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Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations

Time for Action in Countering Violent Extremism: The Role of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund

On 8 December 2015 the Permanent Missions of Qatar and Switzerland co-hosted an event at the United Nations in New York to highlight the role of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) in preventing violent extremism.

GCERF is a new initiative, based in Geneva, Switzerland, with the objective of providing small grants to launch innovative grassroots initiatives to prevent radicalisation to violent extremist agendas. The Fund has three hallmarks: first, it is intended to sustainably fill a funding gap at the local level; second, it is focused on prevention in communities at risk of radicalisation; and third, it is a public-private partnership, generating innovative solutions in support of national efforts.

The event was held a week after the third meeting of the GCERF Governing Board, which paved the way for its first grants to projects in Bangladesh, Mali, and Nigeria; approved new partnerships with Kenya, Kosovo, and Myanmar; and agreed GCERF's strategic vision to be the global fund for preventing violent extremism.

The panelists were **Ambassador Alya Al-Thani** (State of Qatar), Deputy Permanent Representative **Olivier Zehnder** (Switzerland), **Dr Khalid Koser** (GCERF), **Ambassador Masud bin Momen** (Bangladesh), and **Mr Jehangir Khan** (UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force - UNCTITF). The event was attended by about 100 representatives of the New York diplomatic community.

The discussion was opened by Ambassador Alya Al-Thani, who outlined the growing global threat posed by violent extremism, and stressed the need of international cooperation among states but also including civil society. Deputy Permanent Representative added that Switzerland also has a particular interest in promoting private sector engagement and responsibility with GCERF and in the field of preventing violent extremism, especially through job creation. Qatar and Switzerland are the two largest of GCERF's 12 donors.

Representing the views of one of GCERF's first pilot beneficiaries, Ambassador Masud bin Momen reinforced just how important it is to prevent violent extremism, stating that alongside climate change it is the risk most likely to derail Bangladesh's impressive development trajectory. Innovative initiatives that have been identified by GCERF for funding in Bangladesh include empowering university and madrasa students to engage in open dialogue; training Imams to disseminate information refuting the narratives used by violent extremists to attract recruits; educating and empowering women to serve as change-makers in the community and the home; training journalists in in-depth reporting and establishing a fellowships programme for peace journalism; and supporting theatre, music, and radio programs that promote storytelling and strengthen local cultural identities.

Mr Jehangir Khan emphasised the innovative character of GCERF. The forthcoming UN Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism will reinforce GCERF's focus on prevention at the community level, and the significance of supporting youth in particular. The Action Plan will call

upon member states to develop national action plans on preventing and countering violent extremism, and by helping to engage and build resilience amongst communities GCERF has a critical role in supporting these efforts.

Reflecting that while 2015 was GCERF's pilot year, 2016 will be its year of performance, Dr Khalid Koser identified three particular opportunities. One is to strengthen cooperation between security and development actors, whose interests overlap in the goals of preventing and countering violent extremism. A second is to engage further the private sector, by making a strong business case about the economic costs of violent extremism. A third is to develop sustainable interventions to ensure that GCERF's impact will be meaningful and lasting.

For further information please contact info@gcerf.org

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