



Project funded by EU

**Towards a comprehensive implementation of the Joint Plan of Action for Central Asia
under the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy
Recognizing and Responding to Radicalization that Can Lead to Violent Extremism and
Terrorism in Central Asia
Proposed dates: 29-31 March 2016**

Concept Note

Rationale

As part of measures needed to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism (Pillar I) of the Joint Plan of Action (JPoA) for implementing the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy which was adopted in November 2011, Central Asian countries resolved to engage in dialogue on how to recognize and respond to radicalization that can lead to violent extremism.

Central Asian countries are increasingly concerned about the growing trend of radicalization, particularly among youth. This concern was reflected not only in the JPoA, but also in deliberations during a strategic dialogue meeting between Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs for the five Central Asian states and the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA) in November 2014 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan and in November 2015 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Central Asian leaders requested the support of the UN on countering the radicalization of youth and techniques used in their recruitment, such as social media and the Internet. These concerns have been exacerbated by two trends in the region: First, radical ideology may be spreading within vulnerable groups in Central Asia. Second, there is evidence that radicalized individuals have left Central Asia to join international terrorist groups. A sizeable number of Central Asian militant factions – by some estimates up to 3000 people – have now reportedly joined Islamic State (also known as ISIS or Daesh) at various fronts in Iraq and Syria. The return of such individuals, trained and indoctrinated by ISIS abroad, poses security threats for the countries of Central Asia.

In order to support cooperation between Central Asian countries in implementing the JPoA, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) have organized a series of capacity-building workshops on the various pillars of JPoA with the financial support of the European Union and the Government of Norway. The workshops were launched in November 2013 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, with a regional dialogue between leaders of religious institutions and security officials focused on resolving conflicts and countering violent extremism. A second workshop in July 2014 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, focused on engaging the media in countering terrorism in the region. In March 2015 a third workshop was organized in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on border management and countering terrorism.

In March 2016, the planned fourth capacity-building workshop will focus on understanding the causes of radicalization that can lead to violent extremism in Central Asia and aims to bring Central Asian representatives as well as international and regional stakeholders together to discuss how to devise strategies to prevent and combat radicalization. The workshop will build on the discussions and recommendations made during previous workshops, including the Almaty workshop (November 2013). Among the recommendations were the following:

- The need to institutionalize dialogue between government officials and religious leaders to address the conditions that can lead to violent extremism.
- The need to promote and foster social and economic opportunities for groups that are most vulnerable to radicalization (such as youth).
- The need for cross-border cooperation among Central Asian countries to address the regional dimensions of radicalization phenomena.

Towards addressing these needs, the workshop will foster a discussion on measures that can be undertaken by governments, civil society and international organizations in the region and the modalities for achieving them. The recommendations are in line with the Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and they include:

- Institutionalization of exchanges at the regional and national levels, including through the potential establishment of platforms for regular exchanges.
- Training and capacity building for various stakeholders and policy makers on how to counter and prevent violent extremism and how to raise awareness in each country and across the region on available tools and best practises on recognizing and responding to radicalization.
- Knowledge development and dissemination, including cross-regional analysis of what motivates the youth of the region to join extremist organizations as well as analysis and publication of best practices on countering violent extremism and terrorism.

Objectives

The 2.5-day regional workshop will be convened in partnership with CTITF entities on identifying the scope, causes and consequences of radicalization and methods to prevent and combat it as a condition potentially conducive to terrorism.

The workshop will bring together relevant officials from national security agencies, ministries of interior, committees on religion, ministries of foreign affairs as well as civil society representatives (youth groups, women's groups and religious leaders) together with national and international experts. Representatives of Central Asian as well as observer countries such as Afghanistan, the US, China, Russia, and regional organizations such as the EU, SCO, CIS, CSTO and OSCE will be able to share their own experiences, strategies, best practices and challenges in preventing and combating radicalization.

The meeting will be an opportunity to discuss best practices, review legislation on combatting radicalization and foreign terrorist fighters as per UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) and the 2016 UN Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism. Additionally, the workshop seeks to include training sessions on particular aspects of counter-radicalization strategies and the prevention of violent extremism.

Modality

The workshop will consist of an introduction, presentations, guided plenary sessions organized by specific topics and select training sessions on best practices and case studies.

The sessions will allow time for ample discussion and exchange among all participants. The questions that may be examined during the different plenary sessions include:

1: Scope and nature of radicalization in the region

- What are the scope and characteristics of the problem in the region?
- What are the factors that make the region prone to recruitment (outflow) of radicals as well as ground activity within (inflow)?
- What are the primary motivations for radicalization?
- How and where does radicalization and recruitment occur in the region?

2: Vulnerable groups

- How and why are some groups (such as youth) particularly attracted to radicalization and what can be done to prevent this?
- How can youth and women's organizations be partners in developing narratives to prevent radicalization?

3: Responses: Prevention, Countering and De-radicalization

- What best practices that can be adapted for the region in terms of preventing, countering and dissuading/disengaging radicals?
- What are effective elements to prevent narratives associated with violent extremism in the region?
- What are the most effective responses at the national, regional and international level to radicalization?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing de-radicalization programs?

4: Regional cooperation

- How can Central Asian states encourage and sustain cooperation towards a regional approach to preventing radicalization that can lead to violent extremism and terrorism?
- How can relevant institutions in government and civil society across the region work together towards: research and knowledge creation; legislation harmonization; development of counter-narratives for the media and education systems; preventing the use of the internet and social media for radicalization; enhancing inter-ethnic and inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue?

Outcome and follow up

The meeting will foster better understanding of the causes of radicalization and possible responses through the exchange of best practices at regional level and beyond; and it will promote strengthened partnerships between state actors, civil society and communities to address the root causes and consequences of the phenomenon.

Participation

Five representatives of each Central Asian country will be invited, to be chosen from the following groups:

- Representatives of National Security Committees
- Representatives of Ministries of Interior
- Representatives of Offices of the Prosecutor

- National Commissions on Religious Affairs
- Youth institutions
- Members of civil society/associations and religious organizations
- Experts on radicalization or think tanks specializing in radicalization

Other participants will include:

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