

**ASEAN-UN Workshop: Regional Dialogue III on Political-Security  
Cooperation (AURED III):**

**‘ASEAN-UN Collaboration in Conflict Prevention, Preventive  
Diplomacy and Prevention of Violent Extremism’**

**7-9 November 2016, Jakarta**

**Concluding Remarks by Frej Fenniche, Chief of Asia, Pacific, Middle  
East and North Africa Branch, UN Office of the High Commissioner  
for Human Rights**

Excellencies, distinguished participants, colleagues and friends,

I would like first to congratulate all speakers for their very substantive and informative contributions in the past two days. It has been extremely useful to learn from experts of the region on the question of the prevention of violent extremism, an issue I have followed closely for many years in the Middle East and North Africa context. I am originally from Tunisia and as you know the question of violent extremism in my country has been particularly acute in recent years.

A lesson learned from Tunisia is that the more you expand democratic space and freedom of expression, in particular to CSO actors and free press, in order to encourage freedom of expression and inclusive national dialogue, *the more* you will be able to prevent the emergence of violent extremism and terrorism. It was not by chance that the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet (composed of 4 NGOs including the Tunisian League for Human Rights). It was “for its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution of 2011” .

The critical issue of democratic spaces have been raised by many participants in the past two days. Strengthening NGOs' role, including grass-root organizations, is imperative if we want to tackle effectively the question of violent extremism. Establishing a mutual respectful relationship between the State and grass root organizations is imperative toward eradicating violent extremism.

Tensions that may exist between freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief have also been identified. However, experience tells us that these freedoms are instead “mutually dependent and reinforcing”. The 2012 Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of incitement to national, racial or religious hatred (a consensual document developed by a number of UN independent experts, with the active participation of Representatives of Member States and CSOs) stresses that “free and critical thinking in open debate is the soundest way to probe whether religious interpretations adhere to or distort the original values that underpin religious belief”. Unfortunately, counter-extremism legislation has been, in many countries, used to unduly restrict HR. To tackle the root causes of intolerance, a broad set of policy measures, in addition to the legal framework, is necessary, for example concerning intercultural dialogue, policies empowering minorities and women, and education on pluralism and diversity.

Distinguished participants,

In the ASEAN 2025 vision, members of ASEAN committed to realize a community that embraces tolerance and moderation, fully respects differences and diversity as well as to address the threat of violent extremism.

Some participants noted that confronting hate speech and incitement to hatred against individuals or groups who are victims of

discrimination, persecution or harassment is critical. This is also an issue which has been captured by the ASEAN 2025 vision which commits “to uphold common values in the spirit of unity in diversity”.

Indeed, upholding the rights of groups at risk and working with communities with an emphasis on the elements of non-discrimination, tolerance and interfaith dialogue can help to prevent serious crimes in the region. It will also be essential to pursue inclusive economic and social development processes that explicitly seek to overcome exclusion and inequalities, “leaving no one behind” in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Participants also noted that Governments’ responses to violent extremism must be guided by human rights principles. This should also include particular attention to discrimination against women, girls and other groups at risk, such as religious and ethnic minorities, refugees, migrants and LGBTI persons.

This morning, participants discussed the impact of violent extremism on women and how important to empower them to play their role as active members of their communities. In 2015, the UN Development Group for the Asia Pacific in Bangkok initiated some work to develop a common understanding by the UN on the adverse effects of extremism on women and girls. What we observed through this exercise is that human rights violations related to violent extremism have compounding impacts on women and girls resulting in control over all aspects of their lives. Furthermore, women may be actors in the prevention of violent extremism activities; they may also be supporters of violent extremist groups and ideologies. In that context, it is essential to adopt gender responsive, nuanced and

tailored strategies when looking at the prevention of violent extremism, as mentioned by the experts at this morning session on women empowerment.

Our High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has reiterated on many occasions “how vital it is that strategies to combat violent extremism uphold the values of non-discrimination, democracy and human rights”, adding that the “strongest and most durable antidote against violent extremism is public confidence and the rule of law”. I would add “and respect of HR for all”.

Last March, the UN Human Rights Council organized a Panel discussion on the human rights dimensions of preventing and countering violent extremism. At this occasion, the Secretary-General stressed that violent extremism must be addressed as an urgent human rights priority, avoiding the use of sweeping definitions of terrorism or violent extremism that encroached on human rights. He then concluded that full respect for human rights and accountability for wrongdoing was essential to heal broken societies and successfully counter the threat posed by violent extremists.

At that same meeting, our Deputy High Commissioner, Kate Gilmore, highlighted three core messages I would like to reiterate today: First, responses to violent extremism that respect and protect human rights are more effective and sustainable than responses that do not; Second, equality and non-discrimination are the bedrock of preventing and countering violent extremism; and Third, accountability for human rights violations and abuses is essential for finding enduring solutions to violent extremism.

Dear colleagues,

The UN-ASEAN Action Plan 2016-2020 provides a good framework for us to cooperate in the prevention of violent extremism while promoting and protecting human rights. At this interconnection, I would like to make three concrete recommendations for your consideration:

1/The UN-ASEAN Plan of Action stresses the importance for ASEAN countries to cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms, including UPR, Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Recommendations made by these mechanisms can help Governments to formulate rights-sensitive policies and laws that adequately prevent violent extremism. In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to two mandates in particular that have worked on violent extremism and human rights, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion (the current mandate-holder is Mr. Ahmed Shaheed) and the Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights (Mr. Ben Emmerson). These independent UN experts could add real value to future discussion within ASEAN on this topic at the national and regional levels. I would therefore suggest involving these and other mandate holders in future discussion within ASEAN but also encourage ASEAN States to extend invitations to the UN independent experts to conduct official missions.

2/A second recommendation would be to encourage support of ASEAN and UN to the work of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) to further deepen understanding of the root causes of violent extremism in ASEAN and identify rights-sensitive responses. Similarly, National Human Rights Institutions and CSOs could play a similar role at the country level.

3/A third recommendation is related to the importance to protect and expand civil society space within ASEAN and further encourage participation of women, youth and religious leaders in discussions related to the prevention of violent extremism. Without effective mechanisms at the national and regional levels to facilitate effective and meaningful participation by these actors, and to protect HRDs, including journalists and artists, our response to this challenge will be incomplete and inadequate.

Dear colleagues,

Let me conclude by saying that violent extremism is a multidimensional problem which requires a united and concerted response by the UN system, Regional Mechanisms, Governments and civil societies.

The UN-ASEAN dialogue provides a very good platform to bring all these actors together, and OHCHR working with DPA and other UN Agencies is committed to support ASEAN efforts to pursue an inclusive and constructive dialogue on this critical issue of violent extremism including in the development of a Regional Plan of Action if requested.

Thank you.