

18th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights
HUMAN RIGHTS & PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM



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With warm thanks also to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, to all those who have supported and otherwise helped organize this 18th Informal Asia Europe Meeting Seminar on Human Rights, I express the deep appreciation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, for the privilege of the invitation to join you here, and her warm thanks too for making this timely and needed conversation possible.

Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

What we have done - what we are doing - in the name of preventing violent extremism must answer hate, not spread it; enhance personal security for people living insecure lives, not weaken it; be rooted in building trust and connection between and within communities, not tear trust down. We must deepen the foundations for sustainable inclusive societies, not take measures that worsen our prospects of peace and prosperity.

Good law and good policy do good - and good for all, not merely for some. But if not rooted in clearly defined terms; if defying international legal obligations, norms or standards; when breaching by law, the rule of law, if denying equal rights, obstructing recourse, remedy and reparation - then the instruments of governance are not good - because good they won't do.

If our efforts to prevent violent extremism are to do the good intended - human rights compliance may well not be sufficient - but it is always essential. For, as the Secretary-General has emphasized "an utter disregard for human rights has often made things worse."

Friends,

Rights go wherever people go. Rights are the operating manual of our human condition, being that with which we all are born and that from which no one can legitimately separate us - no matter how tough the times, complex the circumstances, how elusive are the solutions.

Acts of violent extremists - and we have to recognize - regrettably - in many instances, our responses to them - are undermining the rights of people the world over.

Cruel, unconscionable acts by armed groups; the callous, criminal acts committed by those peddling fear; the atrocities perpetrated by individuals crazed with hate: these have pummeled fear, pain and grief into communities, large and small, the world over.

It cannot be acceptable that our responses to these heinous crimes should perpetuate the very fear that they too perpetrate, or cause to the very communities we claim to protect, even more harm. Yet, around the world, efforts to prevent extremism are rolling back rights.

In a rush to demonstrate muscular response, some States have adopted draconian detention policies; revised - for the worse - criminal justice rules and practices; and imposed unprecedented limitations on freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and movement.

In domestic laws and policies, vague, elastic notions of “radicalization” are casting chilling effect on dissent; targeting whole groups of people rather than specific conduct; invading people’s right to privacy via broad-reaching surveillance practices. With few procedural safeguards in place - these ingredients concoct suspicion: loosening protections and fostering a climate of impunity; working, in other words, against the very grain of effective prevention.

State policies to counter financial flows to terrorism are also driving funds away from those doing important trust building work in local communities. Measures that may appear neutral, bring discriminatory outcomes. Under shadow of repressive laws, women’s organizations and other human rights defenders are being caught up in a mucky middle - caught between authorities’ suspicion and repression on the one hand and the intimidation, even open attack, of hate-peddling, violent extremist groups, on the other.

An injudicious tolerance of intolerable conduct by religious extremists and paramilitary groups alike, is driving not justice closer to the violent but violence closer to people simply for who they are - violence, that is, against LGBTI persons, indigenous women, journalists, lawyers, activists, artists. Human rights defenders are on the frontlines of this often vicious human rights erosion - targeted by both state and non-state actors alike, with women human rights’ defenders at particular risk.

One almost wonders if this does not suit violent extremists very well - after all, their aim is not to unleash “only” a violent event, but rather to provoke lasting reactions that destabilize, disrupt and distort.

Yet it is clear that we all – each one of us – are born loving and with an irrepressible desire to be loved, to belong. But hate? All hate is learned. And as the incomparable Nelson Mandela explained, hate thus can be and must be unlearned.

We must ask ourselves “How do we ensure that we are not doing exactly what the extremist seeks?” And we must answer this with greater courage.

Trust and confidence are being undermined. Our wiser response would be to set about to rebuild exactly that – to rebuild trust in the State by those under its jurisdiction, and to reinforce the confidence of the people in the systems of governance and of law. For that, we must strengthen, not weaken, rights. We must:

- Focus prevention on behavior, not opinion or beliefs.
- Investigate promptly, impartially and thoroughly alleged human rights violations.
- Put the rights of victims of violence at the centre of our responses.
- End gender based and other discrimination – including racial and religious profiling;
- And we must step up efforts to dismantle inequalities – accelerate advance of economic, social and cultural rights for everyone, on an equal basis – for that would provide the strongest life-line by which to immunize people against the rhetoric of violent extremism. In this cause, human rights-based implementation of sustainable development goals has a major part to play.

We must further invest directly in the resilience of communities. Counter to many States' practices today, it is a free, confident, independent and diverse civil society - both in the virtual and the physical domains - that is the fastest, surest path to societies better able to navigate disputes and better able to sustain an equilibrium of peace. In this, particular effort is needed to include and engage young people.

Friends,

Violent extremism is the offspring of many parents - of discrimination and injustice - actual and perceived; of political disenfranchisement and economic inequality; it's more febrile when young people are left with little but their exclusion; when a faith meets only contempt; when an identity is deprived of dignity; when belonging is denied.

None of this even remotely excuses the contemptible acts of the violent extremist, but nor does the complexity of its causes excuse wrongful action in response by the rest of us.

Yes, there are critical differences between the harvest, the root, the seed and the soil, but all must be present for growth. Planted in the soil of inequality, the seeds of intolerance, prejudice and bigotry readily grow into hate, whose perverse fruit then is the violence that we now seek to prevent in us all. We must dig far deeper if we are to root out this reprehensible harvest more conclusively.

Some claim a rights framework is not tough on crime. Wrong. A rights framework asks us all to answer to the same standards. If we offer impunity to

state law enforcers as we seek to end to it for violent extremists - how on earth is the goal of ending impunity to be served.

Friends,

Prevention of violent extremism is not for the feint hearted. Thin skinned leaders unable to stomach dissent; unwilling to be accountable for their human rights promises and duties: they are not the leaders who will bring an end to extremism.

70 years ago, writing in 1948 his dystopian novel "1984", the English author George Orwell set out in words the nightmare that is a State rooted in hyper-securitisation and relentless in its pursuit of "thought crime". But in that same year, 70 years ago, Member States set out its antidote - proclaiming in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - that "*... it is essential, if we are not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.*"

Today, violent extremism, and our responses to it, threaten so much and so many, once more. Once again, we must not allow fear and hate to push rights aside. The grave duty of States to uphold security must be matched by - be accompanied by - the grave duty of States to protect human dignity and human rights.

But it requires that we all step up to where our fore mothers and fore fathers, including leaders from both Asian and European States, stood 70 years ago when they were faced with the gravest consequences of the most violent extremism the

world has ever seen: Like them - just as they did through the UDHR - we too must first lower our fists to extend our hands and then together again stand up for universal, indivisible human rights. Lower the fist, extend the hand and together stand up for human rights!

I wish you every success with your stand for human rights here at the ASEM forum. Thank you.