Civil Society Engagement Strategy

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Problem Statement

The importance of engaging civil society in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and terrorism efforts is rooted in the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and is well recognized in its review resolutions and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Specifically, in its resolution adopting the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the General Assembly highlighted the determination of Member States to "further encourage non-governmental organizations and civil society to engage, as appropriate, on how to enhance efforts to implement the Strategy (see Annex 2)."[1] In adopting the Strategy, Member States resolved to "foster the involvement of civil society in a global campaign against terrorism and for its condemnation."[2]

The Secretary-General's report containing the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism also recognizes the importance of engaging civil society in P/CVE efforts (see Annex 3). In the Plan of Action, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of including civil society organizations in developing national P/CVE plans. He recommended that Member States "support the establishment of regional and global networks for civil society, youth, women's organizations and religious leaders to enable them to share good practices and experience."[3]

Several Security Council resolutions highlight the importance of engaging civil society in P/CVE, as well as in the rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters. For example, in its resolution 2178 (2014) on foreign terrorist fighters, the Security Council "encourages Member States to engage relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in developing strategies to counter the violent extremist narrative that can incite terrorist acts, address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, including by empowering youth, families, women, religious, cultural and education leaders, and all other concerned groups of civil society and adopt tailored approaches to countering recruitment to this kind of violent extremism and promoting social inclusion and cohesion (see Annex 4)."[4]

Also in addressing the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon, in S/RES/2396 (2017), the Security Council "underscores the importance of a whole of government approach and recognizes the role civil society organizations can play, in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters" and encourages Member States to proactively engage with civil society when developing rehabilitation and reintegration strategies (see Annex 5). [5] Additionally, the Council encourages Member States "as well as international, regional, and sub-regional entities to ensure participation and leadership of women in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of these strategies for addressing returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters and their families."[6] Furthermore, in Resolution 2354 (2017) (see Annex 6), the Security Council recognizes that "efforts to counter terrorist narratives can benefit through

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[1] A/RES/60/288, para. 3e.
[2] A/RES/60/288, para. I (8).
[3] A/70/674 (2015), para. 51f.
[4] S/RES/2178 (2014), para. 16.
[5] S/RES/2396 (2017), para. 32.
[6] S/RES/2396 (2017), para. 39. See also

engagement with a range wide range of actors, including youth, families, women, religious, cultural, and education leaders, and other concerned groups of civil society."[7]

The Madrid Guiding Principles (2015) (see Annex 7) and their Addendum (2018) (see Annex 8) also emphasize the importance of community engagement and civil society participation in addressing the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon, particularly women's organizations,[8] as civil society's views are crucial to effective, context-specific rehabilitation and reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their families.

During the UN's inaugural Counter-Terrorism Week, held from 25-29 June 2018, the General Assembly adopted a consensus resolution for the Sixth Biennial Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, encouraging "Member States and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (now Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact [Global Compact] entities) to enhance engagement with civil society in accordance with their mandates, as appropriate, and to support its role in the implementation of the Strategy"[9] (see Annex 9). The General Assembly further "recognize[d] the role that civil society organizations can play as they may have relevant knowledge of, access to and engagement with local communities, to be able to confront the challenges of recruitment and radicalization to terrorism."[10]

Despite the legal basis for engaging civil society in a "whole-of-society" approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism, UNOCT currently has no systematic method for doing so. While UNOCT consults with a variety of civil society organizations in the development and implementation of its activities, currently, there is no structured engagement of civil society across the range of activities conducted by UNOCT, either on policy development or the development or evaluation of capacity-building programming. There is also no systematic means to engage the views of a geographically balanced pool of civil society organizations in the policy development work related to counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism conducted at the UN.

Goal

The goal of the UNOCT Civil Society Engagement Strategy is to better mobilize civil society as part of a whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism, and effective rehabilitation and reintegration. It is envisaged that the activities outlined in the Strategy will enable UNOCT to systematically and meaningfully engage with a wide variety of civil society organizations at the global, regional and national levels, including by exploring partnerships with civil society, structured consultations, and mutual sharing of knowledge and expertise, on all four pillars of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. While the effort will be comprehensive and seek expertise of civil society across the breadth of the Strategy, a particular focus will be to draw on civil society expertise in the three key areas of gender, youth and human rights. It is foreseen that strengthened engagement would improve the quality and impact of

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[7] S/RES/2354, para. 2f.
[8] See *Madrid Guiding Principles* (2015), Preamble, Guiding Principles 2, 7, 8, 13, 22.
[9] A/RES/72/284 (2018), para. 24
[10] A/RES/72/284 (2018), para. 39

UNOCT policies and programming and that of the Working Groups of the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (Global Compact), contributing to the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Strengthened civil society engagement in UNOCT would also support the Secretary-General's conclusion for the way forward following the 2018 High-Level Conference on Counter-Terrorism, to "ensure that the views of civil society are fully reflected in counter-terrorism policies and programmes."[11]

Outcomes

I.   The effectiveness, quality, reach and impact of the UN's policy and programming efforts related to counter-terrorism and the prevention and countering of violent extremism is improved by ensuring that the UNOCT and Global Compact Working Groups draw upon the diverse expertise, experience, outreach and knowledge of relevant civil society organizations in their policies, programmes, and activities.

II.   The dissemination of the UNOCT's work in specific areas of countering terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) is improved, significantly increasing the Office's outreach and effectiveness, and creating new partnerships to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism.

III.   More structured, systematic civil society engagement is mainstreamed across the UNOCT and Global Compact Working Groups.

Outputs and Main Activities

1.1 Opportunities are created for civil society to provide feedback on UNOCT and Global Compact Working Group policy and programmatic activities in a structured, meaningful way.

1.1.1   Establish a baseline to determine civil society's perceptions of the quality and mechanisms of their current level of engagement with UNOCT and the Global Compact Working Groups and the extent to which their views are reflected in counter-terrorism policies and programmes.
1.1.2   Enable civil society participation in the High-Level Regional Conferences, including by providing information, advance consultation on agendas, and providing financial sponsorship for attendance.
1.1.3   Seek and incorporate civil society feedback into the biennial Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy reviews.

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[11] Secretary-General's Closing Remarks at High-Level Conference on Counter-Terrorism, 29 June 2018, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-06-29/secretary-generals-closing-remarks-high-level-conference-counter.

1.1.4 Provide opportunities for civil society to participate in side events around the United Nations General Assembly and Counter-Terrorism week.

1.1.5 Conduct annual civil society briefings by the Under-Secretary-General or Deputy-Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism attended by senior representatives from civil society organizations that are active on the issue of countering terrorism and P/CVE and are broadly representative thematically and geographically.

1.1.6 Incorporate meetings with civil society organizations into the travel itineraries of the Under-Secretary-General and Deputy-Under-Secretary-General, as appropriate.

1.1.7 Establish a grant-making authority within UNOCT to help facilitate civil society engagement in the work of UNOCT, as needed.

2.1 Outreach efforts are undertaken to ensure dissemination of UNOCT's work, develop new partnerships, and improve the impact of counter-terrorism and P/CVE policies and programmes.

2.1.1 Establish a network of civil society organizations, connecting global, regional, national and local civil society organizations that are active on the issues of counter-terrorism and P/CVE particularly in relation to human rights, gender, and youth, and is thematically and geographically representative.

2.1.2 Create a secure platform for civil society outreach and engagement, which could also connect to designated Global Compact Working Group focal points through an online portal, facilitating on-line and digital consultations on various themes relevant to the United Nations' counter-terrorism and P/CVE agenda, the sharing of research reports and recommendations, the dissemination of relevant updates and information, event calendars, and discussion fora.

2.1.3 Develop a resource mobilization strategy to ensure sustainable, diverse, reliable funding for UNOCT civil society engagement efforts outlined herein.

3.1 Create structured mechanisms to ensure mainstreaming of civil society engagement across UNOCT and the Global Compact Working Groups.

3.1.1 Require UNOCT Branches and Global Compact Working Groups to include civil society consultation in project initiation documentation, as relevant (per UNOCT Standard Operating Procedure #4) and workplans.

3.1.2 Ensure a dedicated capacity for civil society engagement within the UNOCT.

3.1.3 Establish a dedicated capacity for civil society engagement in each Branch of UNOCT that does not house the hub and in UNCCT. Otherwise, appoint focal points for civil society engagement in each UNOCT Branch and Global Compact Working Group. While civil society engagement is the responsibility of all staff, dedicated focal points will serve as an effective bridge between civil society, all Branches of UNOCT, Member States, and Global Compact Working Groups.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles for the UNOCT's engagement with civil society based on best practices include:

- **Representativity** – UNOCT will ensure adequate representation of geographies, gender, and age in its engagement with civil society.
- **Do No Harm** – UNOCT will undertake risk assessments and develop mitigation measures with civil society partners to avoid exposing them to risks that may arise due to their engagement with UNOCT.
- **Inclusivity** – UNOCT will not arbitrarily exclude civil society organizations from participating in its activities, and will set clear, transparent, criteria for engagement.
- **Independence** – Civil society organizations engaging with UNOCT should be acting independently.
- **Legitimacy** – UNOCT's engagement with civil society should be meaningful by ensuring civil society's views are adequately considered in P/CVE and counter-terrorism policies and programming and that how this is done is communicated to them. Engagement should also be structured, systematic, and abide by a consistent set of guidelines and principles.
- **Diversity** – UNOCT should respect the diversity of civil society's views and not expect civil society to speak with one voice.
- **Mutual accountability** – both UNOCT and civil society partners should agree to terms of reference for engagement, to which each are held responsible.
- **Transparency** – decisions made with respect to civil society engagement and criteria for engagement should be transparent and readily available. There should be a method to contest decisions that are perceived as arbitrary or unfair.

Measuring Success

A monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed following the establishment of UNOCT's civil society engagement programme of work, in consultation with the UNOCT Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, and results will be evaluated after a two-year period. The framework will ensure that each project includes indicators pertaining to civil society engagement, as appropriate, and that civil society views are reflected in UNOCT's policies and programmes. Monitoring and evaluation will also include direct engagement with civil society organizations on how UNOCT's engagement is improving and the impact.