



INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Co-sponsored by GCERF and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), a number of private sector, civil society, media, and think tank leaders convened in Cape Town on 5 June 2015 to explore current approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism. Meeting on the margins of the World Economic Forum Regional Summit on Africa, the group identified innovative approaches to engaging the corporate sector in sustainable, long-term investment in areas affected by violent extremism and explored how to support women and their families living under threat of violence and recruitment by these groups.

Engaging the Private Sector

In the first session, participants from the private sector shared examples of how violent extremism threatens not only the safety of employees, but also negatively impacts the stability and development of business operations. Affirming the unique role of the private sector in countering violent extremism (CVE), the group agreed that inroads can be made by leveraging the core competencies of companies, including expertise and access to supply chains.

The group discussed the traditionally tenuous relationship between the development community and governments' counter-terrorism apparatus, but agreed that the dynamic has changed; specifically, we are witnessing a positive shift toward the prioritization of countering violent extremism (CVE) to complement more reactive and kinetic approaches.

The private sector expects results; while it may be too soon to identify tangible examples of CVE success stories, participants acknowledged that progress is being made. What is more, they were in agreement that support for grass-roots CVE initiatives, like those that GCERF will fund, is necessary and worthwhile if measurable success is to be achieved.

Empowering Women

In the second session, participants heard from Madeleine Rees, Secretary General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, on the gendered impacts of conflict and the pressures women living under threat of violent extremism endure. Sharing stories of the resilience of women in Bosnia, Iraq, Syria, and Northern Nigeria, Ms. Rees urged the group to be careful not to homogenize women and girls as solely victims and/or peacemakers. Joined by her colleague Vanessa Farr, the two expressed the need to look at the narratives surrounding gender and conflict, and affirmed their commitment to multilateral institutions and international law as still the best options for lasting peace.

For them, empowering women in the home and community, with the goal of ultimately influencing policy, must begin by listening and not prescribing. For this reason, GCERF's approach to hearing from the community about what drives radicalisation to violent extremism and the Fund's subsequent support to grass-roots initiatives to strengthen resilience to violent extremist agendas, strikes the right balance.

June 2015: GCERF at the World Economic Forum Regional Summit on Africa