

## **Listen! A Youth Perspective on Preventing Violent Extremism**

**26 September 2018, New York**

This interactive panel discussion **“Listen! A Youth Perspective on Preventing Violent Extremism”**, co-hosted by the European Union, GCERF, and the Kofi Annan Foundation (KAF), brought together young people directly affected by and pushing back against violent extremism. They shared their own stories about violent extremism, through presentations, videos and a booklet inviting all of us to reflect on what we can learn from them.



In 2018, GCERF in cooperation with civil society organisations in its partner countries of Bangladesh, Mali, and Nigeria, launched an essay competition asking youth participants in GCERF-funded programmes to answer the question “What can you do, as a young man or woman, to prevent violent extremism in your community?” Their responses are captured in the publication **Read! A Youth Perspective on Fighting Violent Extremism**.

The winner of the essay competition, an inspirational young woman from Cox’s Bazar who with GCERF’s support has been on the frontline of preventing violent extremism there, took part in the event, together with other young civil society representatives, including several Extremely Together Young Leaders (initiative of KAF).

Over 90 participants from government, civil society, UN agencies, multilateral institutions, private sector, media, and students gathered to discuss a critical role of young people as agents of peace and tolerance. Youth can play different roles as victims of violent extremism, perpetrators or protagonists for change.

A strong case of support for GCERF was made as it promotes the voice of local communities, and one of the consistent approaches across all its beneficiary countries is a focus on youth. Despite various challenges of being a youth working on PVE, young people are solutions oriented, enthusiastic and are keen to be involved. The Bangladeshi essay competition winner told how she has seen early signs of radicalisation of her neighbour, intervened and spoke with him, offered help and gave him resources, and that today he is a social worker helping others at risk.

A bottom-up approach was highlighted as a prerequisite to unlock youth potential by listening to them, creating initiatives that come from the community and encouraging local leadership, rather than imposing solutions upon them.

The discussion concluded with powerful statements from young people on how to become a change agent focusing on self-empowerment, giving youth a real voice rather than just a seat at the table, keeping them continuously involved, and finally trusting them to make a difference in this society.