



# **COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM:**

**EWI'S**

**WORLDWIDE ACTION PLATFORM**

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*(\*This document will be revised as EWI's work plans for countering violent extremism are extended or revised)*

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## INTRODUCTION

The word 'extremism', like 'terrorism', is a loaded one. Famous leaders respected around the world have been proud to be called extremists for their cause, whether it be the fight for liberty, civil rights or religious freedom. Yet in the world today, 'extremism' is used by many to describe the threat from exclusivist, messianic or totalitarian movements who use violence to intimidate, maim and kill. It is this violent extremism – regardless of the cause that it claims to defend – that this document addresses.

The UN General Assembly on 6 March 1995 passed a resolution (49/188) that condemned 'all instances of hatred, intolerance and acts of violence, intimidation and coercion motivated by religious extremism'. It urged 'States, in conformity with international standards of human rights, to take ... all appropriate measures to combat hatred, intolerance and acts of violence, intimidation and coercion motivated by religious extremism'.

State leaders from around the world have decried the threat from extremism. For example, India's Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, has observed that 'India stands firmly against all forms of extremism'. On 8 December 2005, the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) issued an action plan calling on its members to 'Condemn extremism in all its forms and manifestations, as it contradicts Islamic and human values'. There are many other examples of political leadership against violent extremism in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas and Oceania that could be cited.

This short document outlines the plan for EWI's Worldwide Action Platform for countering violent extremism which is intended to supplement and breathe new life into existing international measures.

The document is a call to action and provides signposts. It is not a detailed blueprint of next steps in this or that community, country or region. It does not attempt to define the problem. Readers should look elsewhere for that. Since 2006, EWI has been involved in a series of meetings in a number of countries to understand the nature of the problem. The Institute has commissioned a number of policy research reports and short papers. It has in that way joined its efforts to many more substantial undertakings around the world in research, analysis and policy advocacy on violent extremism over a much longer period.

There have been many ideas and plans proffered to address the threat from violent extremism. The UN General Assembly, in its Resolution 188 of 1995

that is mentioned above, recognized that 'legislation alone is not enough'. India's Prime Minister Singh observed that we need 'Lasting solutions to problems, be they political, economic or social' and that this will 'require understanding and sympathy on the part of all sides'. The OIC formula for combating extremism 'called on States to address its political, economic, social, and cultural root-causes, through development programs and resolution of long-standing conflicts, which are to be faced with rationality, persuasion, and good counsel'.

These broad judgments are strongly supported by EWI. Our research and analysis, like our discussions with leaders from around the world on how to counter violent extremism, convince us of the need for non-state actors to become far more vigorously engaged. We also see the need to establish a global framework for action that does not yet exist. This plan for EWI's Worldwide Action Platform is our contribution to that. We will work with leaders from all sectors – public and private, religious and secular – to develop and implement the points in this plan.

## **ESTABLISH A WORLDWIDE ACTION PLATFORM**

EWI's existing global network of leaders and specialists strongly committed to and engaged in countering violent extremism includes over 100 people from the North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The composition of the network represents diversity of knowledge, nationality, ideology, politics, professions (businesses, NGOs, government, military), and culture (East and West). On the basis of our existing network, EWI will work with other community leaders, NGOs and governments from around the world to build a Worldwide Action Platform for countering violent extremism. Its single purpose will be to provide a new, enduring and ever-strengthening position from which people committed to pluralism anywhere can take effective steps to discredit or undermine violent extremists and others committed to imposing totalitarian policies.

The main activities of the platform, elaborated further below, will be:

- ❑ early warning
- ❑ policy research, soliciting policy ideas, and reporting
- ❑ network development and working groups
- ❑ advocacy.

One of the central communications tool of the Worldwide Platform will be an EWI-hosted website on which collaborators can post important reports, news and events related to combating violent extremism. This tool will be utilized to service a sub-network focused on youth and modern mass media, called the HOPE Network (Humanity Organized to Prevent Violent Extremism) as well as other aspects of cross-cutting activities outlined below. The site will have the capacity to upload, reference, store and search for text, video, and audio files related to countering extremism. EWI will commission its own research, invite contributions from interested parties, and establish thereby a progressively expanding *Monitor of Violent Extremism*. We plan to create an inventory of existing civil society projects on extremism. EWI will identify “best practices” in the field of combating extremism and put together recommendations that will help EWI as well as other civil society organizations achieve results. Additionally, our HOPE Network will engage communities as part of our overall agenda and will participate actively in platform activity.

### *Early Warning*

The fight against extremism requires international monitoring and reporting. Too often, the path to extremist forms of government or extremist policies in a just a few discrete areas of government control (such as censorship) has been one of gradual evolution, with progressively more repressive measures imposed as the majority of unwitting citizenry acquiesce in each measure. Similarly, the path from radicalized activist to violent extremist is also often a gradual one. The UN General Assembly resolution (49/188) passed on 6 March 1995 that called on states to fight all forms of religious extremism clearly depends on accurate and timely information as the basis of action. No global system of providing that information exists, though it can be gleaned from a large variety of quite disparate sources.

The Worldwide Platform and its associated website will draw on existing early warning systems, the best of which are either lacking in scope and timeliness, or in legitimacy because of their association with one particular community, country or region. Another significant weakness in existing systems is their narrow language base. There is no early warning and policy research network available in more than one or two languages. One of the best warning and monitoring systems on global extremism is that of the Anti-Defamation League, but it is not accessible in many world languages and its principal, though not exclusive focus, is protection of Jewish people. *The American Muslim*, an online ‘journal’ and much more, provides an excellent set of resources on moderate Islam and the fight against extremism globally, though it is only available in English. The main website of Amnesty International

carries four languages: English, Spanish, Arabic and French, but this span of languages (four) is uncommon for such sites. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe operates an excellent data and resource website to 'promote tolerance and non-discrimination' that is directed against extremism of all forms. It operates in English and Russian.

Effective early warning in countering violent extremism depends on easy circulation of ideas in a variety of languages appropriate to each threat and to those who might counter it.

### *Researching, Soliciting, Reporting*

Networks and action coalitions will be most effective in countering violent extremism if they are constantly challenged with fresh ideas on how to address the problem or reminded of good, old ideas of the same sort. Such groups cannot be effective in different geographic and social settings if they are not closely familiar with the latest trends and events. EWI sees its role as a thought leader in these terms. We have dramatically expanded the geographic and thematic scope of our work; at the same time as opening up our publishing formats to authors from around the world. Through this expanded work plan for 2008 and beyond, EWI seeks to position itself as a focal point for new policy research and fresh critical perspectives on the challenges of countering violent extremism. EWI seeks to deepen awareness of extremism and its root causes among policy makers around the world through publications and dialogue. In doing so, EWI will identify specific and measurable actions to combat extremism. Additionally, EWI will continue to foster cooperation among the civil society, faith-based, and public sector programs dedicated to countering violent extremism.

One of the principal aims of this effort gives EWI additional unique positioning. This is our effort to develop a long-lasting and enriching dialogue between business on the one hand and, on the other, civil society and governments, on how to counter the security threats posed by extremism. EWI is setting out to bridge the "understanding divide" between these different sectors of the community in different regions of the world. EWI invites collaborative contributions to this effort at sustained thought leadership. We cannot and would not presume to represent any sort of monopoly of ideas, but a number of our valued interlocutors in different parts of the world have requested EWI to build on its reputation as a trusted convener and as being fiercely



independent to take up the role of providing a platform for such thought leadership.

EWI would not presume to parachute into this or that community of region and aspire to mobilize local points of view about local problems. Our interest is more clearly focused on linking up local actors with their counterparts elsewhere or with likeminded people from different sectors who can provide much needed logistic support and network power, particularly through more robust exploitation of mass media and modern communications formats.

### *Network Development and Working Groups*

We will expand and formalize that network, building equal partnerships with the most prominent and effective organizations. Members of the network, provisionally titled the Coalition for Countering Violent Extremism (CCVE), will be the primary source of content for the web portal that will be hosted by EWI. This network will provide an environment -- physical and virtual -- that supports free exchanges between its members.

A cornerstone of the global effort to combat violent extremism must be international collaboration. This will best be fostered by the creation of small working groups comprised of experts from civil society and academic, as well as concerned parties from government and faith communities. By fostering the activities of such working groups, EWI and the Action Network will create a cycle of self-generating research and analysis, able to develop 'live' thinking and research on each of problem areas as they develop.

EWI will set up a working group designed to heighten awareness and popularize knowledge capacity about other histories and cultures in areas of high anticipated risk or existence of violent extremism and radicalization. This working group will be one of the key intellectual drivers of the HOPE Network and will seek to report on historical as well as current events that can lead to violent extremism as part of our early warning system. This working group will examine areas where EWI can begin to engage in countermeasures as part of its overall strategy contained herein.

EWI has already set in train a series of activities on the role of inflammatory language and hate speech, as well as the sometimes unwitting use of alienating language by political and community language. Experience in recent years has shown that phrases like the 'War on Terror' have as much power to radicalize extremists as mobilize western society against them. EWI's

'language working group' will seek to understand the developments in this area and work with other around the world monitoring hate speech and will work in close collaboration with EWI's TV News Summit paying particular attention to how media plays a role in perpetuating this language.

EWI will establish a third working group to confront the distortions of theology and religious belief, and the still underpowered (but strengthening) efforts of religious moderates to confront these elements within faith communities. During our work on violent extremism, one of the most encouraging responses from partners and friends has been the demand for an EWI-facilitated process of dialogue within religious communities between moderates, non-violent extremists, and the young people sometimes torn between the two. The working group would engage in an extremely practical, pragmatic and grassroots manner with these diverse groups and constituents and foster the process, creating the space, for them to reach understandings between themselves. This working group will comprise the core of the HOPE network and will operate on the basis of seeking out and highlighting the activities high profile individuals, be they religious leaders, scholars, artists, politicians or journalists, who have taken a stand against violent extremism and overall forms of global violence as well as engage in dialogue and trust-building activities as described above.

## *Advocacy*

EWI's Policy Research Report, *Countering Violent Extremism: Lessons from the Abrahamic Faiths*, demonstrated the importance of contesting ideas and propaganda of extremist groups. EWI will undertake and track global efforts in advocacy of this kind, relying in large part on the extended network mentioned above. We will appoint a new senior staff post in our own organization dedicated

## **FOSTER LOCAL LEADERS**

Building on its traditional role of developing young leaders, EWI will promote a 'Worldwide Leadership Collaborative' of young leaders in the major regions of the world who have sought to position themselves at the head of the fight against violent extremism but who lack the global networks they need to support that effort. This group will complement but be separate from EWI's International Action Network for Countering Violent Extremism in that EWI will pay considerable attention to fostering and supporting this 'global collaborative', both in the substantive work of countering extremism but also in

providing development and learning opportunities for them. This group will contribute to the intellectual leadership of the Action Network but also operate as an advisory board for work in the field. This group will help to identify new members of the Action Network and create opportunities for discussion and advocacy in their home regions. They will serve as ready interlocutors between their home regions and like-minded people in other parts of the world. This group will operate as a virtual “brain-trust” for the global effort against violent extremism. As part of this effort, EWI will also exploit its new HOPE Network by identifying and rewarding high profile local leaders for taking a stand against extremism in their communities.

The advantages to collaborating with experts outside EWI are obvious: a wider range of information and experience can refine our activities and help define our remit in this area. In particular, this group can help to channel global effort where it is most needed, since the threat of violent extremism is quite diffuse. There is a risk that scarce resources might be directed where the threat is weaker. By collaborating with a group of young leaders, EWI will multiply its intellectual assets and create the necessary preconditions for success.

## **CREATE AN EMINENT PERSONS GROUP?**

The success of the International Action Network against Small Arms in mobilizing global, regional and local responses to reduce the threat from that sources has been due in part to the involvement of an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) dedicated to that purpose. The small arms EPG comprised recognized statesmen and women, including as original co-chairs former Prime Minister of France, Michel Rocard, and Malian President, Alpha Oumar Konare. Other members have included: Salim Ahmed Salim, the former secretary-general of the Organization of African Unity, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), former British Foreign Minister David Owen, former Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, former Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, Swedish diplomat Rolf Ekeus, and Russian Gen. M.T. Kalashnikov. It also has included ambassadors from Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and Russia.

Drawing on the example of the small arms campaign, and others, EWI is in the process of forming a group of high level and well-respected leaders to be the face of a global effort against violent extremism. EWI will however look for this group to be of a different character from most similar EPGs. EWI will work with this group on a more regular and active basis than even the most prominent of previous Eminent Persons Groups to date. The EWI leadership group assembled to counter violent extremism will consist of authors, theologians,

academics, media leaders, business leaders and politicians and government officials who are highly recognizable and who will be effective voices in the process. This group will serve to raise the profile of the global effort against violent extremism through a variety of media outlets and public activities. This will enable EWI to cultivate positive exposure to a broad audience and give the Worldwide Action Network additional and much needed credibility.

## **BUILD A WORLDWIDE COALITION OF MEDIA LEADERS**

In July 2007, EWI convened in Dubai a meeting of senior representatives of news organizations to discuss the impact of TV violence on the rise of extremism. The group outlined an agenda for further research and action that EWI will continue to support. One of the examples cited at the meeting included the decision by Al Arabiya in 2004 not show tapes of beheading and other violent propaganda. Al Jazeera then followed this lead. The moral leadership and social responsibility shown by these two channels did not stop Internet websites from uploading these materials, and “hundreds of thousands” of people still watched them online. But nevertheless the Dubai meeting concluded that the action sends a strong message that when major reputable news organizations such as Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera voluntarily draw an ethical boundary, it can have important positive effects reducing the appeal of inflammatory material.

EWI has also engaged with other media leaders and received strong expressions of support for mobilizing a global action coalition of media owners, media executives, leading journalists, and journalism schools. EWI will convene a series of East-West “Journalism Summits” with a view to catalyzing a major shift in how the media covers violent extremism. Although this project is in its early stages, it has the potential to become a primary avenue by which the larger global public becomes aware of our work. In addition, one of the potential outcomes of the Journalism Summit is a documentary that will raise these issues in the form of video broadcast globally. Additionally, EWI will organize seminars at journalism schools in which participants will share its research findings and recommendations on the role of mass media in countering violent extremism.

## COMPETE ON THE BATTLE FRONTS OF INFLUENCE

Since the advent of television, governments, organizations, individuals and mainstream media have used the video format to transfer knowledge and ideas around the globe. The effectiveness of video presentation increases and the audience grows as technology becomes more sophisticated. In the mainstream media, video power is used primarily for news and entertainment but when utilized for political purposes, it can be used to provide prescriptive material that can shape opinions. Additionally, video power has the ability to mobilize large numbers of people, create and enlarge networks, and challenge the norms of society. Attempts to shape opinions and expand networks by the forces of moderation and cooperation are positive while similar attempts by extremists yield more sinister results.

To counter violent extremism, political forces must compete on the 'battle fronts' of influence represented by modern communications formats such as video transmitted globally via the internet. Additionally, it has been noted that the media consistently argues that not enough people are taking a stand against extremism in their own communities while not allowing enough coverage for those who do. EWI's HOPE Network will engage in providing media coverage through a number of awards and honorariums to highlight this important influence.

EWI will publish in coming weeks a policy paper to elaborate the modalities of competing with the ideology of violent extremists through the medium of video, especially through popular internet formats such as Youtube or GoogleVideo. A wealth of video material useful in the fight against violent extremism through these and other mechanisms, but it has not been brought together in any systematic way. EWI will set in train a process of global awareness raising of the power of the informal video productions of extremist individuals and groups. At the same time it will help mobilize the collection and cataloguing of available video material that speaks against or documents objectively the activities of violent extremists.

Additionally, EWI is planning its own video power initiatives in the form of short films and clips to highlight and identify key policy issues and responses. EWI is actively investigating the prospect, subject to funding, of doing longer more comprehensive films in documentary format of similar reach and influence as the Gore documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*.

## **PROMOTE A WORLDWIDE NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK**

The sources of violent extremism are as diverse as they are powerful. The radicalization on which violent extremists depend to widen their support base is usually the result of concrete circumstances in the economic or political lives of people. These are not susceptible to rapid change, nor to the interventions of thought leaders not directly engaged in local politics. The circumstances fuelling extremism can only be addressed through sustained political commitment to do so by all of those actors with high political influence in a particular place and time.

It is for this reason that states need to follow the obligation they willingly took on themselves in the UN General Assembly Resolution cited above. They must elevate the political struggle against violent extremism to a much higher priority in their policies. States must do more to undermine the political and social networks of violent extremists and nullify their support.

In a globalized world, the social contract that will determine the course of violent extremist movements is no longer the preserve of any single state or even of states alone. Thus, states and community leaders must work to create a new global social contract that will foster more distinctly the economic and social aspirations of those people who are currently drawn to support violent extremist crimes out of disaffection with existing international or domestic order. A new world order that will contain and defeat globally networked extremism will involve high (and difficult to attain) standards in international and domestic justice delivery.

This is in the longer frame of history an aspiration. To meet the threats in today's world, the goal has to be oriented around practical problem solving that mobilizes all of the necessary assets in a highly focused way specific to address each extremist threat. Yet all of the tactical effort will be worth little if we squander the moral authority that can come from establishing and maintaining a global normative framework (the rule of international law) that is more closely aligned with humanity's common standards of justice and security than that which we see today.