

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The rise of violent religious extremism and its impact on women and communities worldwide is an urgent and deepening crisis. From November 19-21, 2014, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (IPJ) convened an international conference to examine the issue and gendered strategies to confront this disturbing trend.

The IPJ and its co-conveners¹ brought together Women PeaceMakers from the IPJ's network as well as other peacebuilders, men and women religious and traditional leaders, policymakers, security forces, academics, youth and former extremists to discuss gendered and alternative approaches to countering violent extremism. The conference explored common ground between these often-siloed groups that sometimes have divergent approaches and biases on the issue.

This executive summary contains conference findings and recommendations, as well as identified strategies that are being used around the world in various contexts to defy extremism. The findings and recommendations are not exhaustive of what took place at the conference, and while analysts have come to some similar conclusions, the IPJ believes that a common understanding of the topic lays the foundation for subsequent dialogues with similar participants from a range of the disparate groups mentioned above.

As invoked in the institute's welcome letter to participants, "We ask you ... to allow yourself three days to find points of commonality, seek strategic entrees for collaboration and opportunities to build partnerships. Collectively, our power is far greater than the voices of the fearful, the hate of the few, the violence that strikes against our common humanity."

A full conference report, complete with testimonials from survivors of extremist violence and extremists turned peacemakers, is forthcoming and will serve as the launch of the *Defying Extremism Publication Series*.

¹ Co-conveners: Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID); Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers; NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security; Tanenbaum; UN Women; Women Without Borders; Women's Learning Partnership. Additional partners included Institute for Inclusive Security; International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN); U.S. Institute of Peace; and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

Findings

“Extremist violence has hidden under and associated itself with every major religious tradition throughout history, tarnishing each with movements which have espoused violence and hatred rather than tolerance and peace.”

— Jennifer Freeman, IPJ

Extremism occurs across all religions, and has variations within individual religions and political contexts. These violent ideologies do not arise “out of thin air” or “out of the clear blue sky.”² Extremism cannot be separated from political and economic contexts. Extremist movements seek to gain power through instilling fear and utilizing the power of religion.

“[If] somebody is getting \$20 a month in Syria, but ISIS provides him \$200 a month, that’s why they join. These are the conditions that we really need to address.”

— Mohamed Elsanousi, Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

Islamic extremism is “one of the most important human rights struggles in the world today.”³ Muslims are most at risk of Islamic extremist violence, and there are countless Muslims defying that extremism.

The latest waves of attacks by ISIS and Boko Haram are particularly alarming and have been receiving more and more media attention. However, there is disagreement on whether they constitute a new degree of extremism.

² Quotes from Sanam Anderlini, co-founder of ICAN, and Bennoune, respectively.

³ Quote from Karima Bennoune, author of *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here*.

“A lot of people are looking at radicalization as if it’s a new phenomenon or the way that it’s being expressed in the region as if it’s a new phenomenon. It’s not for women.”

— *Sussan Tahmasebi, ICAN*

Women and their rights are barometers of rising extremism, and are untapped resources for the prevention of it.

Women are not immune to or innocent of being drawn to extremism, of supporting it and perpetrating it.

Military and traditional security approaches to countering violent extremism have largely failed. A gendered, human security, non-state-centric approach is untried and desperately needed.

“Muslim fundamentalism ... is not essentially a security question for Westerners, though it is also that. At its core ... it is a question of human rights for hundreds of millions of people who live in Muslim-majority countries.”

— *Karima Bennoune*

Religious leaders and religious actors — both men and women — need to be more involved and better utilized in preventing and responding to violent religious extremism.

Recruitment to extremist groups must be prevented, and de-radicalization is possible.

The word “secular” needs to be demystified and brought back into the dialogue about democracy, governance, human rights and in relation to religion. In countries without a separation of church and state, the rights of religious and cultural minorities (including sects of the state religion) are often diminished or not protected.

“... the problem with secularism is that it’s been co-opted, and in a lot of contexts been seen to be equal to atheism or anti-religion — when in fact it is a pre-condition to protect believers, non-believers and everyone in a state.”

— Shareen Gokal

In order to truly undermine violent extremism we must have strong state institutions, robust rule of law, and legal mechanisms that combat corruption, impunity and provide equal rights to women and minorities.

Recommendations

Alternative Approaches

It is evident from the range and rapid growth of extremist movements that current military and security-centric approaches are insufficient to address the problem. Moreover, these approaches have often served to support further recruitment and radicalization through real and perceived victimization; the increased militarization of societies; and the diversion of funds from social and human security priorities to traditional security measures at the international, national and local levels.

Alternative approaches are desperately needed, which focus on human security priorities and work with religious, political, cultural and traditional leaders — men and women — in the “moveable middle” to undermine the push and pull factors of radicalization and prevent violent ideologies permeating families, communities and societies.

In order to be effective state actors should recognize that their policies and actions might be viewed as “extremist” by marginalized communities where extremism might breed. Their engagements to counter violent extremism must remain cognizant of these perceptions and actively work to listen, understand and redress in order to build trust and be effective in CVE efforts.

Gender Inclusion

Reiterating the U.N. Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security — including the subsequent ones since groundbreaking resolution 1325 in 2000 — and echoing many previous recommendations from IPJ international conferences on the subject, **women must be included in all aspects of maintaining peace and security. This includes in contexts of violent extremism**, where women and girls’ experiences — as perpetrators, victims and peacebuilding actors — are unique from that of men and boys.

In the context of countering violent extremism, women are uniquely positioned to serve as early warning indicators for radicalization and violence in their communities, because of their roles as mothers and community gatekeepers. In the security forces, women should be hired and trained in greater numbers. One example given during the conference was that of northern Nigeria, which has seen an increase in female suicide bombings, and in which men are not permitted to inspect and search women who are suspected of hiding explosives under their clothes or head coverings. More inclusion of women security officers could help alleviate some of the potential danger.

It is also believed that a number of the female suicide bombers in northern Nigeria had been subjected to sexual violence, as pointed out by Jamestown Foundation fellow Jacob Zenn. Research is ongoing into Boko Haram's intentional manipulation of persistent social stigmas surrounding survivors of sexual abuse as a leverage point to use these women and girls as suicide bombers. The meaningful inclusion of more women in Nigeria and globally in counter terrorism and CVE discussions and research would provide important information on the motivations and gendered dimensions of recruitment, radicalization or coercion of women in violent extremism.

Cross-collaboration

In countering violent extremism, different stakeholders tend to take vastly different approaches and methods, and oftentimes the groups do not reach out to one another or have sufficient opportunities to share lessons learned. Conference participants acknowledged persistent biases between, for example, security forces and human rights activists; peacebuilders and human rights defenders; and women's rights activists and religious leaders. However, as Shareen Gokal of AWID reminded the conference participants, **"We need to work and cross alliances with other movements. We need to see that our struggles are common."** Others specified that those who work from a human rights and women's rights paradigm, and those from a religious paradigm, need to work together to understand the complex dynamics of extremism and how to undermine it. This is true for those in the security sector, policy sector, donor sector, etc.

Education, education, education

"Everywhere that I went, **the most important strategy that people identified was education, education, education,**" said Karima Bennouna. Youth need access to education so they can resist extremist narratives and have opportunities that will buffer them from radicalization. Families and communities need to understand the warning signs of radicalization in their youth and other community members. Religious leaders need to be educated in gendered interpretations of religious texts and norms.

Counter-messaging

Violent extremist groups have been successful in recruiting others because they have a coherent message that appeals to the disenfranchised. The message is also deeply anti-women's rights, and as we heard from numerous religious leaders, relies on flawed

interpretations and selective readings of religious texts. Therefore, counter-messaging — via traditional media, social media and on the frontlines in affected communities — is urgent.

Funding

“It is easier to find funding as a jihadist group than it is to find funding as one fighting it,” pointed out Bennoune. A thorough mapping of funding opportunities and donors who are interested in undermining and countering extremism should be carried out, and agencies need to ensure that money is reaching grassroots groups that are on the frontlines of extremist violence and influence.

Due to the particularly precarious situation of women’s human rights defenders who are countering ideological and misogynistic agendas, specific and significant funding must be directed to protecting and supporting the work of women countering violent extremism. Further, identification and examination of the financiers of extremism are essential, and reflection and reconsideration of Western powers’ engagement with those financiers is critical.

However, it is important to invest equally in preventative efforts, and **for those who have been in contexts with a high-risk of radicalization, restorative and rehabilitative practices can be incredibly effective.**

International human rights system

Activists concerned with the rise of violent extremism should continue to monitor and engage the human rights system, despite its imperfections and limitations. The human rights system continues to evolve, and with that evolution there needs to be more effective ways to hold non-state actors accountable for the types of rights violations being committed in contexts of extremism.

Structural transformation

Structural transformation on a variety of levels is needed in order to undercut some of the root causes of extremism and the ideology that inspires people to join extremist groups and take up arms. Societies need good governance, strong legal systems, access to education, and policies that provide economic and social opportunities for disenfranchised youth.

Other major structural changes include conversions of patriarchal systems, ending the manufacturing and sales of arms, and policies by the West that acknowledge historical injustices and seek to prevent them in the future.

Strategies

Conference delegates identified several strategies that fall into the general categories listed below, though none are mutually exclusive. **These examples provide just one of numerous strategies shared at the conference**; additional examples will be elaborated in the full conference report and in the regional dialogue reports.

Educational

For the past few years, the SAVE (Sisters Against Violent Extremism) initiative of Women Without Borders⁴ has organized Mothers Schools, an innovative project conceived to combat radicalization of youth and to position mothers as an early warning system.

After surveying mothers in five countries in conflict, the organization found that mothers wanted knowledge about identifying warning signs of radicalization in their children and more understanding about religion, as well as training in self-confidence and parenting skills. They also wanted to find environments where they could interact with other mothers facing similar challenges, as SAVE's research discovered that mothers who described their children at "high risk" of radicalization, or who were already radicalized, did not trust institutions such as the state, the police or religious leaders with their concerns. The only group they expressed a likelihood to approach were other mothers. Mothers Schools were born. Women of the SAVE network conduct trainings to explore theories of radicalization and extremism, discuss developmental psychology, and empower one another through storytelling.

Feminist and/or Restorative

Women's Learning Partnership (WLP)⁵ is developing a toolkit on creating a compassionate society, stemming from recent developments in the Arab region and the organization's continued work with women in the area — many of whom are "filled with bitterness, hatred, and having understandable difficulty overcoming what has happened" to them, their families, their communities and region because of extremism by both state and non-state actors, said WLP's Lina Abou-Habib.

WLP is creating the toolkit on compassionate societies not as a method of "forgiving and forgetting," but as a process in which women who have been targeted and brutalized can move to a place of compassionate understanding and to becoming an activist contributing to that compassionate society, rather than to becoming oppressors themselves.

Inherent in the notion of compassion is that it cannot coexist with patriarchy, so part of the toolkit will include steps to deconstructing and transforming patriarchal systems.

⁴ Women Without Borders is an advocacy and research organization for women around the globe. It promotes the role of women in the security sphere and sensitizes mothers in particular to their role and responsibility to challenge violent extremist ideologies.

⁵ Women's Learning Partnership advances communication and cooperation among and between the women of the world in order to protect human rights, facilitate sustainable development and promote peace.

Interreligious

The Peacemakers in Action Network of Tanenbaum⁶ — a secular, nonsectarian organization — recognizes the work of men and women at the grassroots level in countries experiencing armed conflict who are relatively unknown, and, crucially, religiously motivated. To date, the network includes 28 individuals who adhere to Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism, from 21 situations of armed conflict or post-conflict contexts.

The network, identified by Tanenbaum CEO Joyce Dubensky as a “community of practice,” is similar in goals and methods to the IPJ’s Women PeaceMakers program and its alumni network.⁷ It documents the motivations and work of the peacemakers in action, and seeks to strengthen the work of the entire network by calling on one another to enhance their own peace work.

Another objective of the network is for acknowledgment that these peacemakers in action are on the frontline of preventing and halting the phenomenon of religious extremism. “Religious peacemaking ... is a vocational choice for our peacemakers,” claimed Dubensky. “Our theory of social changes is that this vocation would be widely recognized and supported through a range of institutions, and that the international community would be looking for these resources as ... part of the solution to some of the extremism we are seeing.”

Multipronged, Multi-stakeholder and Integrated

“... [I]n order to be able to advance systemic, structural changes and attitudinal changes ... you need to have legal advocates, political activists and religious scholars and leaders working together and collaboratively,” affirmed Susan Hayward of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP).

USIP is engaged in this “three-pillar” approach to legal and social reform in the post-conflict, Muslim-majority societies of Egypt, Afghanistan and Libya as they rewrite their constitutions, largely on sharia law, and where women’s rights need to be protected.

One model for this strategy is the marriage equality movement in the United States, where “moderate” Christian religious leaders continue to work with legal scholars who could navigate the judicial systems, and political activists who could mobilize communities and pressure policymakers — a collaboration that led to landmark decisions in the Supreme Court and state laws.

Hayward pointed to one of the initial defeats of the marriage equality movement: the passage of Proposition 8 in California,⁸ in which political activists and legal advocates excluded the religious sector in their cause, which allowed more extreme religious elements to influence the debate.

In addition to Muslim-majority contexts that are looking at sharia law in the drafting of constitutions and how to protect women’s rights, there is the potential for this approach to be

⁶ Tanenbaum is a secular, nonsectarian nonprofit that promotes mutual respect with practical programs that bridge religious difference and combat prejudice in schools, workplaces, healthcare settings and areas of armed conflict.

⁷ The programs differ substantially in format and selection process, including that the Women PeaceMakers program selects only women and there are no criteria specifying religious motivation.

⁸ Proposition 8 was on the ballot in California in 2008, and sought to restrict marriage as only between a man and a woman. It passed, but was overturned by the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in 2011.

adapted in places like Uganda where LGBT rights are under threat, and Burma as activists try to make space for and protect women's and minority rights.

CONCLUSION

The conference provided these examples and many more, of women and men working against violent ideologies of seemingly limitless range and cruelty. By not sharing their successes, we condemn ourselves to ignorance. This challenge is too complex — and developing too rapidly in numerous corners of the globe — for us not to seek every opportunity to learn what is working and how we can outnumber and overpower the acts of at most, a few hundred thousand individuals, with the collective desire for tolerance and peace of billions.

The findings from the experts gathered at this conference highlights the vast knowledge that can be gained from convening diverse sectors and seeking opportunities to learn from approaches outside of one's own field. Together, we can reach new and different constituencies, strengthen isolated human rights defenders working on the frontlines, and create space for more robust innovations to emerge.

The success of the “Defying Extremism” conference further demonstrated the need to hold these multi-sector discussions in contexts where communities are deeply affected by violent extremism. The discussions and issues explored in San Diego laid the groundwork for the institute and its co-conveners to host regional dialogues in Asia, Europe, Africa and MENA in 2015 and 2016.

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⁹ This executive summary has been produced with the financial assistance of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the Network or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

List of Conference Speakers

Lina Abou-Habib — Women's Learning Partnership
Dee Aker — Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice
Fawziah Albakr — King Saud University
Sanam Naraghi Anderlini — International Civil Society Action Network
Zin Mar Aung — RAINFALL Burma (Re-socialization and Increased Non-discrimination for All)
Karima Bennoune — Author, *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here*
Rubina Feroze Bhatti — Taangh Wasaib Organization (IPJ Woman PeaceMaker)
Loreto Cabaya — Board Member, First District of Cotabato Province, Mindanao, Philippines
Robi Damelin — Parents Circle – Families Forum (IPJ Woman PeaceMaker)
Alison Davidian — UN Women
Joyce Dubensky — Tanenbaum
Mohamed Elsanousi — Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers
Yakin Erturk — former U.N. Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women
Pari Farmani — Institute for Inclusive Security
Naureen Chowdhury Fink — Global Center on Cooperative Security
Jennifer Freeman — Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice
Khadijah Hawaja Gambo — Plateau State Muslim Women Peace Forum, Nigeria
Shareen Gokal — Association for Women's Rights in Development
Hannele Hartto — Finn Church Aid
Rehana Hashmi — Sisters Trust Pakistan (IPJ Woman PeaceMaker)
Susan Hayward — United States Institute of Peace
Allison Horowski — Women's Learning Partnership
Sabiha Husic — Medica Zenica (IPJ Woman PeaceMaker)
Vicky Ibrahim — SAVE Network, Women Without Borders
Angeline Jackson — Quality of Citizenship, Jamaica
Palwasha Kakar — United States Institute of Peace
Ashima Kaul — Yakjah Reconciliation and Development Network (IPJ Woman PeaceMaker)
Madeline Koch — International Civil Society Action Network
Ulrich Kropiunigg — Women Without Borders
Paula Kweskin — Attorney
James McElroy — Southern Poverty Law Center
Merlie "Milet" B. Mendoza — Independent Humanitarian/Development Practitioner (IPJ Woman PeaceMaker)
Rev. Dr. Petri Merenlahti — Finn Church Aid
Arno Michaelis — Serve 2 Unite
Maxensia Nakibuuka Takirambule — Council of the Laity, Diocese of Kampala, Uganda
Sameena Nazir — Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy
Rev. Canon Albert J. Ogle — St. Paul's Foundation for International Reconciliation
Margaret Arach Orech — Uganda Landmine Survivors Association (IPJ Woman PeaceMaker)
Raheel Raza — Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow
Jasvinder Sanghera — Karma Nirvana
Shreen Abdul Saroor — Mannar Women's Development Federation (IPJ Woman PeaceMaker)
Lorna Seitz — The Legis Institute
Mubin Shaikh — Counter-terrorism Specialist
Anne Speckhard — Georgetown University
Avi Spiegel — University of San Diego
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