

Youth Action Agenda To Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace

**Produced at the Global Youth Summit Against Violent Extremism
New York City • September 28, 2015**

I. What we know about violent extremism today

The appeal of violent extremism is growing around the world. We, young people and youth organizations present at the Global Youth Summit Against Violent Extremism, recognize that the choice to support violent extremism is driven by many factors. A sense of disengagement and marginalization, despite the inter-connected world we live in, leaves young people vulnerable to recruitment wherever they are. Some young people join violent extremist groups as a way to pursue exclusionary ideologies, to rectify real and/or perceived injustice, or to feel part of something larger than themselves. Some feel coerced to use violence because of manipulation or fear. The resulting violence has taken too many innocent lives.

In response to extremist violence, governments have taken action to counter violent extremist movements, often through military force. However, this approach only tackles the symptoms of the problem rather than addressing the factors driving participation in violent extremism. In many instances, security responses by governments further aggravate tensions and trigger more support for violent ideologies. This approach often adds to the feeling of exclusion and fails to engage youth as key allies in building resilience against violent extremism.

Many CVE initiatives frame youth as either perpetrators of violent extremism or as possible victims of recruitment into violent groups. However, this narrative fails to capture the fact that most young people are part of the solution. They are not turning to violence. Young people around the world are working to build peace and prevent violent extremism.

More than ever before, the response to violent extremism needs meaningful youth participation at all levels. We recognize the gravity of the threat of violent extremism in the world today. Our generation, like the generations before us, challenges the status quo and demands new ideas and systems. To effectively address the drivers of violent extremism and promote peace, youth must be engaged as partners in the design and implementation of relevant programs and policies. With commitments to learning, to partnership, to innovation, and to impact, we are ready to address violent extremism, a defining challenge for our generation.

II. What we are doing to prevent and counter violent extremism

Young people and youth organizations around the world are already building peace and preventing violent extremism. Our activities include:

- 1) **Preventing violence and recruitment into violent groups**
 - We work across communities and religious groups to foster trust, dialogue, and mutual understanding, building social cohesion and decreasing marginalization and injustice.

- We work with other young people to speak up and address grievances constructively, without violence, by building skills in communication, advocacy, and collaborative problem solving.
- We work in a gender-sensitive way that includes programming focused on the distinctive needs of women and girls.

2) **Facilitating young people's disengagement from violent groups**

- We work with young people who have joined violent extremist groups so that they can make a new choice, embracing peaceful approaches to addressing their grievances.
- We link young people with their peers and empower youth to help other young people see a peaceful future for themselves, talk about their dreams, fears and aspirations, and gain skills in responding to conflict constructively.
- We reach out to former violent extremists, ex-combatants, and returned fighters, helping them build and strengthen healthy relationships with their families and communities.
- We encourage programs working with ex-combatants to provide equal resources to all young people in the community, avoiding negative incentives to choose violence as a way of accessing services or resources.

3) **Producing and amplifying new narratives**

- We actively communicate stories that counter binary narratives about violent extremism and instead amplify new stories about peace and positive role models, fostering discussion about the future that we want to see for ourselves, our communities, and our world.
- We share our stories and ideas about a future without violence through traditional media outlets to reach millions of people of all ages.
- We use social media to amplify new, authentic, original voices that connect with those vulnerable to online recruitment and violent extremist narratives.
- We recognize the need to work both online and offline, and we work directly with individuals and communities in locally relevant and appropriate ways.

4) **Fostering effective and meaningful partnerships**

- We partner with local and national governments, as well as international institutions, to design policies and strategies that prevent and counter violent extremism.
- We recognize that policies and strategies focused on youth without youth input are rarely effective, and our contributions to these policies ensure that they are appropriate, relevant, and impactful.
- We work with other youth, civil society organizations, research institutions, religious leaders, and governments to identify and address drivers of conflicts and marginalization.
- We work as individuals and as youth-led organizations to build trust with police and other security forces, promoting collaborative approaches that enhance community security and build trust between youth and security actors.

III. Opportunities to partner with young people to counter violent extremism and build positive peace

All actors must partner with young people more effectively to jointly address this challenge. Below, we offer ways that governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, donors, international

and inter-governmental agencies, and the media can join us in preventing and countering violent extremism.

Governments and youth partner to:

1. **create mechanisms for young people to participate in developing local, national, and international prevention strategies** that include governmental and non-governmental actions. Our participation must include vulnerable youth, former violent extremists, and ex-combatants.
2. **review official policies on countering violent extremism and terrorism to identify counterproductive policies and divisive language and clearly outline an inclusive process for revision.** Governments should repeal or amend policies which prevent young people's full access to their fundamental rights and reduce the space for civil society.
3. **foster dialogue between security services and young people to develop joint action plans to address grievances and injustices at the community level.** These mechanisms must be designed to enable at-risk youth to engage in positive and constructive ways with security forces, including police, military, and intelligence agencies.
4. **take meaningful steps to ensure the peaceful and secure reintegration of individuals wishing to return to their communities.**
5. **promote the implementation of the Amman Youth Declaration and the Guiding Principles for Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding by national governments** as key tools for sustainable, peaceful, and inclusive societies in which young people are able to participate actively in building peace.
6. **dedicate resources to address the drivers of grievances, such as injustice, marginalization, and gender inequality** through programming and reforms focused on citizen participation in governance, rule of law, opportunities for women and girls, education opportunities, freedom of expression and conflict transformation.
7. **develop projects to stop potential recruitment of vulnerable populations, such as internally displaced people and refugees.**

Civil society, including faith based organizations, and youth partner to:

1. **design and implement initiatives for disengagement of individuals from violent extremism.** These initiatives are most effective in reaching youth who are using violence when they are led by youth, former violent extremists, religious leaders, and parents who share their own personal experiences.
2. **promote community adoption of educational, social, and religious programs** that mitigate environmental factors which raise the risk of youth adopting violent extremist worldviews.
3. **strengthen the skills and capacity of community and religious leaders** to engage with youth and effectively promote a culture of peace.
4. **address root grievances amongst young people that fuel their participation in violent extremism.**
5. **ensure that efforts to counter violent extremism are gender-sensitive and utilize best practices on engaging women and girls.**
6. **engage and strengthen family bonds and build support from parents and families for youth involvement in efforts to address extremist violence.**

Businesses and youth partner to:

1. **use a conflict sensitive approach in their investments as well as in their operations**, engaging with youth and other community members to ensure that their activities do not drive youth to violence.
2. **create sustainable, accessible, and equal-opportunity employment, education, and training opportunities for young people**. Use new technologies, where appropriate, to expand the reach of such programs.
3. **dedicate corporate social responsibility resources and social impact investments to partner with young people and youth organizations in implementing local and national initiatives to prevent violence**.

Media and youth partner to:

1. **highlight alternative and constructive narratives through mainstream and new media**, highlighting real stories of young people addressing grievances in collaborative, non-violent ways.
2. **develop effective policies to prevent the use of social media to promote violent extremism**, while ensuring that limits to hate speech and violence do not hamper open dialogue and freedom of expression online.
3. **promote accurate, impartial, and responsible reporting on violence**.

International and regional intergovernmental organizations and youth partner to:

1. **adopt an international policy framework building on the Amman Youth Declaration** and outlining the positive role that youth play in peace and security.
2. **conduct research - including with youth who join violent extremist groups - to understand what drives youth to participate in violence and identify ways this can be prevented, evaluate programming results**, and disseminate learning publicly to advance the field.

IV. We, as youth, commit to the following:

We will continue to act as leaders in preventing violent extremism through the activities outlined in Section II of this Action Agenda. We will also

- take part in multidisciplinary task forces and other initiatives to counter violent extremism at the national, regional, and global level
- initiate partnerships with local and national governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, and the media;
- undertake contextual research and use the findings to guide and inspire policy and programs;
- work together with other youth and youth-led organizations working on countering violent extremism

When we, as young people, have avenues to express our wishes as well as grievances, we can be the designers, innovators, and creators of a peaceful and just world.