

Notes from the High Level Panel on the Margins of UNGA

***“COUNTERING AND PREVENTING
VIOLENT EXTREMISM THROUGH EDUCATION”***

BACKGROUND

A high level panel on the margins of 71st Session of the UN General Assembly discussed “Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism through Education.” The panel was convened on September 20, 2016. Following is a summary of the discussion.

SPONSORS

- The Republic of Albania.
- The United States.
- The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
- Morocco.
- The Holy See
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

SPEAKERS

- H.E. Ditmir Bushati (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania)
- H.E. Dina Kavar (Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the United States)
- His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin (Secretary of State, The Holy See)
- David N. Saperstein (US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom)
- Professor Ahmed Abbadi (Secretary General, Muhammadan League of Religious Scholars, Morocco)
- Mrs. Irina Bokova (Director General of UNESCO)

FINDINGS

Discussion focused on (i) education, (ii) messaging, (iii) governance, and (iv) national action plans. Following is a summary of findings and recommendations.

Education

- Knowledge is the most important antidote to extremism.
- Critical thinking is a bulwark against radicalization.
- Secular and religious education cultivates responsible citizenship and democratic values.
- Training in conflict resolution, mediation, identities, and shared histories contributes to moderation.

Recommendations

- Assess the educational system to determine its impact on radicalization taking a comprehensive approach that includes facilities, teachers, curriculum, and learning materials.
- Review curriculum and textbooks for negative stereotyping and messages that contribute to radicalization.
- Improve the quality of education by training and empowering teachers.

Messaging

- Faith based communities and leaders are embedded in communities and can support vulnerable members of society.
- While social media is used for hate messaging, the Internet also has positive potential for counter-messaging.
- Family members, especially mothers, are agents of moderation.

Recommendations

- Focus on women and girls as messengers for moderation.
- Emphasize the positive contribution of faith-based leaders.
- Cultivate community and family values through interreligious dialogue.
- Provide counter-narratives with credibility and authority.
- Incorporate plans for integrating returnees from ISIL-controlled territories into society.

Governance

- Oppression and human rights abuses fuel despair, which leads to radicalization.
- Positive values are cultivated by knowing history, religion, and culture.

Recommendations

- Share best practices between countries, regional organizations, international agencies, and UN bodies.
- Avoid duplication by developing a database tracking PVE through education activities of NGOS, INGOs, governments, and international organizations.
- Countries should spend a higher percentage of their Gross Domestic Product on strengthening educational capacity.
- Popularize the *Teacher Guide for Preventing Violent Extremist*, a UNESCO publication.
- Develop regional strategies and frameworks for cooperation (e.g. Western Balkans).
- Highlight youth engagement in education for peace, highlighting success stories (e.g. Malaysia).

National Action Plans

- Chaos in Syria feeds radicalization, destabilizing countries that receive refugees.
- ISIL recruiters use hate speech to radicalize target audiences using figures from the local community to amplify their message.

- Effective national action plans include a strategy for reintegrating radicals and jihadists.
- Refugee youth who do not receive education have become a “lost generation.”

Recommendations

- Use soft power to drain the swamp of support for extremism (e.g. education, media, and economic development).
- Develop counter-narratives in response to hate speech.

(Note: David L. Phillips, Director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights, was facilitator of the panel. He prepared this report).