



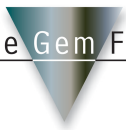
EUROPE REGIONAL DIALOGUE FINAL REPORT

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MAY 3-7, 2015

ALADIN

JOAN B. KROC INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

The Gem Foundation



The Network of
Religious and
Traditional
Peacemakers



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Introduction

From May 3-7, 2015, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (IPJ), along with partners Medica Zenica, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and the Gem Foundation, convened the Europe Regional Dialogue on gendered and alternative responses to prevent and address violent extremism.

The dialogue included 55 participants from 17 countries (Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the UK, Pakistan, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Turkey, the U.S. and Canada — including refugees from Syria and Afghanistan living in Europe) representing varying backgrounds: religious leaders, policymakers, civil society, security sector representatives, former extremists and peacebuilders.

The four-and-a-half-day gathering was the second in a global series of dialogues to be held in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region between 2015 and 2017. The purpose is to bring together individuals from diverse sectors to learn their perspectives on violent extremism: its roots and motivations, how to temper its appeal to young men and women, and how to address its gendered impact on some of the most affected communities in the world.

Context

Over the last century alone, Europe has experienced violent extremism in numerous forms, enacted by state and non-state actors from across the political spectrum. Proponents of violent ideologies have associated themselves with nearly every major religious tradition and targeted minorities from multiple faiths. In the aftermath of World War II, Europe rose from one of the worst tragedies of the 20th century to defy those legacies. The cooperation between former adversaries and the formation of the European Union set a landmark precedent in peacebuilding.

Unfortunately, recent attacks in places like France, Belgium and Denmark and Turkey, the rise of the far-right and the threat posed by returning foreign fighters present urgent and complex challenges for the continent. Too often the tools used to address these threats have been gender-blind, siloed and disconnected from the realities and perspectives of communities where violent ideologies are thriving.

In order to undermine violent extremisms, participants — including religious actors, women peacebuilders, donors, academics, security sector, policymakers, NGO professionals working on community cohesion, anti-recruitment and de-radicalization, and former extremists — from throughout the region gathered to offer new and diverse perspectives in order to develop more innovative, collaborative and effective systems to prevent and respond to these trends.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was selected as the host of the Europe Regional Dialogue due to its experience of conflict, in which religion and ethnicity were used as political tools to divide communities. Its progress and challenges toward reconciliation over the last 20 years, and its identity as the “Muslim heartland of Europe,” set a rich context for the dialogue.

The regional dialogue focused on:

- examining the successes and challenges of religious communities in BiH, and reconciling after the war in the former Yugoslavia.
- identifying gender-sensitive strategies to counter radicalization and recruitment of BiH youth (men

and women) seeking to join different extremist groups in conflict areas.

- addressing the challenges of xenophobia being targeted against Muslims and minorities in BiH and in Europe broadly, and the role of xenophobia in trajectories of isolation, disenfranchisement and possible attraction to radical and/or violent acts or affiliations.
- identifying opportunities for feminist theologians to work with religious and lay leaders to build interreligious dialogue and reconciliation; and promote respect for women's rights within conservative ideologies or various faiths.

The dialogue provided an introduction to the history of BiH as a multi-ethnic nation, an analysis of the historical context of religious communities in the country, and knowledge about the way religion has been used to reinforce conflict as well as to build peace. Participants and community groups interrogated the meaning of "respect for diversity," its contribution to building democracy and what has been achieved in the period after the Dayton Peace Accords. Particular emphasis was placed on the contributions of women to the healing and reconciliation process in the post-war period.

Recent Incidents

20th Anniversary of Genocide in Srebrenica

The Europe Regional Dialogue took place just two months prior to the 20th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica. In July 1995, the Bosnian Serb army under the control of Ratko Mladić massacred more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims, primarily men and boys, in the town of Srebrenica. Both the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have ruled that the massacre, and the preceding separation and forcible transfer of women, children and the elderly, from the men and boys who were killed, constituted genocide.

While many legal cases continue through various international and national courts related to the genocide (including ICTY cases of Mladić and Radovan Karadžić), other forms of justice, truth-telling and memorialization are taking place in Bosnia. The recovery and identification of the bodies of the missing continues, and each July there is a ceremony at the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide, to commemorate those who have been identified in the previous year.

The International Commission on Missing Persons has a forensic project and facility in neighboring Tuzla – the Podrinje Identification Project – that exhumes and identifies remains from mass graves.¹ Once they are identified and the families notified, graves are prepared at the Srebrenica memorial and laid to rest each July.

The commemoration that took place in July after the dialogue included tens of thousands of visitors, including the Serbian prime minister, who was heckled and attacked before fleeing the event. One hundred and thirty-six victims of the genocide who had been identified in the previous year were laid to rest. More than 1,000 people are still missing.

Zvornik

On April 27, 2015, less than a week before the Europe Regional Dialogue was to commence, a gunman

¹ Peter Geoghegan, "Bosnia still digging up its tortured past," *AlJazeera.com*, last modified July 10, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/07/bosnia-srebrenica-massacre-anniversary-150707113058311.html>

attacked a police station in the Serb-dominated town of Zvornik, along the Drina River in northeast Bosnia in the Republika Srpska. It was reported that the gunman was a suspected Islamic extremist from the region who yelled “Allahu Akbar” when he attacked. He killed one police officer and wounded two others, before he was killed by police.

The event was considered one of the more serious ethnic/religious attacks in Bosnia since the end of the war, and was immediately characterized by some as a terrorist attack, while other leaders urged calm and to restrain from hate speech. Islamic religious leaders in Zvornik and neighboring Srebrenica condemned the attack, as did the Serb mayor of Zvornik.²

But the attack inflamed fear and suspicion among both Orthodox-Serbs and Muslim-Bosniaks in Bosnia, and symbolized the lack of coexistence and reconciliation in the region since the war. Because the gunman was a suspected Islamic extremist with ties to alleged fighters for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the attack supported fears that extremists are both being recruited for fighting with ISIS, and that fighters are returning to Bosnia to radicalize others.

In the wake of the attack, and while the delegation was still in Bosnia, the Republika Srpska police arrested 30 people they accused of being radical Islamists, but the police failed to cooperate with other authorities in the region before the raids and apparently had little legal basis to arrest the individuals. Bosnian Muslims claim that Serb security forces are using the cover of extremism to further oppress the Muslim population, particularly those who have returned to their villages which now lay in the primarily Serb region since the end of the wars. Ćamil Duraković, mayor of Srebrenica, said that some of those arrested were “ordinary, hard working people who had nothing to do with religious radicalism.”³

Activities

The dialogue opened in Sarajevo on the evening of May 3, with a concert by Pontanima choir – founded in Sarajevo in 1996 by Franciscan Friar Ivo Marković who led the choir and was one of the dialogue participants. The internationally renowned ensemble is comprised of a religiously mixed group of musicians performing songs from different faith traditions. They performed through the war and in the charged post-conflict region in front of polarized audiences.

The first full day of the dialogue was spent in Sarajevo and included knowledge-building and perspective-sharing discussions on the context of extremism and Islamophobia in BiH and Europe broadly. Key issues, such as the recruitment and radicalization of women and men, were discussed from security sector, family-member, practitioner and personal perspectives of former extremists.

Participants worked together in thematic breakout sessions on opportunities and challenges for inter-religious dialogue; developing gender-sensitive strategies for donor support to the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (PVE/CVE); countering Islamophobia, and examining legal responses to extremism.

On day 2 of the dialogue, participants traveled together to the victim identification center and the forensic lab for the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) in Tuzla, before proceeding to the Srebrenica memorial center in Potočari. The trip had three significant purposes:

² “Bosnia mourns victim of police station attack,” *DailyMail.com*, last modified April 29, 2015.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-3060725/Bosnia-mourns-victim-police-station-attack.html>

³ Elvira M. Jukic, “Bosnian Serb Mass Arrests Alarm Bosniaks,” *BalkanInsight.com*, last modified May 8, 2015.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnian-serb-terrorism-related-arrests-raise-ethnic-concerns>

- 1) The memorial provided an historically significant opportunity for the multiethnic participants from the region; the majority of the ethnic Muslim and Serb Bosnians from Republika Srpska had not visited the memorial. Participants shared that a narrative existed among some ethnic Serbs that denied the genocide, making their willingness to visit the memorial even more significant. At the memorial site, interfaith prayers from Islam, Christianity and Judaism were offered by a woman Islamic theologian, Friar Marković, the memorial's Imam, and a British dialogue participant.
- 2) Participants met with some of the Mothers of Srebrenica — a group of women who survived the genocide and chose to return to Potočari to create a memorial to remember their sons and husbands. Potočari is located in Republika Srpska, and the mothers reported being harassed and threatened by their Serb neighbors, who are now in the majority. Participants were thus able to discuss with the mothers the long and difficult process to establish and maintain the memorial, and their ongoing quest for justice.
- 3) The victim identification center in Tuzla presented a vivid reminder of the long-term costs of violent extremism. Participants were guided through the practical and time-sensitive challenges of identifying exhumed remains, and for families searching for those who are still missing. In addition to its cautionary significance, the visit to these sites raised relevant questions of how persistent gaps in communal justice and national transition processes can produce narratives of real and perceived injustice not only within the affected community, but regionally and internationally.

On day 3, participants traveled to Zenica to visit host partner Medica Zenica. Medica pioneered holistic psychosocial responses to survivors of sexual violence during the war in the former Yugoslavia, and has continued providing a comprehensive range of services to survivors — women and men — as well as addressing the complex intergenerational implications for children born of rape during the conflict. Their model, developed by women, continues to set what is widely considered to be the gold standard in gender-sensitive approaches to conflict-related sexual violence.

Sexual violence has been a particularly brutal and widespread tactic used by extremist groups against women and girls, and also some men and boys, in Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uganda and elsewhere. Learning of its multifaceted effects on survivors, as well as their families and communities, was relevant for participants' understanding of its significance as a strategy of terror. After hearing from survivors and Medica's team, participants discussed how to design gender-sensitive, age-sensitive, and culturally relevant response mechanisms and holistic systems of support, and the importance of supporting survivors and their offspring after conflict.

The dialogue concluded in Sarajevo with an exploration of youth-focused peacebuilding programs, and those that employ alternative tools such as theatre and the arts to facilitate inter-personal and community healing in divided societies. Participants also held a rich discussion with senior representatives from the Ministry of Security on current challenges and opportunities for the security sector's counter-terrorism efforts. The dialogue concluded with breakout sessions to establish recommendations and plans of action, which are highlighted in the Findings and Outcomes sections below.

Key Findings

Extremisms are mutually reinforcing and need to be examined relationally

Experiences of participants from the former Yugoslavia and Western Europe — including former

extremists and those who currently work in counter-recruitment efforts — emphasized the mutually reinforcing dynamics of ethno-nationalism (including far-right movements), religious fundamentalism and violent movements.

Numerous parallels were identified between the dynamics employed in the former Yugoslavia — where political goading of ethno-national sentiment resulted in the rise of violent movements in those communities and eventually in minority communities who were targeted — and the current rise of ethno-nationalist and far-right sentiment in the rest of Europe.⁴ It is known that anti-immigrant, anti-refugee and Islamophobic sentiment is being exploited by domestic and foreign terrorist groups to encourage recruitment.

Reinforcing findings from the Asia Regional Dialogue,⁵ Muslim and Arab minority participants also cited the predominant security and policy focus on Muslim communities as problematic from a strategic as well as a human rights perspective.

It is thus recommended that far-right and ethno-nationalist groups be consistently included in PVE and CVE agendas, both for their high propensity for violence, and for the relational effect extremist movements have on one another.

Addressing deficits of justice and impunity: Strengthening state institutions and rule of law

BiH presents both strong success stories and deeply troubling deficits in its processes of transitional justice following the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Participants, including a majority of women who had experienced sexual violence, cited concrete examples of persistent quests for justice for war crimes committed two decades ago. For some, their perpetrators not only remain free but hold positions of civil or political power within their communities, and the women continue to endure threats and insecurity.

Strengthening state institutions and the rule of law is a crucial mechanism to preventing violent extremism. However, the case of BiH — as also evidenced in other post-conflict countries — provides caution that the establishment of laws and institutions should reference international law and human rights standards. Without protections for minorities in pluralistic societies, democratic rule can have the consequence of enforcing majority rights, entrenching discrimination and unequal laws and institutions.

With real and perceived grievances being a primary driver of violent extremist recruitment, this caution is particularly relevant in pluralistic societies, whether that is in Bosnia, France, the United States, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Iraq, etc.

Further research is needed on the experiences of women former extremists

Much attention has been paid to understanding the gendered dimensions of radicalization and recruitment to violent movements, yet there is a deficit of research into gender-specific push/pull factors, and crucially, into women's and men's, boys' and girls' paths to leave violent movements, and current challenges to doing so. Better understanding and helping to address those challenges for women “formers”⁶ — likely not through external engagement, but possibly through peer support — will make it

⁴ Mike Bird. “Welcome to the 'Rechtsrutch': The far right is quietly making massive gains in Europe” *BusinessInsider.com*, last modified October 19, 2015. <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-far-right-is-quietly-making-massive-gains-in-europe-2015-10?r=UK&IR=T>

⁵ See Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, *Asia Regional Dialogue* (San Diego: University of San Diego, 2015)

⁶ “Formers” is a self-description used by women and men who have participated in these dialogues who were formerly members of a group espousing a violent extremist ideology.

easier and more attractive for others to leave.

Examining masculinities

The gendered dimensions of violent extremism also require a critical examination of the role of dominant and alternative masculinities within majority and minority cultures. For example, an examination of the roles and expectations for men

- in European minority and immigrant cultures is needed to better understand push/pull factors to violent movements, and roles and expectations which facilitate resistance to recruitment and violence;
- in European majority cultures is needed to better understand push/pull factors to violent movements (e.g. ethno-national or far-right), and roles and expectations which facilitate resistance to xenophobia and violence;
- is needed to facilitate reintegration efforts of returning former fighters.

In relation to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict

A limited number of studies have begun to scratch the surface of male sexual and gender-based violence in conflict,⁷ and in relation to push factors to violent extremist groups,⁸ asserting the need for much greater awareness and research on its consequences. For example, in Bosnia, Medica Zenica pioneered examining masculinities in the context of sexual and gender-based violence. When responding to the repercussions of conflict-related rape and its inter-generational impact for victims and perpetrators, Medica provided trauma healing to men who reported its need. In the first year they treated 4 men, in 2014 they lead over 400 therapy sessions for men.

Violence prevention through education

Pluralistic social policy and education models

Recognizing Europe's current challenges with respect to immigration policy and community cohesion, pluralism was recommended as a preferential social policy to that of multiculturalism, tolerance or assimilation.⁹

In BiH, participants examined the deepening ethnic divides institutionalized through *de facto* political, geographic and educational segregation following the Dayton Accords. An exploration of current drivers of disenfranchisement and anti-social behavior in youth identified intergenerational effects of the conflict, including wartime sexual violence, widespread impunity, and unemployment rates of over 57% for youth¹⁰ and 43.9% in society at large¹¹ as some of the largest concerns. However, ethnically divided schools and educational systems which continue to teach ethnocentric histories were identified as high-risk factors which could translate the aforementioned push factors into inter-ethnic violence if not urgently addressed.

Promoting respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) among armed state and non-state actors

⁷ Sandesh Sivakurmaran, "Sexual Violence Against Men in Armed Conflict." *European Journal of International Law* 18, no. 2 (2007), p 253-76

⁸ Jessica Stern in Anne Speckhard and Mubin Shaikh, *Undercover Jihadi: Inside the Toronto 18*. (McLean: Advances Press, 2014)

⁹ Dr. Ahmed Zildzic, Oriental Institute of Sarajevo, conference presentation, May 4, 2015

¹⁰ World Bank Group, "Bosnia and Herzegovina," *WorldBank.org*, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bosniaandherzegovina>

¹¹ CIA World Fact Book (2014 estimate), "Bosnia and Herzegovina," *CIA.gov*, last modified March 15, 2016. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html>

Similar to a local model employed in the Philippines,¹² the Swiss-based NGO Geneva Call works with armed non-state actors to prevent violence targeting civilians, through promoting IHL. In addition to working directly with armed non-state actors, Geneva Call broadcasts commercials on Syrian TV educating the public about IHL. Several dialogue participants not affiliated with Geneva Call — either Syrians or those who have worked in the country or with Syrian refugees in Europe — affirmed that the commercials are well received by communities. Elements of this type of education are consistent with psychological “norm setting” behavior which could reduce propensity for violence which targets civilians, including the use of sexual and gender-based violence, as has been seen in ISIS’s use of sexual slaves as a recruitment tool and reward for fighters.

While elements of this approach may be considered controversial, they invite deeper inquiry and consideration of the strengths and weaknesses in localized and nuanced contexts. It has also been recognized that in order for this method to be effective, state actors must be equally informed and committed to maintaining IHL. Geneva Call cites a common challenge: armed non-state actors can be reluctant to sign covenants committing to adhere to IHL, because state actors are not adhering to the same humanitarian principles.

Both as a matter of international law, and as a strategic approach to reduce the escalation and severity of violent methods being employed by all sides, it is strenuously recommended that international humanitarian law be upheld by states and taught to non-state actors.

Gender-targeted civil society funding mechanism needed

To address the persistent under-funding that civil society, and in particular local women-led groups, face, participants recommend the creation of a multi-donor fund for women-led initiatives. In order for it to be accessed by women-led groups working in peacebuilding/PVE/CVE, it must be sensitive to the dynamics of working in contexts where violent extremism is present. Recommendations for the fund include:

- Civil society organizations should be vetted and funding directed to independent and credible women-led groups.
- The gender-sensitive security needs of civil society actors should be prioritized, with nuanced flexibility on the part of donors. For example, groups should be able to access funds without a requirement to brand their activities with the name or logo of the fund. Groups — and women in particular — should be consulted directly to best understand the particular security needs for their context.
- The donor fund should be anonymous and premised on a spirit of solidarity with frontline women peacebuilders. The fund should be managed by an independent board of experts to decouple the grant-making process from individual state agendas, which in certain circumstances can compromise the safety and credibility of women peacebuilders.
- With a target demographic of local, women-led civil society organizations rather than large international NGOs, grant amounts, applications and reporting requirements should all be designed in consultation with credible local groups working in this field.
- Funding can be offered as varying combinations of financial support, in-kind contributions and capacity building or consultation.

Positive alternatives must be offered

¹² See Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, *Asia Regional Dialogue* (San Diego: University of San Diego, 2015)

Many policy and program agendas for countering and preventing violent extremism have focused on phenomena — e.g., terrorism, violence and violent ideologies — which we seek to eradicate. Violent extremist groups, in contrast, use not only the narratives of what they wish to destroy/replace, but they often attract followers by emphasizing agency and a vision of what its members will gain by being part of the movement. In order to be effective, states and civil society organizations need to articulate and offer positive and attractive alternatives to at-risk groups. Multiple dialogue participants are pioneering such positive models. Some examples and links to learn more about their work follow:

- Youth programs such as Serve to Unite (S2U): <http://serve2unite.org>, which is led by former extremists and victims of extremism. S2U was founded in the United States and now operates globally.
- Faith-based programs such as the Pontanima interfaith choir and the “Eye to Eye” interreligious dialogue center both run by Friar Ivo Marković.
- Community-building programs such as the Dutch initiative “Creating a new WE”(<http://www.nieuwwij.nl>); and HumanKind, a new initiative launched in San Diego (www.humankindsandiego.org).

Outcomes

The methodological foundation for these regional dialogues is, in part, to bring together influential individuals and groups who are working to prevent or counter violent extremism through:

- community engagement as religious, NGO or political actors;
- counter-messaging;
- engaging those who are at high-risk or who have joined or returned from violent movements;
- security or legal responses;
- or academic research.

Participants need not have PVE/CVE as an explicit goal of their work. However, we recognize that their work contributes to explicit peacebuilding and security goals which prevent or counter violent extremism. Thus, core to the dialogue’s methodology is that through learning about one another’s diverse approaches and experiences, participants will expand their lenses beyond their silos of engagement, and find opportunities to work bilaterally or collaboratively on new initiatives that can strengthen our collective work.

The following represent some of those collaborative outcomes:¹³

Women “formers” present a severely under-researched demographic in efforts to understand current violent movements and to prevent extremism. Recognizing the value of listening to and learning from the individual experiences of women who have entered violent movements, and been involved in their activities but then chosen to leave those movements, the Europe dialogue laid the groundwork for a series of initiatives to bring women formers together. Gendered psychological and physical risks are often inherent to women’s attempts both to exit extremist movements and to rebuild a life afterward, making it very difficult for formers to come forward. The first such meeting will therefore be a carefully selected convening of a small and geographically diverse group of women who previously participated in extremist, militant

¹³ As part of the monitoring and evaluation of the regional dialogues, organizers collect medium and long-term projects and partnerships which develop in the weeks and months following the dialogue. These are updated regularly on our website as community submissions, reports and resources as appropriate.

movements. As appropriate, the initiative will expand to engage this group in direct conversation with researchers, policymakers and security forces who can benefit from their insights and experiences. A key outcome of these meetings will be to formulate policy recommendations to support community-level engagements with gender-disaggregated youth at risk, and for the development of peer-support networks that support the gender-specific needs of women seeking to leave extremist movements.

At-risk youth engagement. As recognized in the dialogue findings, educational reform is needed in BiH to counter divisive narratives and sensitively address currently segregated schools. Participants Arno Michaelis and Yasmin Mulbocus offered additional support to demonstrate for children and youth in BiH the potential harm ethnic or religious prejudice and the attraction of extremist violence. As a former racist skinhead and a former Muslim extremist, Michaelis and Mulbocus have collaborated on youth-focused initiatives in Europe and the United States, and each run their own community organizations supporting high-risk youth.

Religiously and culturally sensitive models which encourage protection of civilians. Building upon Geneva Call's experience in working directly with armed non-state actors, dialogue participants were interested in developing an initiative to bring together women and men human rights defenders, religious actors and others to discuss models which advance religious, cultural and ethical/moral values that protect civilians, including women, including young women, and young men. For those who work in environments or communities where support for violent ideologies is strong, Geneva Call has offered to partner with them to teach techniques to engage directly with armed non-state actors, while promoting personal safety and in respect of international law and human rights norms.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Many would consider Europe to be at a crossroads. Crucial decisions are being made on how to respond to unprecedented numbers of refugees arriving from the conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, economic migrants from North Africa, and how to prevent and mitigate the fear of attacks by both domestic and foreign terrorist cells in European cities.

The Europe Regional Dialogue re-emphasized that traditional security-centric responses to these challenges are insufficient, and require more broad-based and nuanced responses by development, donor, security and policy actors working collaboratively with civil society. Crucial to the success and longevity of these efforts will be the inclusion of previously marginalized voices in meaningful consultations and decision-making. We assert that women, religious actors and youth represent three extremely salient — and frequently marginalized — perspectives to understand the drivers and contexts in which violent extremism exists and flourishes. However, current CVE trends to operationalize women, youth or religious leaders as counter-terrorism tools, or essentialize their roles, are also problematic.¹⁴

Bosnia and Herzegovina offers rich examples of successful interfaith efforts and pioneering women's human rights groups who have fought for peace and justice during and after the war. However, it also presents an under-acknowledged and potentially volatile case in the middle of Europe. Institutionalized inequality, persistent impunity, and very high unemployment present well-recognized risk factors for recruitment to ethno-national and extremist ideologies. While BiH has existed with these conditions for

¹⁴ Radhika Coomaraswamy et. al, "Ch. 9: Countering Violent Extremism While Respecting the Rights and Autonomy of Women and Communities," *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace* (New York: UN Women, 2015)

over a decade, the economic, security and social dynamics in the rest of Europe and the ongoing crisis in Syria and Iraq could have a further destabilizing effect.

Urgent attention should be paid to reform the detrimental effect of the Dayton Accords in entrenching ethnic and religious divisions in the country, and address persistent impediments to justice — including for sexual violence. The Soufan Group estimates that as of December 2015, 875 foreign fighters had traveled from the western Balkans¹⁵ to Iraq and Syria. While that is less than France’s 1,800, and comparable to the UK or Germany (estimates of 760 each as of November 2015), it is nevertheless concerning. Across the continent, it is estimated that over 5,000 European nationals have traveled to Iraq or Syria as foreign fighters thus far.¹⁶

In order to compellingly turn this tide, states and civil society organizations need to offer an alternative that is more attractive than the narrative being offered by groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, right-wing extremist groups or others. This can only be done by listening to the concerns and better understanding the needs of the (predominantly, but not exclusively, young) women and men who are susceptible to adopting these ideologies. Civil society, including women-led groups and faith-based actors who dedicate themselves to understanding the needs of their communities, provide invaluable resources to understand these dynamics and local concerns, and what resilience to extremism looks like in their contexts. Certainly, the appeal of violence is not universal. It is as important to study who turns away from violence, as it is to study who turns toward it. Civil society working in this highly sensitive space must not be operationalized within a security framework, but rather consulted with and involved in the design of attractive alternatives to maintain their credibility and effectiveness.

Future dialogues — to be held in Kenya in 2016 and Morocco in 2017 — will build on the learning and findings from the regional dialogues in Asia and Europe, and be designed to address each of their specific regional contexts. Each will have its own format and identify a different combination of individuals with various expertise and experience in differing sectors. In this way, each of these meetings will produce its own set of insights and approaches, and a gendered, nuanced and context-specific analysis of how to undermine violent groups, prevent recruitment and foster peaceful societies.

To learn more about ongoing follow-up to each dialogue, or to support this work, please contact:

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¹⁵ Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia.

¹⁶ The Soufan Group, “Foreign Fighters,” *SoufanGroup.com*, last modified December 2015. http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf

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