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Culture of peace

A world against violence and violent extremism

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1.   The present report is being issued in response to General Assembly resolution 70/109, entitled "A world against violence and violent extremism", in which the Assembly called on Member States to unite against violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution and to recommend ways and means by which the United Nations system and the Secretariat could assist Member States, upon their request and within existing resources, in generating public awareness about the dangers of intolerance, as well as in fostering understanding and non-violence.

2.   Violent extremism is an affront to the purposes and principles of the United Nations and to our common values. It hinders our efforts to maintain international peace and security, promote and protect human rights and foster sustainable development. It leads to social polarization and undermines the universal values of justice and human dignity. It drives a wedge between and within societies, exacerbating conflicts and destabilizing countries and regions.

3.   There is no quick fix to tackle the complex and multifaceted challenge of violent extremism. Over the past two decades, the international community has mainly sought to address this threat through security measures, which are essential in certain situations, but are rarely sufficient on their own. Furthermore, experience has shown that harsh crackdowns and heavy-handed approaches inconsistent with international human rights standards can be counterproductive.

4.   Violent extremism takes many different shapes and forms and cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. Any measures to combat violent extremism that demonize specific communities could become a propaganda tool in the hands of violent extremist groups.

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5.   The Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/70/674) provides a preventive framework to address the drivers of violent extremism in the context of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In its resolution 70/291 on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review, the General Assembly recommended that Member States consider the implementation of relevant recommendations of the Plan of Action, as applicable to the national context.

6.   The present report contains information on how the United Nations system has supported and otherwise contributed to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 70/109 at the national level. The next review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which is scheduled for June 2018, will provide an opportunity for Member States to reflect on their strategies and efforts to prevent violent extremism and on how the United Nations can best support those efforts as part of its work to assist, upon request, the balanced implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. It will also provide an opportunity to revisit and strengthen the elements of resolution 70/109. In April 2018, in the lead-up to the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review, I will present to the Assembly a report analysing in greater detail our collective efforts to support a balanced implementation the Strategy. I am grateful to the Assembly for approving one of my first reform initiatives: the establishment of the Office of Counter-Terrorism.

7.   The adoption of General Assembly resolution 70/109 reflects the international community's firm commitment to addressing the growing polarization and intolerance around the world. Increased international cooperation on a wide range of issues and the creation of tolerant and inclusive societies, based on full respect for human rights, including women's rights, with economic opportunities and good governance for all, is the most effective way to present an attractive and meaningful alternative to violent extremism.

II.   Drivers of violent extremism

8.   In its resolution 70/291 on the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review, the General Assembly recognized the importance of preventing violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism. In the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, it is noted that, while research has been conducted on the drivers of violent extremism in the past decade and a half, there is still a lack of authoritative data on the pathways towards individual radicalization to violence (see A/70/674, para. 23).

9.   There is no single driver or set of drivers that push or pull an individual to violent extremism. Nonetheless, surveys, studies and research have identified recurring local, national, regional and international factors which appear in a wide variety of countries and regions and which lead, sometimes in isolation and sometimes in combination with other factors, to radicalization and violence.

10.   During the general debate at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly, some 152 Member States called upon the international community to step up international cooperation against the scourge of terrorism.[1] Most speakers

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[1] See the speech made by the Secretary-General on 16 November 2017 at SOAS, University of London, entitled "Counter-terrorism and human rights: winning the fight while upholding our values". Available from https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-11-16/secretary-

underlined the need to address a range of root causes or drivers of terrorism and violent extremism. Factors such as prolonged unresolved conflict, lack of the rule of law and violations of human rights, socioeconomic marginalization and ethnic, national and religious discrimination can all play a role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action. While often context-specific, two main drivers of violent extremism can be distinguished: "push factors", or the conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges, and "pull factors", or the individual motivations and processes which play a key role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action.

11.   In July 2017, the United Nations published two reports with empirical data on the background and motivations of individuals who joined violent extremist and terrorist groups, which largely confirmed and expanded on the general findings of the fifth review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre issued a report on the background and motivations of 43 individuals who travelled to become foreign terrorist fighters and the reasons for their return.[2] The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) issued a report based on interviews with 718 former or convicted violent extremists from Cameroon, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and the Sudan.[3]

12.   The conclusions of both studies have significant implications for policy-makers and practitioners seeking to address the drivers of violent extremism, particularly at the local level. The report of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre concluded that the interviewed individuals that travelled to become foreign terrorist fighters lacked opportunity, were disadvantaged economically, lacked education and had poor labour prospects. In the report it was also suggested that economic factors had become more important as a reason for foreign terrorist fighters to travel than had been the case in earlier waves of foreign terrorist fighters. Other identified motivating factors were unresolved conflicts that included intercommunal violence and the desire to help co-religionists who were perceived as victimized and mistreated by other groups.

13.   The UNDP report, which focused on recruitment in the most prominent violent extremist groups in Africa, also underscored the relevance of socioeconomic drivers. It found that those who were studying or working were far less vulnerable to recruitment. The majority of recruits came from borderlands or peripheral areas that had suffered generations of marginalization and reported having had less parental involvement growing up. Most recruits expressed frustration at their economic conditions, with employment the most acute need at the time of joining a group.

14.   According to the UNDP study, recruitment in Africa occurred mostly at the local, person-to-person level, rather than online, but the forms and patterns of recruitment may change as Internet connectivity improves. Some 80 per cent of recruits interviewed joined within a year of introduction to the violent extremist group, and nearly half of these joined within just one month. Another important finding relates to the role of ideology. The study identified the need to differentiate

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general%E2%80%99s-speech-soas-university-london-%E2%80%9Ccounter-terrorism.

[2] United Nations, Office of Counter-Terrorism, "Enhancing the understanding of the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon in Syria" (July 2017). Available from www.un.org/en/counterterrorism/assets/img/Report_Final_20170727.pdf.

[3] United Nations Development Programme, "Journey to extremism in Africa" (July 2017). Available from http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org.

between perceptions about religion and its significance as a reason for joining a violent extremist group, and actual religious literacy.

15. While a large group of individuals may be exposed to various push and pull factors of violent extremism, only a very small number of people actually make the final step on the radicalization pathway and become violent extremists or join violent extremist groups. One of the UNDP study's most important findings relates to the "tipping point" — the idea of a transformative trigger that pushes individuals from the at-risk category to taking the step of joining violent extremist groups. Some 71 per cent of recruits interviewed said that it was some specific action by government forces, such as the unlawful killing, forced disappearance or arbitrary detention of a family member or friend, that triggered their final decision to join a violent extremist group.

16. Both studies reaffirm that there is no single pathway to violent extremism and that the targeting of abstract profiles risks alienating entire communities and can be counterproductive. Similarly, while military and security measures and national capacities to counter terrorism are an important component of combating violent extremist and terrorist groups, their actual impact on local populations should be constantly reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with international humanitarian and human rights law and do not become the final trigger for individuals to join violent extremist groups. Municipalities and local communities that are at the forefront of efforts to prevent violent extremism and counter radicalization to violence may provide the national Government with the early warning necessary to detect such risks.

17. The studies also confirm that young people aged 16 to 29 are at the centre of recruitment efforts and therefore require special engagement and protection. As stressed in the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, young people, who constitute the majority of the population in an increasing number of countries today, must be viewed as an asset and must be empowered to make a constructive contribution to the political and economic development of their societies. They represent an untapped resource and leaders should strive to offer young people a positive vision of their future, together with a genuine chance to realize their aspirations and potential (see A/70/674, para. 9).

III. Implementation of General Assembly resolution 70/109 by the United Nations system

18. In order to address violent extremism and give more content to pillars I and IV of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism was presented under the agenda item entitled "The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy" as well as under the agenda item entitled "Culture of peace," under which General Assembly resolution 70/109 also falls.

19. In the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, there is a core recommendation to all Member States: to develop comprehensive national and regional plans of action to prevent violent extremism, based on national ownership and local, national and regional contexts, so as to effectively address, at the local level, the root causes of radicalization, the drivers that fuel conflict and the modes of recruitment by violent extremist groups. In the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, more than 70 preventive measures are suggested in seven priority areas

to address the drivers of violent extremism through such plans. The Plan of Action also includes a number of actions to be taken by the United Nations to support Member States and regional organizations, upon their request and with their ownership, through an "All-of-the-United-Nations" approach consisting of stronger inter-agency coordination and coherence.

A. Overview of United Nations projects and initiatives on preventing violent extremism

20.   In July 2016, the General Assembly adopted resolution 70/291, in which it encouraged the United Nations entities to implement relevant recommendations of the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, including by providing technical assistance to Member States upon their request.

21.   Building on this mandate, in October 2016 the Secretary-General established the High-level Preventing Violent Extremism Action Group to spearhead the development of the "All-of-the-United-Nations" approach to preventing violent extremism in accordance with the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and to provide guidance on the implementation of paragraph 40 of General Assembly resolution 70/291. In the light of its role of supporting the implementation of the recommendations in the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, the Office of Counter-Terrorism also acts as secretariat to the High-level Action Group and coordinates the work of various United Nations entities on preventing violent extremism, within the context of supporting Member States, upon request, on their implementation of pillars I and IV of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

22.   In order to operationalize the "All-of-the-United-Nations" approach on preventing violent extremism, the Office of Counter-Terrorism has consulted widely with United Nations entities and developed a mapping of United Nations activities, including 223 projects on preventing violent extremism at the global, regional and national levels across all priority areas of the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. The Office has also identified and collected good practices, lessons learned and experiences in a common preventing violent extremism repository created for this purpose; established a virtual global resource group on preventing violent extremism consisting of international experts from around the world; and hosted a Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force inter-agency expert retreat on the development of national and regional plans of action to prevent violent extremism, on 22 and 23 February 2017. The retreat brought together senior representatives from Member States, Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force entities, researchers and experts from think tanks and civil society organizations to discuss challenges and exchange good practices and lessons learned relating to overarching, procedural and substantive principles on the development of national and regional plans of action to prevent violent extremism.

23.   Following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 70/291, the Office of Counter-Terrorism also initiated the creation of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Working Group on Communications, which brings together communications experts and practitioners from Task Force member entities and is co-chaired by the Department of Public Information, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. The Working Group coordinates an "All-of-the-United-Nations" strategy for communications about United Nations efforts and programmes to counter terrorism

and prevent violent extremism and serves as an information-sharing platform. It develops guidelines to maximize the impact of communications related to counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism by the United Nations system and other Task Force entities. It also supports the communications efforts of other working groups of the Task Force and United Nations entities through the provision of guidance and advice on relevant projects and components as required, and develops and implements capacity-building and technical assistance projects related to communications in a coordinated manner, as requested by Member States and based on their needs and priorities.

24.   As highlighted above, the Office of Counter-Terrorism mapped the efforts of the United Nations system in support of Member States' efforts to implement the recommendations of the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, in accordance with their balanced implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. That matrix provides a snapshot of the focus areas of the recommendations of the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and the methodology and geographical location of the 223 ongoing and recently completed United Nations-supported projects on preventing violent extremism around the world. [4] Those projects and activities cover all seven priority areas of the recommendations in the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and break down as follows: 40 projects focus on strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law; 31 projects seek to improve education, skills development and employment facilitation; 29 projects aim to foster dialogue and conflict prevention; 27 projects focus on empowering youth; 23 projects cover strategic communications, the Internet and social media; 22 projects seek to increase gender equality and empower women; and 18 relate to engaging communities. In addition, there are 33 ongoing, planned or completed projects that focus on other areas related to the prevention of violent extremism, including the development of national or regional plans of action to prevent violent extremism, upon request by Member States and regional organizations.

25.   With respect to the geographic spread of these projects, 82 are global in scope, while 66 are aimed at the regional level and 75 at the national level. Of all the regional projects related to preventing violent extremism, 61 are in Africa, 55 in the Middle East and North Africa region, 22 in Asia, 12 in Europe and 3 in the Americas.

26.   In its resolution 70/109, the General Assembly highlighted the thematic areas for action by the international community discussed in sections III.B to G below, many of which were also reflected in the seven priority areas of the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

B.   Strategies to address the causes of violent extremism

27.   The General Assembly, in its resolutions 70/109 and 70/291, has made clear that the primary responsibility for addressing violent extremism and intolerance and creating a culture of peace and non-violence rests with Member States. The strategies to address these issues take many forms and are tailored to specific circumstances, but most aim to generate public awareness about the dangers of

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[4] The draft matrix of United Nations projects on preventing violent extremism is available from https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/A72621_AnnexI_MatrixUNPVEProjects.pdf/.

intolerance, while promoting dialogue and inclusion. They look to foster understanding through educational, cultural and religious programmes and address inequalities in society in order to leave no one behind.

28.   The General Assembly has also recognized the important role of the United Nations in promoting coordination and coherence at the global, regional and national levels and in providing assistance to Member States when requested. One of the five key functions of the Office of Counter-Terrorism is to enhance coordination and coherence across the 38 Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force entities to ensure the balanced implementation of the four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Secretariat, agencies, funds and programmes, and affiliated organizations also contribute through their individual mandates and their membership in the Task Force. The efforts made by the High Representative of the Secretary-General for the Alliance of Civilizations to promote greater understanding and respect among civilizations, cultures and religions were particularly welcomed by the Assembly in resolution 70/109.

C.   Respecting and protecting human rights and the rule of law

29.   Under the Charter of the United Nations, Member States are committed to promoting and encouraging universal respect for, and observance of, all human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is crucial for building social cohesion, promoting tolerance and fostering understanding and non-violence. The United Nations has therefore been unequivocal that all national legislation, policies, strategies and practices adopted to prevent violent extremism and counter terrorism must respect and protect human rights and the rule of law. This is an essential element of any successful effort to address violent extremism.

30.   The United Nations has helped ensure that efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism neither discriminate against nor stigmatize particular groups and that they do not lead to racial, religious or other profiling. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has stressed, key concepts related to violent extremism should be clearly defined by Member States in their own jurisdictions, particularly when they are likely to trigger measures that may interfere with the protection of human rights. The United Nations continues to encourage Member States to focus measures to address violent extremism on the actual conduct of individuals and groups, rather than focusing on the beliefs that they hold, which would contravene international human rights law.

31.   The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime recognizes that Member States that promote inclusive societies with equal access to justice and effective and accountable criminal justice institutions are often more successful in tackling marginalization and reducing the appeal of violent extremism. The Office has helped ensure that criminal justice measures against terrorism implemented by Member States fully respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. It has also supported Member States to ensure the protection of children's rights in practices and policies to prevent terrorism.

D.   Preventing violence against women

32.   The United Nations condemns all forms of violence against women. Violent extremists violate the rights of women and girls through forced marriage and by

preventing their access to education. Sexual violence has become an increasingly common tactic of violent extremist groups to maintain control and spread fear. It is as devastating as any bullet or bomb. It destroys communities and undermines the chances for reconciliation if left unaddressed.

33.   The Office of Counter-Terrorism is committed to supporting Member States' efforts to prevent violence against women and promote their rights, participation, leadership and empowerment in policies, strategies and programmes to prevent violent extremism. The Office is integrating gender as a cross-cutting issue in its work and has created a dedicated Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Inter-Agency Working Group on Adopting a Gender-Sensitive Approach to Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism, chaired by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. Women are already playing important roles at all levels in preventing and countering violent extremism. The United Nations works to ensure that the critical role of women in preventing and responding to violent extremism and intolerance is fully recognized.

E.   Contributing to education and skills development

34.   Education is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of violent extremism and support dialogue, moderation and cooperation. The United Nations is supporting Member States in developing and implementing programmes, policies and strategies that promote civic education, tolerance and respect for diversity. Working with a wide range of partners around the world, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is supporting education sectors to ensure that places of learning do not become breeding grounds for violent extremism. It has produced two guidance tools for teachers and policymakers, and is leading capacity-building workshops in various regions to adapt these to specific settings. The UNESCO Networks of Mediterranean Youth (NET-MED Youth) initiative seeks to empower young people with skills and opportunities for civic engagement in 10 countries around the Mediterranean. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Young Peacebuilders programme contributes to youth education and development by bringing together young people at the regional level to enhance their peacebuilding skills. The integration of crime prevention and rule of law aspects into education programmes can enhance the understanding of young people that crime, including terrorism, is unacceptable. Through its Education for Justice initiative, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has developed educational materials on crime prevention and criminal justice for primary, secondary and tertiary education levels.

35.   It is necessary to bolster the digital competences and critical thinking of young people so they can make the most of the Internet and social media as platforms for dialogue on the basis of tolerance and mutual respect. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations has focused attention on the need to develop media literacy among young people, while UNESCO provides support to national strategies, training for teachers and online courses on media literacy and intercultural dialogue. UNESCO is also promoting cultural literacy through education programmes and initiatives designed to mobilize young men and women to protect and celebrate their cultural diversity. This can help prevent radicalization, counter hate speech and promote tolerance and inclusion.

F. Community engagement in countering violent extremism, including by strengthening ties between communities and emphasizing their common bonds and interests

36.   The United Nations recognizes that violent extremism and intolerance will only be countered through the engagement of a wide range of societal actors. As highlighted in General Assembly resolution 70/109, this requires the engagement of local communities, civil society, young people, women, religious bodies and the media to develop and implement measures to challenge the violent extremist narrative. The Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate have facilitated regional and national workshops in North Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia during 2017. These workshops have demonstrated the benefits of the adoption by Member States of a comprehensive approach, combining law enforcement measures with other steps, to enhance mutual respect and dialogue in communities to counter violent extremism.

37.   The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Youth Solidarity Fund has provided seed funding to youth-led civil society initiatives that are dedicated to promoting conflict resolution and prevention activities in their home communities. The Alliance has developed public-private partnerships to provide mentoring to civil society organizations that are taking leading roles in their communities and increase understanding among and between different groups.

38.   UNESCO is spearheading the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013–2022), engaging a variety of actors in intercultural and interreligious dialogue to strengthen tolerance, mutual understanding and respect and promote diversity and inclusion.

39.   In July 2017, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect launched the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes,[5] which contained detailed recommendations to prevent and counter incitement to violence, enhance dialogue and collaboration, and contribute to building peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The process that led to the Plan of Action included interreligious and intrareligious discussions. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect is helping to organize workshops with religious leaders in countries that have experienced or are currently experiencing hate speech, hostility or incitement to violence that targets communities based on their ethnic or religious identities. The aim is to help develop national strategies that religious leaders can implement, working in partnership across religions and with national authorities and other actors.

G. Supporting the right to freedom of expression

40.   The United Nations recognizes the positive contribution that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, particularly by the media and through new technologies, can make to the fight against violent extremism, racism, xenophobia and intolerance. As the United Nations agency with a specific mandate to promote the free flow of ideas and image, UNESCO works to foster free, independent and pluralistic media in print, broadcast and online. Building on its publication

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[5] Available from www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Plan%20of%20Action_Religious_Prevent-Incite-WEB-rev1.pdf.

Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalists,[6] UNESCO supports and trains journalists on reporting on violent extremism.

H. Dissemination of information on tolerance and mutual respect

41.   The Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Working Group on Communications is developing capacity-building and technical assistance projects related to communications, when requested by Member States. In addition, the Working Group has designed a project aimed at compiling existing good practices in countering terrorist narratives, both online and offline. This will help improve understanding of the nature and tactics of violent extremist appeals and support Member States in tackling this issue. It will also strengthen the capacity of the United Nations and its departments and agencies to play an active role in international efforts to counter violent extremist narratives.

42.   The challenge of responding to violent extremist communications is increasingly complex, but the values that the United Nations represents have the potential to effectively undermine the violent extremist threat. In its resolution 2354 (2017), the Security Council requested the Counter-Terrorism Committee to further develop initiatives to strengthen public-private partnerships to counter violent extremist narratives. The Tech Against Terrorism initiative, which the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate launched in partnership with the private sector in 2017, aims at the adoption and sharing of good practices by the information and communications technology industry worldwide. The United Nations is in a position not only to communicate globally on its own behalf, but also to support the coordination of regional and national strategies for preventing violent extremism to help Member States respond through effective strategic communication.

43.   The Department of Public Information has continued to raise global awareness and encourage support for fostering understanding and non-violence. It has used its traditional and digital media multilingual platforms, its global network of United Nations information centres and its array of outreach partners to raise awareness of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. The Department's advocacy has focused on themes such as respect for indigenous peoples and the role of religious leaders in preventing violence and promoting dialogue among civilizations. These activities were often linked to the commemoration of United Nations international days and observances, such as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the International Day of Peace, the International Day of Non-violence and the International Day for Tolerance.

44.   The Office of Counter-Terrorism is implementing a project on preventing violent extremism through strategic communications consisting of three phases. The first phase comprised a desk review on the communications landscape to define how the United Nations could add value to existing work in this area. These efforts led to the development of the United Nations strategic communications approach to preventing violent extremism, which includes key recommendations and guidance on how United Nations entities should communicate about violent extremism using United Nations values as a foundation for effective alternative narratives that resonate at the local level.

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[6] Available from unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002470/247074E.pdf.

45.   Building on the findings of consultations undertaken in a number of countries, the second phase of the project produced a methodology for providing capacity-building assistance to Member States and United Nations entities. The consultations identified the need for more comprehensive research to understand the drivers of violent extremism, as well as capacity-building support on how to use social media more effectively; improve media literacy and critical thinking in schools; identify credible messengers; conduct target audience analysis; enhance intergovernmental coordination mechanisms to better identify individuals at risk of engaging in violent extremism; and engage with the private sector and civil society organizations with respect to strategic communications to prevent violent extremism.

46.   The third phase of the project involves the effective delivery of capacity-building assistance to requesting Member States and United Nations entities, at the national and regional levels. This phase consists of three elements: enhancing understanding and awareness of strategic communications for preventing violent extremism through introductory strategic communications workshops and webinars; providing assistance for the establishment of institutional frameworks to plan, coordinate and manage strategic communications for preventing violent extremism at the national level; and offering specialized and tailored training to improve the technical strategic communications skills of potential beneficiaries.

IV.   Observations and recommendations

47.   The present report builds on the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism with its more than 70 recommendations to Member States and the United Nations system for preventive measures to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups. It seeks to highlight areas in which a renewed focus from Member States, working closely with the United Nations and other key partners, could help generate greater public awareness about the dangers of intolerance. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/291, I will submit a report on the review of the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by April 2018, which will also include more detailed suggestions and recommendations on the prevention of violent extremism in the context of balanced implementation of the Strategy.

48.   As the adoption of General Assembly resolution 70/109 demonstrates, there is international consensus on the need for increased cooperation and collaboration at the global, regional and national levels to tackle the interrelated challenges of polarization, intolerance and violent extremism. I am committed to using the universal membership and convening power of the United Nations to build on this consensus and draw on all the available expertise and resources to assist Member States in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in a balanced manner.

49.   Hate crimes, in which a perpetrator targets a victim because of race or social group, have a devastating impact on families and communities and can incite further violence, violent extremism and xenophobia. I welcome the fact that a number of Member States have established or designated dedicated authorities to document, track and analyse hate crimes, identify patterns and trends and improve access to justice and services for victims. Such measures should be expanded. Furthermore, I call on Governments, political officials and religious leaders to speak out firmly and promptly at all times against intolerance and violence. The Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes

incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence of 2012 (see A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, appendix) laid out some core responsibilities of leaders, including refraining from inciting violence and stressing that violence should never be tolerated as a response to incitement to hatred.

50. No one is born a violent extremist; they are made and influenced by their experiences. Any efforts to promote tolerance and prevent the spread of violent extremism must start with educating young people about the importance of respecting diversity, human rights and non-violence. Young people are important agents of change and should be fully involved in a meaningful and inclusive way in all aspects of policy-making and implementation at the global, regional, national and local levels, as set out in the Amman Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security of 2015 and Security Council resolution 2250 (2015). I have therefore asked my Envoy on Youth and relevant United Nations offices, funds and programmes to consult widely over the next few months on the feasibility of convening a United Nations youth summit in 2018. I hope this could be an opportunity to listen and address the concerns of young people and engage them as equal partners in countering violent extremism, polarization and intolerance.

51. I urge Member States, with support from the United Nations, to continue to promote women's participation, leadership and empowerment, including by providing support to women's groups, so that their voices are heard and amplified across society, and by strengthening their inclusion in the development and implementation of national strategies on preventing violent extremism. There is a need to ensure that women's participation and leadership increase in all sectors of society, including government and national law enforcement and security agencies.

52. The manipulative use of the Internet and social media by violent extremist groups to spread their distorted views represents a significant challenge for the international community. Despite some positive progress in recent years, including the pledge by major technology companies to block the spread of violent extremist content online, more can and must be done to counter violent extremist narratives and propose new, positive ones. I call on Member States to prioritize the development and implementation of national and regional communication strategies that are tailored to local contexts and generate public awareness about the challenges of violent extremism. These strategies should also be aligned and linked with other relevant regional and national action plans. They should be delivered creatively and innovatively by a broad coalition of government and other partners. The Office of Counter-Terrorism project on preventing violent extremism through strategic communications can contribute to Member States' efforts through capacity-building support.

53. Finally, promoting community engagement, including strengthening ties between communities and emphasizing their common bonds and interests, can play an important role in tackling intolerance, discrimination and sectarian violence. This includes linking parents, teachers, religious leaders, young people, civil society and law enforcement agencies to share their perspectives and experiences on how to prevent and tackle extremism. I urge Member States to involve these groups in a holistic way in community-based public awareness campaigns to promote tolerance and ensure ownership, transparency and a more effective dissemination of information. It will help to build confidence at the community level, provide platforms for intercultural and interfaith dialogue and enable grievances and critical issues to be identified at an early stage.

54. The threat from violent extremism is real, complex and transnational. The United Nations stands ready to support Member States to unite people and communities on the basis of universally shared values and principles, respond early and effectively in the cycle of conflict and invest more in prevention. This will take concerted and committed action over many years but we have a collective duty to deliver greater security, dignity and opportunity for all.

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