraq-sistani-righteous-jihad-fatwa-popular-mobilization.html#ixzz41m29qAM6>

²⁸ According to activists on the ground and social media reports, such as Luay Al-Khateeb, a Huffington post blogger.

armed and outside the grasp of law enforcement without political backing. Moreover, the government's responses have exacerbated conditions, as highlighted by Amnesty International's 2015/2016 Annual Report on Nigeria.²⁹ The attempt to create a military task force failed, as it was impossible to distinguish local actors from Boko Haram. "Then the military became a worse perpetrator of violence than Boko Haram," according to a Nigerian peace activist, "so the community's sympathies shifted to the extremist group."

The rise of ISIS in Iraq, in part a result of the abusive actions of the Iraqi army and police in Sunni-dominated areas, prompted a shift in the government's approach. The government legitimized the militias in the hope of mobilizing against ISIS, but it never had control over the use and spread of weapons,³⁰ as was the case when Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the al-Hasdh al-Shaabi militia the official force of the state. Iraqi peace activists say the militias are stronger than the state.³¹ They are funded by regional powers including Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Iraqi government itself is also implicated. Although it is a signatory to international conventions preventing the use of child soldiers and has signed protocols

As conditions worsen, each community, Arab and non-Arab, from different tribes and religions, is forming its own militia. The big question is: "given this situation, even if ISIS goes, what would happen?"

with UNICEF, these mandates have been ignored. Speaking of government aligned militia, one Iraqi peacemaker said, "They abuse children, some as young as 10, by recruiting them under the pretext of religion. Because they don't have strong religious education, the recruits believe the ideology that's spread." Often the children's families believe the propaganda, thinking that if their children die they will be martyrs and go to paradise. As conditions worsen, each community — Arab and non-Arab, and different tribes and religions — is forming its own militia. The big question is: "given this situation, even if ISIS goes, what would happen?"

The same story is unfolding in Libya. In spite of the 2014 elections, the political system remains broken. There is no single national leadership. It is unclear where instructions to political parties and warlords are coming from. Libyan peace activists are skeptical about international interventions: "They [the international community] ban weapons sales, but individually [foreign governments] let the weapons flow in from other sources." Frustration with the international community is palpable on other fronts too. Despite the current and sometimes problematic attention to the role of women in deradicalization, local activists have received little support for such efforts. "In 2011, we said that mothers can be an effective force for disarming the youth, but the international community never listened or even heard us." By 2016, militias supporting different political and tribal factions had splintered and proliferated even more. Foreign fighters affiliated with extremist movements have infiltrated local militias. They have more weapons and money, and the local youth are admittedly attracted to them. "The easiest thing in Libya," says a writer who was forced to flee after being target by militias "is to kill."

²⁹ For more on human rights abuses committed by the Nigerian Military see "Stars on their Shoulders. Blood on their Hands: War Crimes Committed by the Nigerian Military," Amnesty International (June 2015), <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/stars-on-their-shoulders-blood-on-their-hands-war-crimes-committed-by-the-nigerian-military> and "Nigeria Annual Report 2015/2016," Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/nigeria/report-nigeria/>

³⁰ Ali Mamouri, "How to rein in Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units," Al-Monitor (September 2015), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/09/iraq-popular-mobilization-militias-isis-iran-government.html#ixzz41m5QbuXT>

³¹ Renad Mansour, "From Militia to State Force: The Transformation of al-Hashd al-Shaabi," The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (November 16, 2015), <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=61986>

Modern Day Mercenaries: The Pipeline of Foreign Fighters

Across the region, women involved in de-radicalization efforts highlight the issue of foreign fighters, modern-day mercenaries whose motives are convoluted and difficult to tackle. Many move from one conflict zone to the next. It is unclear how many are committed, hardened fighters and who among them has been forcibly sent to fight. Because they speak different languages and have no ties to the community, women working locally cannot reach them effectively.

One solution is to scale up local deradicalization and prevention work. In many locales, foreign fighters are too few in numbers to be effective without recruitment from the local population. During the 2012 famine in Somalia for example, Al Shabaab released control of Mogadishu overnight as its local members disappeared and chose to allow food aid to enter. The transnational and foreign fighters were also forced to withdraw from the city.³²

State prisons are feeding the pool of foreign fighters... many are radicalized during incarceration.

— Tajik woman lawyer

State prisons are feeding the pool of foreign fighters. A female lawyer working with former criminals in Tajikistan noted that many are radicalized during incarceration.³³ Once they are released they join a pipeline of recruits entering Afghanistan and other countries. Many are petty criminals, locked up for minor charges

or involvement in the drugs trade. They often have little religious ideologies or alliances before they are committed, yet they emerge radicalized. “We cannot access the prisons,” says the Tajik lawyer. “We don’t know how or why they are exposed to this extreme ideology.”

Another issue is the lack of local socio-economic opportunities for the younger generations. As of October 2015, over 6000 Tunisians have migrated to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters.³⁴ “There is a crisis of masculinity,” observed one university professor. The youth have few job prospects, no prestige or social standing, and no means of building their futures, as they are unable to marry or provide for families. They see corrupt or ineffective systems of justice and governance that exclude them. By contrast, the message of Da’esh and similar groups taps into their personal grievances, promising a better future, protection, belonging, and the prestige of fighting for a just cause.³⁵ They are given money and promised a place in heaven. These views were echoed by the founder of an NGO that provides children and youth in poor communities with access to theater arts and sports as a means of enabling expression and illustrating more inclusive and moderate norms of religiosity.³⁶

³⁴ The Soufan Group. Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq, 2015

³⁵ Ömer Ta pınar, “You Can’t Understand Why People Join ISIS Without Understanding Relative Deprivation,” Huffington Post (March 25, 2015), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amer-tapaenar-/isis-relative-deprivation_b_6912460.html

³⁶ For more on the use of sports in countering extremism and deradicalization, see “Thinking Outside the Box: Exploring the Critical Roles of Sports, Arts, and Culture in Preventing Violent Extremism,” Global Center on Cooperative Security and Hedaya (February 2015), http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/15Feb17_SAC_Brief_Hedayah_GlobalCenter.pdf and Ivo Veenkamp and Sarah Zeiger, “Countering Violent Extremism: Program and policy approaches relating to youth through education, families, and communities,” Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism Among Youth to Prevent Terrorism (2015: IOS Press).

³² “Somalia: Al Shabaab’s Pullback does not mean defeat” Stratfor (8 August 2011) (<https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/somalia-al-shabaabs-pullback-does-not-mean-defeat>)

³³ For more on the radicalization process in prisons see “Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalization and De-radicalization in 15 Countries,” International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) (2010), <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1277699166PrisonsandTerrorismRadicalisationandDeradicalisationin15Countries.pdf>

Women Peacebuilders Offer Pragmatic Deradicalization and Rehabilitation Approaches

Security conditions are horrendous and worsening, but from Nigeria to Pakistan, Iraq to Syria, women are leading efforts to prevent recruitment, demobilize, and disarm youth. Across the globe, their experiences are similar. The first lesson is to humanize. If members of militias are perceived as inhuman or labeled as terrorists they become unreachable. Activists use various tactics to reach out and interact with them. “We see them as our people,” said one Pakistani activist. “We know how to talk to the local boys.” Activists also stress the importance of trust and being rooted in the community. They demonstrate this by adhering to local cultural norms, such as ensuring appropriate dress, use of language, reference to religious texts, and even approaching these individuals with a male relative as a companion.

Secondly, engaging them on one-on-one basis is essential, even though it is time-consuming and dangerous. The motivations for each person vary, so the interactions with them must be tailored. With some, the key driver may be a national or political cause. For others, the primary motivation may be faith or religious instruction. It is critical to understand whether they are leaders or recruits. Understanding the psychosocial factors is as important as identifying potential and economic motives. Many of these young men have no outlets for expression and few opportunities. In each case, withdrawal from the militia must be matched with a clear alternative future. “We try to find out what skills they have from their previous lives and to build on those resources,” said one

activist. “We work with them to develop alternative livelihoods.” These ex-fighters can be important allies in preventing others from being recruited and reaching out to their former cohorts to draw them away from violence.

Thirdly, there must be a paradigmatic shift in their values and how they understand and practice their faith. Too often, the boys have little religious understanding. They are easily misguided into assuming that violence is not only necessary and acceptable, but also preordained by God. The women engaging these militias provide alternative guidance. They use the same discourse and religious references, but provide different interpretations.

“I say Jihad is not spilling or wasting blood in the streets,” it is giving blood in hospitals to people who need it.”

— Iraqi activist

“I say Jihad is not spilling or wasting blood in the streets,” said one Iraqi activist, “it is giving blood in hospitals to people who need it.” They frame religion as a path towards peaceful, positive civic engagement and life affirming actions – a strong contrast to the ideology of self-sacrifice through violence. They create a strong sense of purpose and belonging. The psychosocial aspects of de-radicalization are woven into tangible activities ranging from repairing electricity lines for the community and painting schools to entertaining children as clowns, or performing theater.

Finally, it is critical to build trust and relationships with local leaders, such as tribal elders. Local elders and leaders are also concerned about the well being of their youth, and they understand underlying

factors and trends that should inform de-radicalization.³⁷ On another level, a show of respect for their status can lead to endorsement and protection. At a minimum, the interactions can help prevent a backlash against the women's efforts. It is a narrow and sensitive diplomatic navigation, because while women may be leading and creating alternative options, they cannot be seen to be usurping existing sources of authority, and they do not want to be co-opted by them. While lessons can be shared across different contexts, the language and means of approaching and engaging local leaders is unique to each setting, and requires locally rooted individuals.

Peaceful Societal Transformation Threatens State and Militia Power

Women peacebuilders are working against sizeable odds. By taking a stand, they put themselves at risk. "We are accused of being infidels," one peacebuilder observed. An activist from Libya shared that twelve of her colleagues had been killed. Government and international actors can sometimes attempt to co-opt them. "They ask us to work with them," said one Iraqi, "but they also fear the potential power that these women are unleashing." When the women attempt to mobilize civilians for the prevention of extremism and transformation of their societies, they are accused of seeking regime change. "They want us to mop up the mess, but they are afraid that we could create change."

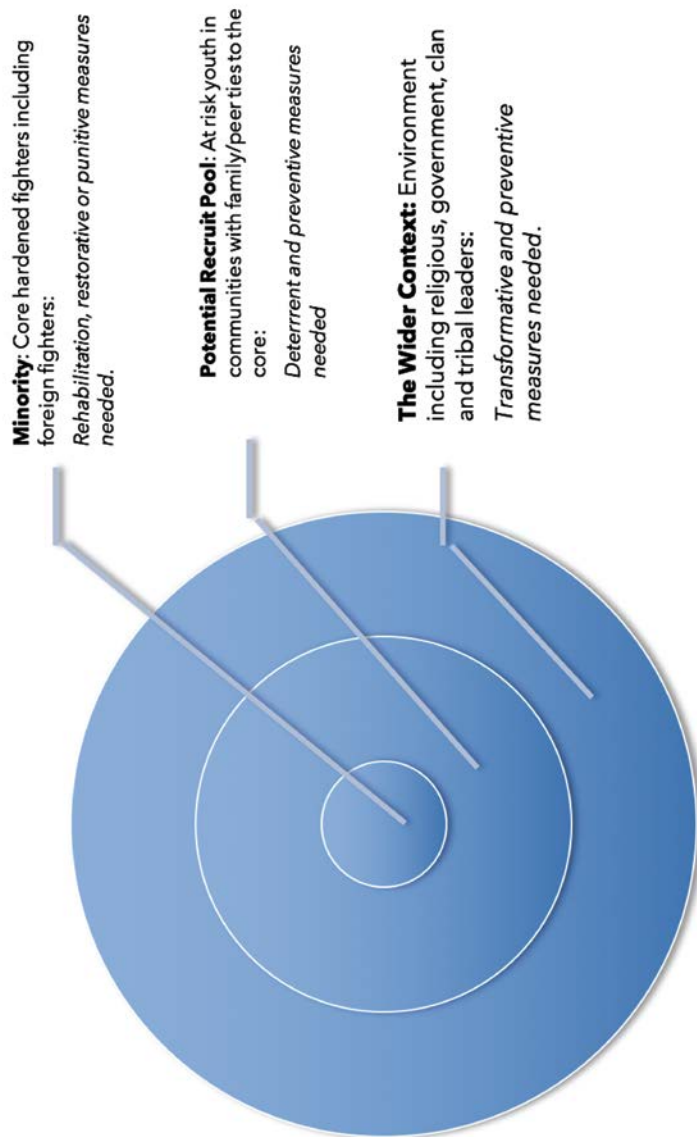
³⁷ In a USIP Special Report, Reza Fazli, Casey Johnson, and Peyton Cooke encourage consultations with local elders and religious leaders as a guide for the development of CVE/PVE strategies. "Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan," United States Institute of Peace (September 2015), <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR379-Understanding-and-Countering-Violent-Extremism-in-Afghanistan.pdf>

It is difficult enough for women's organizations to navigate the threats and increasingly restricted public space, but worsening conditions are making the demands of the work untenable. Women's civil society organizations assert that the burdens of tackling the militias and radicalization issues are growing. The pressures on them to 'do this and that' are increasing, but they say their governments are not being sufficiently proactive in assisting their efforts. They raise the issue of funding: states should be limiting the flow of resources to militias and extremists, yet little action has been taken. The militias, especially the extremist groups of foreign fighters, continue to obtain ample funding. They use it to draw in local fighters. In Libya and Syria, civil society actors reflect on how demoralized local militias become when faced with the power and protection that extremist groups can offer.

Therefore, the focus on positive alternatives and prevention is critical. The persistent lack of opportunity in the formal economic sphere coupled with experiences of state injustice and oppression heightens vulnerability to recruitment, particularly among boys and men. There is always a ready pool of recruits. If the broader problems are not addressed, the stream of young men and women who are recruited and the perpetuating cycle of violence will grow. Preventive and deterrent measures, and more transformative interventions in the community are critical.

"We don't want relief only, we need projects to engage teenagers in productive ways, not through fighting."

Three Tiered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism



Women peacebuilders are already doing this work with a younger cohort. As one peacebuilder noted, “we have to dry up the pool of recruits by focusing on interventions for the 12-18 year old age group, and to build their skills as a preventive measure.” The work is painstaking and slow. It combines activities such as discussions on sensitive topics in safe spaces and exposure to diversity across religious, ethnic, political and social divisions. In Pakistan, one head mistress has integrated these issues into her school curriculum as peace education. In Syria, civil society activists are encouraging teenagers to get involved in civic and community activities. Across all settings, they welcome community-based economic development and support for small and medium-sized businesses.

The acceleration towards greater militarization is occurring daily, especially as younger children are exposed to the culture of militias and ideologies of intolerance. Women peacebuilders know it is critical to build resistance and resilience against the onslaught of extremism, while preserving the positive practices of tolerance and the culture of peace that is essential to transforming their communities. They are doing their share, but they are being stretched thin.

Recommendations to Advance Prevention and Reduce Militarization

1. *Recognize and support the unique and specialized work of women peacebuilders in deradicalization and broader civic engagement and mobilization.*
 - a. Invite women peacebuilders and activists to dialogues and involve in planning of international policies and programs;



4. International Security Interventions: Intentions vs. Outcomes

Skepticism, pragmatism, and frustration prevail when women peacebuilders assess international military and security presence in their countries. They are fully aware of the geo-political dynamics that propel international interventions. They are quick to acknowledge the global nature of extremist violence and the need for international cooperation, but they are skeptical of interventions justified under the ‘anti-terrorism’ umbrella, noting how states have been instigators of the ideologies that foment extreme violence and terrorism. They point to Saudi Arabia’s support for extremist groups³⁸ and the US’s inability to control the spread of its weapons and money to militias in Iraq and Yemen.³⁹ They recall the duplicitous policies of national governments as examples of how states are implicated in creating the conditions in which extremist violence flourishes. They are also quick to point out that the fight against extremism has given many governments, especially Egypt, the latitude to shut down dissent and commit violence with impunity, while at the same time, receiving continuing support from international actors.

They are also pragmatic, recognizing that while having foreign militaries in their countries is never ideal, it is at times necessary. As one Afghani women’s rights defender noted, “It’s not a matter of what you want. Sometimes you have no choice.” Libyans agree. In a country that had no functional security force in the aftermath

- b. Enable their access to funding;
 - c. Provide of protection when they are threatened by both state and non-state actors; and
 - d. Expedite travel assistance.
2. *Focus attention and resources into research and knowledge development on foreign fighters.*
 - a. Investigate where, how, and why they are recruited, how they infiltrate local militias and movements, how they garner local support, and what factors can contribute to their departure or loss of support in host communities.
 - b. Share findings with local women’s organizations.
 3. *Be consistent in denouncing, defunding, and limiting the spread of extremist groups and their ideologies, including through:*
 - a. Imposing tougher banking controls and penalties (per existing policies) against countries that enable financial transfers for extremist movements, passage of foreign fighters and trafficking of weapons;
 - b. Using diplomacy to challenge states that allow the spread of violent ideologies (particularly overt misogyny and intolerance towards minorities) that is taking place through media and school curricula.
 4. *Integrate the goals of social cohesion, inclusion of marginalized groups, and economic development into all multilateral and bilateral policies, programs and projects.*
 - a. Encourage governments to fund and support scaling up of CSOs’ prevention/ deradicalization & civic engagement programs.
 - b. Support community-level participatory processes that include at-risk youth to determine effective and sustainable economic development and social service programs needed to mitigate push factors for radicalization and rehabilitate de-radicalized youth.

³⁸ For more on the Saudi export of extremism see Kamel Daoud, “Saudi Arabia: An ISIS That Has Made It,” The New York Times (November 20, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/21/opinion/saudi-arabia-an-isis-that-has-made-it.html>

³⁹ “Taking Stock: The Arming of Islamic State,” Amnesty International (December 2015), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde14/2812/2015/en/>

of Gaddafi's downfall, many yearn for international assistance to establish a unified, strong national army to quash the multitude of militias that have arisen.

In countries where extremist violence has not spread yet, prevention is a priority. Tajiks, for example, appreciate the presence of Russian army bases on their borders. They consider this as a means of protecting their own country from the spread of violence from Afghanistan. Some Pakistani peacebuilders note that the army and intelligence services have been pivotal in staving off the threat of terrorism. Others disagree, noting how state security and intelligence agencies have been implicated in supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

There is also support for peacekeepers and security forces that have a clear mandate: to maintain ceasefires, uphold rule of law, and give confidence to the public in situations where insecurity has been rife — provided they do not exploit local populations. In the case of Syria, some peacebuilders who led the peaceful protests call for 'peaceful armies.' "If we are a peaceful movement against arms, we cannot advocate for armed intervention. We can't have it both ways," says one leading community organizer. "We should not forget our history of Gandhi and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who led the first peaceful army. They never used military force."

The Problem with Military Interventions

As civil society practitioners they make a clear distinction between the interventions of foreign military forces for combat versus

peacekeeping. For some, military presence has been a source of security and an opportunity to create spaces for peacebuilding and a return to normalcy. In Iraq for example, some local peacebuilders professed a preference for U.S. or Western 'boots on the ground' as opposed to bombings from overhead.

In such cases, local civil society may consider the physical presence of international forces necessary as a means of deterring the spread of militias and violent extremist groups like Da'esh, as well as a means of keeping domestic armies and security forces in check.

"Can any international actor guarantee that they will only attack ISIS or Assad? They can't, and that's the problem."

— Syrian peacebuilder

However, for many women peacebuilders, the foreign military presence has been negative. They have seen firsthand that such interventions are not the proverbial 'silver bullet' to resolve deeply political and societal conflicts. They invariably lead to violence. "Military interventions feed the conflict," said a Syrian community activist. "Once guns are there and people have killed each other, people, the nation and society are changed. You cannot reverse that." They recognize that Assad regime's relentless bombing of Syria poses the greatest threat, but they also point to the danger of heightened attacks. "Can any international actor guarantee that they will only attack ISIS or Assad?" asked a Syrian woman. "They can't, and that's the problem."

This resonates with Nigerians, who see American, French, and even German forces entering their country to fight Boko Haram. "We

worry that they'll come and perpetrate the same violations," said a peacebuilder from Maiduguri in Northern Nigeria. But she noted that Boko Haram members are not easily identifiable, so people are afraid that the foreigners will also kill local villagers inadvertently. These actions fuel the cycle of violence and extremism. Afghans who have experienced decades of multiple foreign interventions and interferences echo these sentiments. "We appreciate the governments that support us," said one Afghan peacebuilder, "but there was also much harm done. International presence in some areas led to masses of people joining the Taliban."

"We also cried for help to bring democracy but the 'democracy' that was brought us has destroyed everything about our culture."

Iraqis recall the Bush administration's attacks and mismanaged occupation that resulted in the disbanding of the Iraqi army, the spread of weapons and heavy equipment and formation of extremists and militias.⁴⁰ "We can't stop the nightmare alone. Our police and military need protection." These experiences resonate deeply with Afghans.⁴¹ "We also cried for help to bring democracy but the 'democracy' that was brought to us has destroyed everything about our culture," said one Afghan women's rights defender. "In our country, everyone has guns now." Tunisians noted that France offered to send arms to support the dictatorship in the 2011 revolution there and Libyans point the finger at former French President Sarkozy for the chaos and subsequent flow of weapons into their country. Palestinians are perhaps the most

⁴⁰ International Civil Society Action Network, "Picking up the Pieces: Iraqi Women in the Aftermath of War and Occupation," *What the Women Say* (Winter 2013), Brief 6, <http://www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/WWS-Iraq.pdf>

⁴¹ Dean White, "The Afghan Conundrum: Intervention, Statebuilding and Resistance; Obama, US Foreign Policy and the Dilemmas of Intervention," *International Peacekeeping* (2016 vol. 23:2).

skeptical. "Don't bring me the international community," said a Palestinian community worker. "We already have them, but they miss what's supposed to be done."

The lost opportunities in security sector reform are an ongoing source of frustration. In Afghanistan for example, women peacebuilders reflect on the involvement of NATO member states in their tactical security issues, policy development, trainings, and the equipping of local security forces. But they say the policies were not consistent, and the equipment provided to Afghan forces was outdated. When there is lack of coordination and differences among the intervening actors, it can have devastating impact on the ground. Many states are assisting security sector reform and development in the region, but there is too much variance between the ethos, policies, and approaches that each uses. The effect, as experienced by local populations, is inconsistency and lack of clarity regarding common rules of engagement with civilian populations or adherence to protecting human rights.

"We are not a project. It is matter of life for millions of people."

— peacebuilder

The Benefits — and Dangers — of Empowering Domestic Security Forces

Many activists want well-trained national armies to protect state borders against the mix of arms trafficking and foreign interventions that seed extremism. They recognize that the public is often willing to cede privacy to ensure security. In Sri Lanka, for example, when

the Tamil Tigers were bombing public areas in the south, people accepted the military's presence and security procedures as a necessary precaution, despite the army's own record of warfare and violence.

In Tunisia and elsewhere, the targeting of police and army personnel in the aftermath of the 2011 revolutions led many to demand better equipment and weapons for these forces.⁴² But they are well aware that empowering domestic security forces and national militaries can be a double-edged sword. As militaries gain strength and enter civilian spaces, they can and have become key perpetrators of violence, as demonstrated in Iraq, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Syria. The fear of militarized dictatorships is a rising concern among civil society groups. Egypt is a case in point, where the levels of violence and human rights abuses perpetrated by the state have reached unprecedented levels. In Nigeria the situation is also dire. Three states in the northern region are under a state of emergency. The police have little relevance, and the military has taken over their role, without clear rules of engagement in dealing with civilian populations or accountability for their actions. Says one Nigerian peacebuilder, "Nigerians are experiencing unprecedented violations and abuses by the military."

Among civil society actors, there is consensus around the fact that

International interventions must be done in good faith, say local peacebuilders. So long as international actors are working only through corrupt national bodies, they will fail.

countries need armies for defensive purposes operating under democratic civilian leadership and adhering to human rights laws and norms. A doctrinal and paradigm shift is therefore needed so that security sector prioritizes serve to the population, upholding and protecting their rights, and being accountable to civilian authorities, including civil society. But too often militaries are dominating the political space or political leaders use the military to oppress their own people. International actors that fund, equip, and train dictatorships and their militaries and remain silent about abuses are considered guilty by association.

The Danger of Double Standards and Divide and Rule Games

Double standards in foreign policy are no longer tenable. Given global connectivity and social media, people are well aware and rapidly informed of the hypocrisy of governments that claim the mantle of anti-terrorism yet act in self-interest. "You can't be a state signatory to an international [arms] convention or member of a coalition against terrorism but smuggle or support militias unilaterally," said a Libyan reflecting on the role of Arab Gulf states in funding and arming militias in her country. Others points to the western countries that either allow private companies to sell weapons or do so directly to governments that are implicated in violence, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

There is both anger and pain when they observe the silence of Western states in the face of gross violations of rights in their countries. There is pressure on Palestine to negotiate with Israel, but as one Palestinian community worker noted, "you can't negotiate with someone who is holding a gun to your head."

⁴² Christine Petré, "Tunisia's Fragile Security," Al-Monitor (October 20, 2015), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/10/nobel-peace-prize-security-tunisia.html#>).

As many women observed, “Everyone thinks of the Paris terror victims, but they rarely speak or care about the thousands dying in Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria.”

International interventions should be coordinated to promote social cohesion not factionalize society

“International actors do not support coherence and stronger sovereignty, they factionalize and pursue their own interests,” reported one activist. The perception among women human rights defenders and peacebuilders is that many of the most powerful foreign actors are not assisting locals to bring social cohesion and unity. Instead they are pursuing their own goals by instrumentalizing different

political, ethnic, religious or ideological factions. As one activist pointed out, “When we ask for international help, we are not asking for each country to come and do what they want. We are asking for a unified international presence, so no single country has influence.”

They see the evidence of this problem in Iraq and Syria where a multitude of foreign actors have exacerbated conditions for local communities. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, according to local peacebuilders, interference by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, and India is fomenting more divisions. Afghans also point to the US’s support for Pakistan in their country. “They came to build security,

“When we ask for international help, we are not asking for each country to come and do what they want. We are asking for a unified international presence, so no single country has influence.”

— civil society activist

give rights to women, but they just left us,” said one Afghan woman. Since 2010, levels of violence have been rising. “As they withdrew, they gave their weapons to the Pakistanis.” “We want the international community to support us in building Afghanistan, not to put us under the influence of Pakistan or Iran.” Pakistani peacebuilders reiterated the message, noting that the rise of the Taliban in their own country is a result of support for US and Saudi funded anti-Russian interventions in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Peace activists are frustrated by the willingness of international actors to spend resources and time arming groups while lacking the will and

devoting limited resources to peace negotiations. There are precedents for effective negotiations. In Tajikistan, the UN, with Russian, Iranian, and other international involvement, supported a dialogue process between Islamists and secular factions with 305 seats dedicated to anti-government forces. The non-official Inter-Tajik Dialogue (ITD) lasted from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s, and provided a platform for non-government and civil society actors to shape the official UN peace process and engage the public in national reconciliation. The ITD highlighted the importance of expanding spaces for civil society to engage in reconciliation and rebuilding the country.⁴³

“Help us talk, don’t just arm us to kill.”

— Syrian activist

Many civil society practitioners also believe that international actors are unwilling or unable to acknowledge and address their own weaknesses. They are frustrated, because they can see the

⁴³ Randa Slim and Harold Saunders, “Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process,” Conciliation Resources (2001), <http://www.c-r.org/accord-article/inter-tajik-dialogue-civil-war-towards-civil-society>

immense positive potential of an international presence, but repeatedly witness a lack of coherence, limited understanding of local dynamics, short-term approaches, and competing interests among international actors. As one peacebuilder noted, “We are not a project. It is matter of life for millions of people.” So their message is clear: If peace is the goal, then international actors must develop a coordinated plan based on a shared vision that is rooted in fundamental human rights, with the participation of state and local actors and civil society as a core tenet.

Political, financial, and logistics support to armed groups far outweighs assistance to non-violent civil society entities. “In reality, we are being hollowed out, while rhetorically they say women matter,” said one peacebuilder, referencing UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2242, which mandate the inclusion of women in peace and security issues.

“The international community is not doing us any favors... Extremism is not our problem only; what happened in Paris is part of the same thing that’s happening in Libya.”

Recommendations for Effective International Intervention

1. *Integrate human rights-based doctrine and oversight to ensure security interventions adhere to human rights norms, including the women, peace, and security agenda in policies and actions.*
 - a. This must include attention to the gender dimensions (i.e. differing experiences of local women and men) in security, crisis management and prevention efforts, including in horizon scanning and early warning processes.

- b) *Make security assistance conditional on greater inclusion of local communities and independent civil society in monitoring and oversight.*
2. *Stop the sale and transfer of weapons to countries waging wars or perpetrating violence against their own civilians.*
3. *Put greater emphasis, resources, and time into developing inclusive political negotiations and nonviolent solutions, instead of primarily funding armed groups and warfare.*
4. *Enable the UN to provide robust oversight of international interventions with local civil society involvement, to ensure coherence, consistency, and cooperation among countries offering assistance so they are not pursuing their own agendas or conflicting strategies, particularly involving trainings for the security and justice sectors.*
5. *Support national public surveys and grassroots consultations to identify the shared hopes and aspirations of the moderate majority, and draw on these to develop comprehensive country assistance programs for governance, economic and social development.*
6. *Integrate social cohesion and respect for pluralism into all security, justice, governance and development programs by including marginalized groups (e.g. youth, women, minorities, etc.) in program design, implementation and oversight.*
7. *Support alliances and capacity development to share knowledge and practices across countries and between sectors (e.g. civil society, security sector, media and legislatures).*
8. *Ensure that funds budgeted for support of women and civil society are not re-allocated for other projects and incorporate budget monitoring to oversee appropriate allocation and spending of funds.*



Conclusions

In every country, local people are taking action to prevent the spread of violence and nurture pluralism, peace and the principles of human rights and democracy, all of which are essential in the fight against all forms of extremism. In Nigeria, for example, a civilian joint task force and de-facto community policing units have been formed by local youth to protect against both Boko Haram and government forces.⁴⁴ While there is inherent danger in the proliferation of such groups, as in Iraq and Syria, the motivations of those involved is clear: they want basic safety for their communities, and they are keen to engage as citizens.

Internationally there is rhetorical support for civil society inclusion and a focus on non-militarized approaches to addressing violent extremism. The budget allocations, however, tell a different story. In 2016, globally an estimated \$1.6 trillion will be dedicated to defense and security budgets.⁴⁵ The resources dedicated to peacebuilding and socio-economic development are magnitudes less, yet they are essential ingredients for the prevention of extremism.

The messages from civil society leaders are similar across the countries: it is not enough to merely counter or even to prevent violent extremism, states must articulate and adhere to positive alternative values, policies and strategies. Recommitting to basic universal human rights principles alongside the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and implementing national action

plans derived from these would be an important start. Provision of public services, effective inclusion and integration of all sectors and strata of society, and upholding the dignity of individuals are fundamental to achieving peace. Even in the provision of security, states and civil society are mutually interdependent. No sector can do it alone.

Local perspectives and experiences are crucial in improving national and international responses to end radicalization and bring sustainable peace. As for international actors, the challenge is not only to recognize the strength, will, and knowledge of those who want to contribute to peace, but also to listen to and heed their advice. Will women peacebuilders and other civil society actors raise uncomfortable truths? Of course they will. But the vision and solutions they offer can also be transformative. These are necessary and urgent now.

⁴⁴ Ashionye Ogene, "Nigerian Vigilantes Aim to Rout Boko Haram," Al-Jazeera (May 31, 2014), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/05/nigerian-vigilantes-aim-rout-boko-haram-2014526123758444854.html>

⁴⁵ Data Source: IHS, Inc. "Growing Security Fears Boost Defense Budgets, IHS Says," The New York Times (December 17, 2015) http://markets.on.nytimes.com/research/stocks/news/press_release.asp?docTag=201512161905BIZWIRE_USPRX____BW6109&feedID=600&press_symbol=1834686



Annex I: An Introduction to the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership

I. Context: Women's rights and peace activists have been warning against the rise of extremist and violent forces across the world for nearly three decades.¹ For good reason, in every setting, women have been the first to notice, and often bear the brunt of, these regressive forces.

Out of necessity and despite limited resources and profound risks, local women-led NGOs and community-based organizations have developed innovative approaches to challenge the spreading ideologies and violent practices of state and non-state actors. They engage in prevention and deradicalization, work with those vulnerable to recruitment, offer interpretations of religious and cultural tenets that uphold equal rights and coexistence, and aim to hold political and religious leaders accountable. These locally rooted and transnationally linked women-led organizations have the authenticity and credibility to not only counter or prevent *violent extremism* but also *crucially provide positive alternative visions and solutions for their societies by promoting peace, rights and pluralism*.

Since 2011, ICAN has been providing a platform for networking among independent, women-led civil society organizations across the MENA/Asia regions, active in promoting rights, peace and security, and countering the rapid spread of extremism and state authoritarianism. We ensure diversity across spheres to promote

¹ See www.awid.org for range of publications on religious fundamentalisms globally, their impact on women and women's activism.

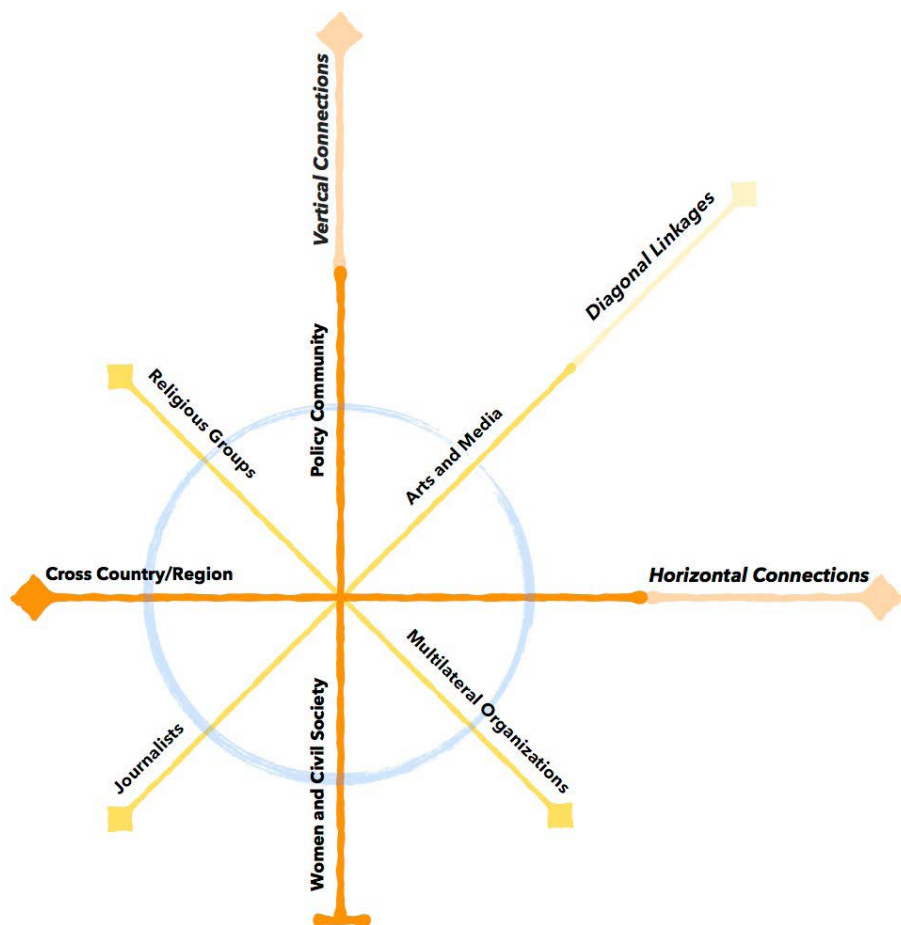
greater learning, innovation and outreach into sectors that are less attuned to women's perspectives. In Fall 2015, building on the momentum of the White House Summit on CVE and following consultations with our partners and counterparts globally, ICAN formally spearheaded the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) – the acronym means 'connect or link' in Arabic, Farsi and Urdu.

II. WASL: Vision, Mission and Objectives: WASL brings together existing women's networks, practitioners, and organizations with long-standing experience in addressing extremism and promoting peace, rights and pluralism to improve practices in communities affected by violence, and inform and offer pragmatic policy solutions for the international community. The alliance functions in 3 dimensions:

1. Horizontal Connections: We provide opportunities to enable lessons learning and strategy sharing for scaling up efforts across countries between grassroots and national civil society actors from different countries facing similar manifestations. We also channel resources and provide technical assistance to support innovative solutions locally and internationally in a range of spheres – notably practical community-based work, messaging and production of knowledge.

2. Vertical Connections: We connect our grassroots and national partners to the international policy community by a) producing gendered thematic and country specific policy briefs that distill the perspectives and experiences of women's organizations on critical issues (see policy brief list) and offer pragmatic recommendations and solutions; and b) we link them to state and multilateral actors and processes to share lessons, inform policies and programs based on ground realities and needs.

3. Diagonal Connections: The Alliance is also reaching out to other sectors – notably arts and culture, journalism, religious communities, the private sector and governmental agencies to echo and amplify the voices and perspectives that women’s organizations are developing. We hope to draw on each sector’s unique competence to ensure innovative outreach and build wider public participation in disseminating the vision, values, and messages of alliance members.



The Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) is reaching out to organizations and practitioners active in these spheres:

- Direct involvement in de-radicalization and demobilization of youth in their communities;
- Promoting peace and pluralism and alternative avenues for youth to express grievances and fulfill their aspirations through community activities;
- Highlighting religious theory and producing scholarship that encourages human rights especially human/women’s rights, pluralism, non-violence, and coexistence in religious texts and cultural /historic narratives;
- Supporting women’s effective participation in mediation and peace processes (formal and informal);
- Highlighting women’s current experiences and perspectives on extremism and militarism in the media;
- Fighting to widen space for women including preserving past gains and progressing on women’s rights and protection in legislative, political arenas, and service provision;
- Leading local efforts to address violence against women due to the spread of extremism and militarism;
- Leveraging international spaces to generate changes in national and multilateral defense, development, and diplomacy policies.

2015-2016 Prospective Policy Briefs

1. Uncomfortable Truths, Unconventional Wisdoms: Perspectives on CVE and Security interventions (3/2016).
2. Economic Development to Prevent and Counter Extremism (6/2016)
3. Lip Service or Serious Support? Why Independent Civil Society Matters in the Fight Against Extremism (6/2016)
4. Education Policies and Practices to Promote Pluralism, Rights and Social Cohesion
5. Religion, Rights and Responsibilities
6. Refugees, Foreign Fighters and Human Rights
7. Doing harm to do good? The good, the bad and the ugly of international development, humanitarian and military financing and policies
8. Peace negotiations including transitional processes and justice
9. Extremism and the targeting of women: femicide – why it occurs and how to address it

Annex II: Statement “Announcing the formation of a Global Alliance of Women Countering Extremism and Promoting Peace, Rights & Pluralism

Announcing the formation of a Global Alliance of Women Countering Extremism and Promoting Peace, Rights & Pluralism

We, the undersigned, are gathering to form an independent alliance of women-led civil society actors and organizations working to prevent and counter all forms of extremism. Our purpose is to bring synergy and greater coherence to our existing collective efforts, to advance gendered understandings of and responses to extremism, and to collaborate strategically in providing clear alternatives that bring a just peace for all.

On September 29, U.S. President Barack Obama will host the world leaders’ summit on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) at the United Nations General Assembly. Leaders will emphasize the need to balance military solutions for CVE with changes in socio-economic policies. They will note the important role of civil society in resisting extremism. They will highlight the need for gendered analyses and the role of women in promoting and preventing radicalization. We welcome their attention, but these insights are not new to us.

Collectively, our outreach extends to international, national, and grassroots women-led organizations that for close to thirty years have worked on the frontlines and warned against the rising tide

of extremism cloaked in religious and ethno-nationalistic politics. From Asia and Africa to the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East, *women's rights activists are the longest-standing socially-rooted, transnational groups mobilizing for peace, countering rising extremism, and providing an alternative vision for the future.*

For years we have witnessed the complicity of some state and non-state actors in spreading extremist ideologies, weapons, and wars that are killing more civilians. We have insisted that extremism and state militarism are two sides of the same destructive coin, each fueling the other. We have heard the lip service that some governments pay to women's welfare while they stand by in the face of rising oppression. Through experience, we know that these problems are also exacerbated by decades of economic austerity programs that have shredded welfare programs for the majority while benefitting a small minority.

Women have led the struggle because regardless of region or identity they are usually the first to feel the direct impact of growing intolerance. Women who courageously work for peace, rights, and pluralism are often in the crosshairs of violence. Extremists often target them for recruitment or seek to them. State forces detain and harass them for leading communities in demanding justice, accountability, or simple basic services. Women are on the kill-lists of militias and gangs for daring to speak out against violence. They are threatened for questioning violence and discriminatory religious interpretations and practices, and they are targeted for providing youth with peaceful ways to express their faith and dignity.

Despite these threats, we will not let violence determine our lives and collective future.

Today, extremists, occupation forces, authoritarian regimes, corrupt powers, and organized crime groups hold the rest of humanity hostage. Existing international policies are inadequate for preventing extremism. Economic sanctions and weapons sales exacerbate the suffering of many while often benefiting those promoting extremism. Governments spend billions on bombs and drones, knowing that military solutions alone provide no solution. Yet when citizens seek funds for schools, economic development, or humanitarian aid, leaders claim they cannot afford it.

What is truly unaffordable is the status quo. It is driving humanity toward perpetual war. This must stop.

Our alliance will extend and strengthen existing networks led by women and help to realize a progressive vision of the world eschewing violence and rooted in universal rights, dignity, and equality. It will respect our diversity while uniting us across our shared humanity, hopes, and aspirations.

The challenges are enormous and require the talent, commitment, and expertise of many. The alliance will provide a platform for collaboration across sectors—civil society, private industry, media and the arts, academia, government, religious, and multilateral institutions—working to harness peaceful and positive forces everywhere.

We will work proactively to inform public opinion and influence policymaking. We will echo and build on each other's strengths and remain committed to bringing a gendered lens to humanize and inform solutions. We aim to be present, vocal, and active

where and when state and non-state actors make decisions and implement policies related to extremism and militarism. We will critique and challenge ineffective policies and instead foster peaceful solutions and prevent the spread of violence.

We invite the international community to walk alongside us. One thing is guaranteed: Our vision for a future of peace, justice, dignity, rights, pluralism, and prosperity for all is possible. Join us.

Founding Members and Current Supporters

ASIA

Afghanistan

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*Executive Director,
Armanshahr/OPEN ASIA*

India

Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan

Malaysia

*All Women's Action
Society Society (AWAM)*

*Asian-Pacific Resource and
Research Centre for Women*

Sisters in Islam

Myanmar

Women Peace Network - Arakan

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Ms. Ghada Rifai
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Ms. Hamsatu Allamin
Gender Activist

EUROPE

Norway

Ms. Deeyah Khan
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Notes



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