

Engaging Civil Society in Countering Violent Extremism

Experiences with the UN Global Counter- Terrorism Strategy

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Abstract

In this ICCT Research Paper Dr. Bibi van Ginkel takes an in depth look at how multi-lateral institutions, engage with civil society to counter violent extremism. Dr. van Ginkel argues that civil society can play a crucial role in preventing and countering violent extremism in numerous ways – by working on development programs, through their work in conflict transformation, in providing a platform to raise political grievances and to facilitate dialogue, or through their work in empowering victims and survivors of terrorism. The paper finds that over the last decade there has been a more intensive coordination of activities between the UN and other multi-lateral organisations and civil society but the question remains whether the implementation as well as the drafting of these policies will live up to their potential effectiveness. This paper gauges how effective these measures have been and what more there is to do. The final section concludes with a series of policy recommendations.

About the Author

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1. Introduction

Ten years after 9/11 we look back on a proliferation of counter-terrorism measures and more intensive cooperation between states, international organisations and agencies. The adoption of the United Nations (UN) Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2006 by the General Assembly (GA)¹ reflects this development. Whereas the majority of UN measures adopted before that date were initiated by the Security Council (SC), and mainly had a security perspective, the 2006 Global Strategy broadened the focus of counter-terrorism to include issues of development and human rights, and called for measures to focus on prevention and capacity building. The Global Strategy aims to integrate different pillars of counter-terrorism policies in order to ensure a comprehensive approach in combating terrorism. This comprehensive approach provides for a better, more effective strategy than merely focusing on separate elements of counter-terrorism policies. This positive development in policy-making, however, is hampered when it comes to implementation, since the actors involved are limited to include UN entities and some other international organisations in cooperation with member states. Civil society actors are thus not officially included in this process, although they sometimes have vital knowledge of context-specific situations and can positively contribute to the effectiveness of the implementation of the Strategy. The Global Strategy consists of four pillars:

1. Measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism;
2. Measures to prevent and combat terrorism;
3. Measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the UN system in this regard, and
4. Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism.

The Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), established in 2005, aims to coordinate the work of the different UN organs and organisations, as well as the work of some non-UN related organisations on counter-terrorism. The CTITF therefore aims for a common, coherent and more focused framework by facilitating better communication, but also through the setting up of several working groups on specific themes. There are currently eight working groups which include, in total, 31 international entities. These actors, including several UN entities, work on multilateral counter-terrorism efforts and thus participate in the working groups that relate to their daily work. Themes of the working groups include:

- Preventing and resolving conflict;
- Supporting and highlighting victims of terrorism;
- Countering the use of the internet for terrorist purposes;
- Tackling financing of terrorism; and
- Protecting human rights while countering terrorism.

While the UN is moving towards a more comprehensive approach, other states, multilateral organisations, such as the European Union (EU), and new cooperative initiatives such as the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) are starting to commit to a prevention agenda. This by focussing on countering violent extremism. The EU for instance adopted its Counter-Terrorism Strategy in November 2005. It contains a four pillar approach on 'Prevent, Protect, Pursue and Respond'- issues.² The GCTF currently focuses on five areas: countering violent extremism, the rule of law, and three regional working groups on capacity building in the Sahel

¹ GA Resolution A/RES/60/288, 8 September 2006.

² Council of the European Union, 14469/4/05 Rev, 30 November 2005.

region, the Horn of Africa and South-East Asia.³ In the areas of preventing violent radicalisation and the development of counter-narratives, some particularly commendable efforts have been made. Currently, different research projects are conducted, for example, on the importance of rehabilitation and reintegration of former violent extremists into society.⁴

Importantly, several states and multilateral organisations have also recognised the important role that civil society actors⁵ can play in dealing with conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, and thus in preventing and countering violent extremism. The role of civil society was stressed in several GA Resolutions relating to the Global Strategy. Resolution 60/288 on adopting the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy stated the ambition ‘[t]o further encourage non-governmental organizations and civil society to engage, as appropriate, on how to enhance efforts to implement the Strategy’. In resolutions adopted at the 2008 and 2010 reviews of the Global Strategy, similar references were included, with added references to the interaction with Member States and the UN System.⁶ Though it must be recognized, that other UN resolutions on countering terrorism in general or more specifically on the protection of human rights while countering terrorism, do not refer to the importance of cooperating with civil society nor recognise the importance of civil society actors in countering terrorism.

In addition to the GA, the SC has begun to reference civil society in various resolutions as well as engaging them in practice through the SC’s Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED). CTED, for instance, invited civil society organisations to participate in the regional implementation workshops of resolution 1624, as was the case in November/December 2011 in Nairobi,⁷ as well as in July 2012 in Rabat.⁸ The preamble of SC Resolution 1963 (2010) also mentions ‘[r]ecognizing the importance of the support of local communities, private sector, civil society and media for increasing awareness about the threats of terrorism and more effectively tackling them’, as well as in paragraph 7 of the same resolution ‘[e]ncourages CTED to interact, as appropriate and in consultation with the [SC Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)] and relevant member States, with civil society and other relevant non-government actors in the context of its efforts to support the CTC’s efforts to monitor the implementation of resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1624 (2005)’. Additionally, the Global Survey on the Implementation by Member States of SC Resolution 1624 (2005),⁹ in its assessments of state practices refers to many types of engagement and cooperation between states and civil society.

In his latest discussion paper, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Mr. Gilles de Kerchove also stressed the importance of cooperation with civil society as a key factor when implementing effective strategies.¹⁰

These are promising first steps for deepening engagement with civil society organisations, after years of policies and adopted measures that often resulted in the opposite effect, and which, in many cases, even diminished the political space that civil society organisations could operate in. Several studies have shown how counter-terrorism measures and policies resulted in a reduced role for civil society in areas such as human rights,

³ See the GCTF website: <http://www.thegctf.org>.

⁴ See for instance the leading work of ICCT together with the UN’s Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute on drafting the [Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders](#), which was adopted during the Ministerial Meeting of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) on 7-8 June 2012 in Istanbul by the 30 GCTF Member States, see <http://www.icct.nl/news/gctf-adopts-rome-memorandum-on-good-practices-for-rehabilitation-and-reintegration-of-violent-extremist-offenders>, last visited on 21 August 2012.

⁵ There is no universal definition of civil society actors. Yet, for the purpose of this paper I borrow the definition used by CIVICUS, which defines civil society as “the arena outside the family, state and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests”.

⁶ GA Resolutions 62/272 and 64/279.

⁷ See the report of this meeting: http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/news/2011-12-09_nairobi.html.

⁸ See the report of this meeting: http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/news/2012-07-23_rabat.html.

⁹ UN Doc S/Docs/2012/16.

¹⁰ The EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy – Discussion Paper, 9990/12, 23 May 2012, pp. 9, 12 and 13. <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/12/st09/st09990.en12.pdf>.

sustainable development and conflict transformation.¹¹ Civil society was perceived as a risk factor or a threat to governments. Freedom House, a non-governmental monitoring organisation, even reported an alarming erosion of global political freedom in its 2010 annual survey. It noted “intensified repression against human rights defenders and civic activists” and reported declines in political freedom in 40 countries representing 20 percent of the world’s total polities. The trend even showed a further decline in the 2011 report.¹²

The following section will elaborate on the reduced space for civil society organisations. It will be followed by an examination of the added value that civil society organisations can have if allowed to contribute and engage with other actors on preventing and countering violent extremism. Next, the engagement strategy that has been developed by the recently established Civil Society Network on Human Security to liaise with the UN and the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy will be discussed. Other engagement activities with regional organisations or other UN entities, such as CTED, fall outside the scope of this paper. To conclude, the paper will list several recommendations for improved engagement with civil society organisations in the area of preventing and countering violent extremism.

2. Political space: oxygen for civil society organisations

As a result of 9/11 and the quick adoption of SC Resolution 1373 (2001), ordering all UN member states to take concrete steps in combating terrorism without actually defining the term, member states have adopted a lot of measures that were labelled as ‘counter-terrorism measures’. Although the intention was commendable, ostensibly to protect innocent civilians and to protect the state structures against terrorist acts, the resulting policies had, in many cases, negative impacts on fundamental freedoms and human rights. On the premise that such measures were necessary to ensure security, many governments have curtailed political freedoms and imposed restrictive measures against human rights defenders and civil society activists in various countries.¹³ This is for instance the case in Kenya, where legislation designed to prevent support for terrorism has contributed to a climate of suspicion against civil society actors, especially Muslim charities.¹⁴ Furthermore it seems a securitisation of other policy areas, such as development, has taken place.¹⁵ The climate of fear that existed – in some cases exacerbated by politicians, shocked after 9/11¹⁶ – has played a large role in shaping policies, in which it seemed acceptable to reduce personal privacy, lower fair trial standards, broaden government powers for surveillance and prosecution purposes, restrict freedom of speech, restrict free movement of people, and reduce the political space in which civil society actors operate. Clearly, some governments took advantage of the ‘counter-terrorism’ label, which was often not further defined, to deal with political opponents and those who publicly criticised government policies. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like Amnesty International and

¹¹ David Cortright and others, *Friend not Foe; Opening Spaces for Civil Society Engagement to Prevent Violent Extremism*, A report to Cordaid from the Fourth Freedom Forum and the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame (hereafter Friend not Foe report), 2nd Edition, May 2011, http://www.fourthfreedomforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Friend-not-Foe_Fnl_May.pdf, last visited on 21 August 2012, also published as: David Cortright and others, ‘Friend not Foe: The Role of Civil Society in Preventing Violent Extremism’, in: *Notre Dame Journal of International & Comparative Law*, Volume 2, number, 2012, pp. 238-256; Mandeep Tiwana and Netsanet Belay, *Civil Society: The Clampdown is Real*, Civicus, Global Trends 2009-2010, December 2010, https://www.civicus.org/content/CIVICUS-Global_trends_in_Civil_Society_Space_2009-2010.pdf, last visited on 21 August 2012.

¹² Friend not Foe report, *op cit.*, p. 5; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2010: Global Erosion of Freedom*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2010>, last visited on 21 August 2012; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2011: The Authoritarian Challenge to Democracy*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2011>, last visited on 21 August 2012.

¹³ Friend not Foe report, *op cit.*, p. ix.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. ix-x.

¹⁶ Frank Furedi, *Invitation to Terrorism: The Expanding Empire of the Unknown*, London: Continuum Press, 2007, pp. 13, 25, 73 and 118.

Human Rights Watch have published several reports providing evidence of this phenomenon.¹⁷ Amnesty, for instance, points to the situation in China, where the global war against terrorism has been used by the authorities to legitimize actions against political opposition, as actions against separatist, terrorists or religious extremists from the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

Often, the consequences of counter-terrorism measures adopted were never fully thought out. Recent reports from NGOs like Civicus and Cordaid have shown how both the intended and unintended consequences have resulted in a 'clamp down' on civil society, because the possibilities of citizens and civil society organisations to express criticism with regard to government policies, and in that sense contribute to a democratic process of dialogue have been diminished.¹⁸ Sometimes the measures adopted have a legitimate goal, but due to the lack of context-specific application, evaluation mechanisms or redress possibilities, their impact can have seriously counterproductive effects. This is the case, for instance, with measures against the financing of terrorism. In itself this is a positive initiative, but in its application it can have unintended negative implications for civil society groups and charities seeking to overcome suppression.¹⁹

In many countries, the role of the military in countering terrorism has been very prominent. US policies overseas, although labelled differently, still remain heavily militarised. Moreover, many states use counter-insurgency tactics to counter rebel movements and it can be seriously questioned whether these policies are effective. The RAND Corporation in their 2008 study on 'How terrorist groups end'²⁰ shows that only 4 % of the terrorist groups can be considered successful in attaining their goals, and therefore stop their violent actions. In most cases however, terrorism is stopped through policing (40 %) and by political processes (43 %) while only 7 % of terrorism is stopped by military operations.

Furthermore, many civil society organisations that work on human rights, sustainable development and conflict transformation have, on several occasions, been erroneously labelled extremists and terrorist organisations themselves and have been confronted with serious constraints on their ability to operate.²¹ This is, for instance the case in Manipur, where civil society organisations who are attempting to resolve political disputes, as well as advocates of human rights and self-determination, have been labelled terrorists or accused of collusion with armed nationalists.²² Their financial resources may also become depleted, because donors have become risk averse, either because of fear of prosecution or increased scrutiny about the accountability of their activities.²³ Measures such as 'blacklisting' alleged terrorist organisations and terrorist individuals, the Special Recommendation VIII against the Financing of Terrorism issued by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), or the US Material Support Act, have had this direct or indirect effect. The first measure is usually based on some form of intelligence or involvement of particular and identifiable organisations or individuals in terrorist activities, although it is not transparent and thus not verifiable. The latter two measures however claim, without any supportive evidence, that non-governmental organisations are more vulnerable to terrorist infiltration and manipulation, and are thus completely arbitrary. This sweeping claim has been refuted, based on a research conducted in relation to 1.8 million charitable organisations within the US, which showed that only eight US charities were designated by the US Treasury Department for alleged terrorist financing, of which only four had

¹⁷ See for instance: Amnesty International, *The backlash: Human Rights at risk throughout the World*, 4 October 2001, <http://www.globalissues.org/article/263/amnesty-international-human-rights-backlash>; Human Rights Watch, *Opportunism in the Face of Tragedy; Repression in the name of anti-terrorism*, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/september11/opportunismwatch.htm>.

¹⁸ Tiwana and Belay, *op cit*; Friend not Foe report, *op cit.*, pp. 238-256.

¹⁹ Friend not Foe report, *op cit.*, p. 4.

²⁰ Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida*, Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2008, pp. xiii-xiv, 42-43.

²¹ Tiwana and Belay, *op cit.*, p. 9.

²² Friend not Foe report, *op cit.*, p. 14.

²³ Friend not Foe report, *op cit.*, pp. 8-9, 20-21.

connections to al Qaeda.²⁴ Additionally, a study commissioned by Cordaid on the Special Recommendation VIII of the FATF shows that the ‘top-down’ and overly broad approach of the FATF to regulate civil society in the name of countering terrorism has a contradictory effect on the positive role that many civil society organisations can play in countering violent extremism. This is the result of regulation that, in its current form, stimulates governments to introduce onerous rules and regulation, subject civil society organisations to excessive state surveillance, and interfere in or restrict the activities of civil society actors.²⁵

Evidently, these developments have resulted in limited political space in which civil society organisations operate. In some regions, this even meant that a vacuum emerged between the government and citizens; a vacuum where civil society organisations could no longer operate legally.

3. Civil society’s role in countering violent extremism

‘Preventing terror attacks requires not only improved security but better efforts to address the underlying conditions that give rise to violent extremism. Resolving conflicts, ending foreign occupations, overcoming oppression, eradicating poverty, supporting sustainable development, empowering the marginalized, defending human rights, promoting good governance- all are vital to the struggle against terrorism, yet addressing these challenges is made more difficult by repressive counterterrorism policies.’²⁶

This citation shows the irony of the situation, since these are the kinds of activities that address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. The kinds of activities developed by civil society organisations that contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism, may not be recognised as such at first. In most cases, civil society even prefers to distance itself from the security prone agenda run by governments. Studies into violent radicalisation processes and effective counter-radicalisation policies, however, show that there is more to countering violent extremism than a hard core security approach. These same studies into the process of radicalisation also explain what causes this process. A key element is the understanding that the process of radicalisation is an individual and unique one, and hence different for each person. Different aspects and different events that occur in a different order, and thus create a different mix of root causes and trigger events could be the recipe for a particular individual’s radicalisation process towards violent extremism. Factors that play a role could be their personal character (psychological characteristics, personal experiences), societal character (social identification, social interaction and group processes, relative deprivation) or a political, economical, cultural or religious character (macro level).²⁷ For instance, economic deprivation could play a big role in making young people vulnerable for recruitment, whereas, on the other hand it could only play a role as part of the narrative used to legitimise violent extremist acts in the end stage of the process. The same is true for religious motivations.

²⁴ Friend not Foe report, *op cit.*, p. 20.

²⁵ Ben Hayes, *Counter-Terrorism, ‘Policy Laundering’ and the FATF: Legalising Surveillance, Regulating Civil Society*, Transnational Institute/Statewatch, 2012, p. 36.

²⁶ Friend not Foe report, *op cit.*, pg. 1

²⁷ Tinka Veldhuis and Jørgen Staun, *Islamist Radicalisation; A Root Cause Model*, Clingendael Security Paper no. 12, 2009, pp. 21-27.

Good practices of civil society engagement, some examples:

(source: Civil Society Network for Human Security)

- Example I: The Uganda Somalis Community is an initiative of the large Somali business community in Uganda. They started as a response to the political unrest in Uganda and the more negative attitude of Ugandans towards the Somali population, as a result of the situation in Somalia. This civil society organisation has set up programmes that provide community outreach, communication and media strategies in order to engage with the Somalis community as well as with the local authorities and to invest in a positive public campaign on the importance of the Somali business community. Their self-standing contribution to community policing, thus without compromising the otherwise legitimate goals of the local authorities by directly affiliating themselves with a corrupt police, is a good example of a civil society initiative that tunes into local grievances and is looking for context-specific solutions. They also provide language courses. These initiatives have proven to be important steps in preventing radicalisation in Uganda as a result of societal and political exclusion.
- Example II: The Jesuit clergy in Colombia benefit from their pastoral engagement with extremist groups, which is not prohibited by law, to continue a dialogue on non-violent solutions to longstanding conflicts. They work from a conflict transformation approach whereby societal and political solutions to violence are communicated and negotiated with all stakeholders involved. Their conflict prevention and peace building work in the oil-rich department of Magdalena Medio has led to community-supported initiatives of local policing to protect villages and oil companies premises from intimidation and attacks by terrorist groups, insurgents and paramilitaries. This work has been supported by, among others, the EU and Cordaid, and has gained national and international recognition.
- Example III: Indonesia has been hit more than most countries by serious and well-organised terrorist actions. In response, main faith-based civil society organisations such as Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, in collaboration with smaller professional human rights organisations, women and other civil groups have strengthened a non-violent narrative on the premises of Islam and the conditions of the Indonesian nation, which has been disseminated widely through existing networks based in mosques, schools, hospitals, savings collectives and other forms of service delivery. Civil society organisations have collaborated effectively with the Indonesian government in an approach which has led to curtailing and changing the environment for violent extremism, supporting a greatly reduced level of terrorist attacks in the country.
- Example IV: The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is a leading Regional network of Peacebuilding organisations that has succeeded in establishing strong national networks in every Member State of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). WANEP places special focus on collaborative approaches to conflict prevention, and peacebuilding, working with diverse actors from civil society, governments, and intergovernmental bodies. In 2002, WANEP entered into a partnership with ECOWAS for the implementation of a regional early warning and response system (ECOWARN). Through this partnership West African civil society organisations are effectively contributing to Track I responses to conflicts and policy debates in the region.

Given the variety of factors that could influence these processes of radicalisation, it is clear that civil society organisations working in areas of development, women's rights, conflict transformation, governance building, freedom of the internet, interfaith dialogue, human rights, and providing other forms of dialogue platforms, all contribute in some way in addressing conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism (see textbox above). Such organisations could act locally, in a specific neighbourhood for instance, or on the national or even international level, while still being connected with grassroots movements that give voice to the grievances in society. In doing so, these organisations contribute to:

- Generating the social basis for democracy;
- Promoting political accountability;
- Producing trust, reciprocity and networks;
- Creating and promoting alternatives; and
- Supporting the rights of citizens and the concept of citizenship.²⁸

Civil society organisations can work as facilitators between the population and government authorities when allowed a seat at the table. Since 'countering terrorism' as such is not on their agenda, it is thus important to be careful in labelling the agenda for dialogue as such. It would be much more effective to search for a common language to frame the agenda, such as would be the case by setting the agenda in relation to 'human security'. This would allow civil society to act as a credible messenger in developing and delivering counter-narratives, for which they are, in many cases, better positioned than government authorities.

4. Building a bridge: Engagement efforts with the UN

The more intensive coordination of activities within the UN, as well as the broadening of the scope of themes deemed relevant in countering terrorism are very necessary, and seem to be getting increased support from Member States through the financial sponsoring of programmes as well as the implementation of preventive policies. Nevertheless, the question remains whether the implementation as well as the drafting of these policies live up to their potential effectiveness.

As argued above, civil society organisations play a crucial role in preventing and countering violent extremism in numerous ways – by working on development programs, through their work in conflict transformation, in providing a platform to raise political grievances and to facilitate dialogue, or through their work in empowering victims and survivors of terrorism. They can function within a single neighbourhood, on a national or regional level, or even on an international level either on their own account or through networks of like-minded organisations. Diversity is a key characteristic of the civil society community and although this may sometimes be a complicating factor in cooperation, it is also its strength. With civil society organisations it is not about representation, but about the participation of as many diverse voices as possible. Here lies their value as a credible messenger of counter-narratives and in the role they can play in countering violent extremism by doing what they do best: namely using the political space for the kinds of activities for which they are mandated.

It is for these reasons that it is important to build a bridge between civil society organisations, national governments and international actors in order to facilitate ways to exchange experiences and strategise together through engagement and a search for a common language. For years, civil society has been excluded from deliberations taking place at the UN level when it comes to hard core security issues, such as terrorism. This was partly the result of their own choosing. Counter-terrorism is not, after all, top of the agenda of civil society organisations, which is considered a government responsibility. By taking up issues such as counter-terrorism, civil

²⁸ Brian Pratt, *Global Changes and Civil Society*, Background paper for 'Civil Society at a new frontier': INTRAC Conference, December 2011, pp. 6-7.

society organisations might risk losing their legitimacy towards their constituency. And although the opening towards the participation of civil society in the implementation of the Global Strategy has been created, civil society groups have also expressed concern about linking development policies to security agendas and military strategies.²⁹ Furthermore, as a result of their diversity and the different themes that these organisations are working on, it seems difficult to establish a platform that would be able to ‘represent’ the different voices that need to be heard. This is underscored by the fact that organising civil society thematically does not seem to work, except for perhaps the human rights community and organisations working on the role of women in conflict situations. Only through these cooperation initiatives have civil society organisations so far been able to acquire a chair at the table in order to observe or contribute to the debates on specific UN agendas.

On the other hand, civil society organisations were not invited by UN entities because of Member States’ reluctance to include civil society into the debate and the implementation of the Global Strategy. The main arguments brought forward to explain this exclusion related to the question of representation, as well as the question ‘how civil’ the civil society organisations are. The common concern with regard to civil society organisations and apparently a prerequisite for any form of cooperation, has been whether it can be absolutely certain that they do not maintain any contacts with individuals or organisations that have been labelled as terrorist.

4.1 Civil society engagement with the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Notwithstanding these concerns, in 2010, perhaps triggered by the developments during the Arab Spring, a civil society panel was invited to take part in a side event organised by the CTITF during the 2nd Review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. During this panel, issues such as diversity, representation and engagement versus implementation were discussed.³⁰ The inclusion of the panel can be seen as evidence of the careful opening offered to civil society to participate in the counter-terrorism debate. This is also in line with the recommendations made by the Centre on Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation which argued, in a report submitted to the GA, for more civil society involvement in the implementation of the UN Global Strategy, and even suggested to set up a Civil Society Advisory Committee to the Task Force.³¹

This event also marked the beginning of a networking exercise with the aim of engaging civil society organisations working on a variety of themes that would all relate to some extent to the overarching theme of human security. These civil society organisations, in many cases, functioned in a broad network of organisations based on all continents. Initially, the Dutch organization Cordaid took the lead in these activities, to be supported along the way by the Global Partnership of Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), the Centre on Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation, the Kroc Institute and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) – The Hague. Meanwhile, relations were built with different UN entities working on issues of counter-terrorism, such as CTED, al Qaeda / Taliban Sanctions Committee, UNDP, Alliance for Civilization, CTITF, UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICRI, and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism, as well as with Member States willing to support the initiative.

These activities resulted in a three-day event organised in New York in October 2011. More than 40 participants from five continents attended, representing civil society organisations across a range of issues, including women’s rights, conflict prevention and peace building, development, security sector reform, internet

²⁹ Friend not Foe report, *op cit.*, p. 7.

³⁰ Bibi van Ginkel, Lia van Broekhoven and Fulco van Deventer, *The role of civil society in implementing the Global UN Counter Terrorism Strategy*, Discussion paper on the occasion of the CTITF Office Side-Event during the Second Review of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, 7-9 September 2010, http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2010/20100909_cscp_paper_ginkel.pdf.

³¹ James Cockayne, Alistair Millar, and Jason Ipe, *An Opportunity for Renewal: Revitalizing the United Nations counterterrorism program*, Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, September 2010, p. 34, http://www.globalct.org/images/content/pdf/reports/Opportunity_for_Renewal_Final.pdf.

freedom, and human security. During the conference, participants engaged with UN officials from CTITF, CTED, the al Qaeda / Taliban Sanctions Committee and the Alliance for Civilizations. The main themes of the event focussed on the role of civil society in the implementation of an effective and comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy, which respects human rights and the political space of civil society, and to start to build a dialogue with the UN and Member States. More specifically, the issues and dilemmas discussed dealt with the reframing of the security debate into a human security debate, the risk of misuse of policies and negative consequences for civil society organisations because of a lack of a definition of terrorism, and the dilemma for civil society to maintain independence and integrity while engaging with government and international organisations on agendas countering violent extremism. Some further thematic issues were discussed, such as the role of victims of terrorism and counter-terrorism measures, women's inclusion, conflict prevention and peace-building, security sector reform, human rights, monitoring and evaluating counter-terrorism measures, internet freedom, and protecting local civil society actors.

4.2 The Civil Society Network for Human Security and the way forward

The civil society organisations that have so far participated in the dialogue amongst the network participants, have now organised themselves into the Civil Society Network on Human Security.³² This network is a global, collaborative, civil society platform working towards more effective and inclusive measures for countering violent extremism, through engagement with policy makers, state actors and interregional bodies. It offers a strong and dynamic network for connecting transnational organisations and states with local civil society organisations, in order to bring together actors from different fields facing the same issues, and to provide the space and opportunity for civil society actors to speak out, exchange sensitive data, share experiences, and convene on these issues in order to strengthen and support their work.. One of the concrete outcomes of this collaboration is a public website and a closed online community.

The website contains material that is accessible for a general public, for state and interstate bodies and others who are professionally involved in security and counter-terrorism matters as well as issues of human rights, conflict resolution and peace-building. The closed section of the online platform can be accessed by members only. It offers human rights activists, peace builders and development workers a well-secured space for real time discussion and exchange and storage of documents (such as reports, videos and photographic material).

In June 2012, the 3rd Review of the UN Global Strategy took place. During the last review in 2010, some careful attention was paid to the role of civil society with regard to the implementation of the Strategy. It would thus make sense, after the series of activities developed by civil society, to embrace stronger language in the resolution vis-à-vis the role of civil society. The Civil Society Network for Human Security has been lobbying for several amendments to the text of the previous GA Resolutions, in order to include language that is more susceptible to the role of civil society. The resolution adopted at the Review,³³ however, failed to mirror the results of the improved communication between civil society organisations and different UN organs achieved over the last years, and merely echoed the resolutions of previous years. Efforts thus continue to ensure that a stronger engagement between the UN and civil society on countering violent extremism is realised, both on paper and in practice.

Throughout the year, the Network also organised several regional meetings with local civil society organisations, government officials and regional organisations on the issue of countering violent extremism. The outcomes of these meetings fed into a day-long symposium organised in New York in the week of the 2012 Review.³⁴

³² See <http://www.humansecuritynetwork.net>.

³³ GA Resolution 66/282, 29 June 2012.

³⁴ The report of the symposium will be available on the Network's website shortly: <http://www.humansecuritynetwork.net>.

Through the Civil Society Network for Human Security, civil society organisations are clearly reaching out to regions and local partners to continue building their network and knowledge to connect and to engage with the UN and other global actors. The ‘Resolution 1624 implementation workshops’ organised by CTED in different regions – the latest co-organised in Rabat with ICCT – The Hague – offer a perfect setting to bring this into practice. These opportunities, as well as the meetings organised by the Network itself, will demonstrate its usefulness and hopefully encourage international organisations and Member States to cooperate and engage with it. Such collaboration would greatly bolster the shared aims of providing human security in order to counter violent extremism as well as state-sponsored violence.

4. Conclusions and Policy recommendations

The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was adopted in 2006 to enhance the effectiveness of counter-terrorism policies through better cooperation by different UN entities and more coherent policy planning including respect for human rights, and prevention measures that deal with conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. Civil society organisations can function ‘as the collective conscience of the international community’, as a CTITF representative argued during the earlier-mentioned three-day event in New York in October 2011. He also added that ‘[u]ntil civil society is engaged in counter-terrorism measures, there will be a gaping hole.’ Enhancing the legitimacy of counter-terrorism policies through civil society participation will thus likely also enhance their effectiveness. In this light it is important to be mindful of some important conclusions and recommendations that follow from recent practice and that have been discussed in this paper.

Advantages of civil society involvement

- Many civil society organisations work on issues such as conflict transformation, peace-building, good governance issues, development, political participation, interfaith dialogue, youth programmes, human rights, victim’s rights, women’s rights, and the freedom of the internet. These issues provide answers to grievances in society which could otherwise potentially develop into radicalisation or even violent extremism. In this respect, civil society organisations contribute to countering conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, by offering ingredients that provide human security.
- Civil society organisations are not about representation, but about participation and channelling the different voices within society. They can create platforms of dialogue, and provide for the inclusiveness needed in society, as an answer to the exclusion that might lead to violent radicalisation.
- Civil society organisations are often well-rooted in local communities, and are thus tuned into grievances that may be present within society, which enables them to provide context-specific responses, and not the ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions that may be formulated on an international or governmental level. Civil society organisations can function as facilitators between governments and citizens, and are often perceived as a more credible messenger of alternative narratives that avoid or counter radicalisation.

Policy recommendations

- Policymakers within governments and international organisations would be well-advised to actively engage with civil society organisations by inviting them to participate in the debate on the regional challenges and possible solutions in all aspects of preventing and countering violent extremism.
- Policymakers within governments and international organisations should also be invited to share their early warning signals on grievances within society. Within the UN, such engagement could be organised through the establishment of a Civil Society Advisory Committee.

- When creating the Civil Society Advisory Committee with the purpose of contributing to the debate within the UN on the implementation of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, civil society organisations should be involved in this process in order to guarantee the necessary legitimacy.
- GA Resolutions to be adopted during future Reviews of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy should include language on the engagement and cooperation with civil society, recognising that development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and recognising that civil society plays a vital role in dealing with conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and functions as the collective conscience of the international community.
- Policymakers are advised to decide which actor is best suited for specific activities that follow from a comprehensive strategy. This choice may result in governments making conscious decisions not to implement policy themselves but leave it to others, who will be perceived as more credible actors.
- Engagement or cooperation with civil society organisations on preventing and countering violent extremism means that government authorities and civil society organisations should learn to understand and respect the role played by different stakeholders, while respecting the principles of human rights and the rule of law. It will therefore be necessary to agree upon a common language based on shared values.
- More particularly, in engaging with civil society, it is necessary to respect the political space of civil society organisations, while at the same time seeking to avoid compromising their independence and potentially controlling their agendas. This is the only way, that civil society organisations can guarantee their independence and credibility.
- Governments and international organisations should evaluate and amend their policies in order to avoid counterproductive effects of counter-terrorism measures on the political space of civil society actors.
- In assuring political freedom and protecting the operational space of civil society, the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law³⁵ has derived from UN conventions, the following rights, which should be adhered to and respected:
 - The right to associate and form organisations;
 - The right to operate without unwanted state interference;
 - The right to free expression;
 - The right to communicate and cooperate freely internally and externally;
 - The right to seek and secure resources; and
 - The right to have these freedoms protected by the state.

³⁵ International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law and World Movement for Democracy Secretariat at the National Endowment for Democracy, *Defending Civil Society Report*, Second edition, June 2012.

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