



Towards a comprehensive implementation of United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia
Addressing Conditions Conducive to the Spread of Violent Extremism and Terrorism
21-22 May 2018
Astana, Kazakhstan

Concept Note

Rationale

Central Asian countries are increasingly concerned about the growing trend of radicalization, and the danger that this phenomenon could lead to violent extremism and potentially terrorism within the region. Concerns are two pronged: First is the growth of radical ideology among some of the population in the region, mostly the youth, who can become vulnerable to incitement to violence and terrorism. A second concern is related to the potential return of a sizeable number of Central Asian militant factions – by some estimates up to 5000 people – who had reportedly joined the Islamic State (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) or Daesh) and who have now been driven out of Iraq and Syria with the defeat of the Islamic State. Governments of the region are concerned about the potential threat that the return of such people, trained and indoctrinated by ISIS abroad, could pose for their secular systems.

Common concerns about radicalization that could lead to violent extremism and terrorism have raised the need for common response, exchanges of best practices and cooperation across Central Asian countries to jointly tackle root causes.

Through three phases of a project implemented since 2010, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism- the UN Center for Counter Terrorism (UNOCT-UNCCT) together with the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) have been supporting Central Asian countries in the development of a Joint Plan of Action (JPoA) to implement the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia. The JPoA, adopted in November 2011, was the first time that Central Asian countries agreed on a common approach to identify and respond to the threats of terrorism and violent extremism around the region and it was the first regional plan to implement the global strategy. Experience with the past seven years of the implementation of the JPoA shows the importance of fostering greater networking among Central Asian counties and facilitating interactions between global, regional and national efforts in countering terrorism and violent extremism.

As part of measures needed to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism (Pillar I) of the JPoA, Central Asian countries resolved to take the following measures, with the help of regional and international organizations and civil society:

- ⇒ To continue efforts to resolve on-going crises that could lead to conflicts and instability through conflict prevention and dispute settlement.
- ⇒ To contribute to a political solution for the stabilization of Afghanistan as a source of instability and condition for the spread of terrorism.

- ⇒ To generate knowledge and address linkages between social exclusion, marginalization and extremism/terrorism
- ⇒ To respect the right of freedom of religion in the adoption of counter-terrorism legislation and policies.
- ⇒ To contribute to the development of counter-narratives, including through the media.
- ⇒ To address the needs of victims of terrorism and give them a voice.

These resolves, as well as the overall progress made in the implementation of the JPoA were reviewed by in June 2017 by the leaders of Central Asian States during a High-Level Dialogue in Ashgabat chaired by the UN Secretary General. Leaders also discussed the emerging challenges to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism faced by the region. The High Level Dialogue led to the adoption of the Ashgabat Declaration, during which Central Asian leaders expressed their intent “to exert all necessary efforts to counter new threats identified in the fifth review resolution of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, including the recommendations of the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, through promoting dialogue and conflict prevention, addressing the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon, promoting youth engagement, skills development and employment facilitation, countering terrorist narrative and the misuse of information technology, as well as sharing of information and best practices.”

Central Asian states requested the UN to continue to provide cohesive, holistic and coordinated assistance to the region through a new level of engagement. The Ashgabat Declaration thus provided the framework for the UN’s engagement for Central Asia, including through the launch of a third phase of a project aiming to assist Central Asia states in building their capacities to respond to the emerging threats of violent extremism and terrorism through targeted policy support, trainings, information and best practices sharing, as well as regional cooperation.

Under the auspices of this project, UNOCT-UNCCT and UNRCCA are organizing a workshop on addressing drivers of violent extremism and conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, which will be held on 21-22 May 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Objectives

The two day workshop provides an opportunity to review efforts made in addressing conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism and discuss drivers of violent extremism and terrorism in the region, exchanging good practices and lessons learned in implementing pillar 1 of the JPoA in Central Asia at both national and regional levels, sharing good practices from elsewhere, as well as considering the recommendations stemming from the UN Plan of Action on the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) which found resonance regionally and nationally in Central Asia through the Ashgabat Declaration.

It will bring together Central Asian policy makers, practitioners, civil society organizations, experts as well as experts from countries outside of the region and representatives of regional and international organizations in order to share experiences, strategies, best practices and challenges in preventing violent extremism and addressing conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism and terrorism.

Expected Outcomes and outputs

As the outcome of the workshop, government officials, experts and civil society organizations of the region will gain exposure to a variety of policies and practices on themes related to preventing violent extremism and combatting conditions conducive to terrorism and on methods of preparing strategies and action plans. As a consequence, it is expected that they will be better positioned to design holistic strategies and national action plans to address PVE and CT priority areas in compliance with standards of the United Nations.

Outputs of the workshop will include:

- 1) Resources and materials (guidelines, examples of good practices, tools, publications, model legislation etc.) on key priority areas under Pillar 1 of the JPoA gathered and disseminated to participants and consequently made available through the website of UNRCCA for continued access.
- 2) A policy brief prepared on key findings of the workshop and based on a compilation of best practices released for further dissemination at the national level.

Modality

The workshop will consist of three major sections:

- An Introductory Part would be an opportunity for participants to briefly present their progress and challenges in implementing pillar 1 of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy and the JPoA in Central Asia.
- Part 1 will be devoted to moderated discussions around good practices in key areas related to conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism and terrorism that were identified in the JPoA and the Ashgabat Declaration.
- Part 2 will be devoted to exchanges of good practices on the preparation, implementation and monitoring of national strategies and plans of actions on PVE/CT in Central Asia and from global experiences;

All the sessions after the introductory one will be held in guided plenary sessions to allow for ample discussions and exchanges among all participants.

Participation

Six representatives of each Central Asian country will be invited, to be chosen from among the following groups, bearing in mind that participants directly involved with the preparation of national strategies on PVE or Countering of Terrorism will most benefit from this workshop:

- Representatives of law enforcement bodies (National Security Committees, representatives of Ministries of Interior, and Prosecutor's Offices).
- Representatives of institutions responsible for social/youth/women affairs (Ministries of Social Affairs/labor, representatives of the Committees on Women, on Youth, and on Religious Affairs);
- Experts or members of civil society associations or think tanks

Other participants will include:

- 1) Observers from Afghanistan, Russia, China and the United States;
- 2) Experts, including international facilitators and regional resources persons;
- 3) The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Asia and staff of UNRCCA, one representative each from UNOCT-UNCCT and DPA/ MEWAD
- 4) Representatives from CT Task Force entities and relevant UN organizations, CTED, INTERPOL, UNDP, UNOHCHR, UNESCO etc.
- 5) One representative each from regional organizations including CIS, the CSTO, the EU, OSCE, SCO and/or the SCO RCTS.