

**PERSPECTIVES ON DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION:  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CVE)**

Panel discussion on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly  
23 September 2014, New York City

**Summary**

On 23 September, Hedayah and the Global Center on Cooperative Security organized panel discussions on “Perspectives on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Challenges and Opportunities for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)” on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City. It brought together experts and practitioners from different regions and disciplines. The panel discussions mainly aimed to explore issues relating to the lessons learned and the future challenges of DDR efforts in rehabilitation and reintegration, particularly within the framework of countering violent extremism (CVE). The event aimed at discussing the following goals: (1) explore a deeper analysis of security in war zones, and in new territories in which extremist or terrorist groups are operating and flourishing; (2) offer policymakers, researchers, and practitioners exchange insights and good practices, and collectively reflect on their professional experiences from the field of DDR; (3) incorporate discussions among UN member states and within the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration through the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum’s *Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders*.

The discussions were divided into two panels; the first panel focused on regional case studies presenting challenges of moving armed groups away from violence and reintegrating former fighters back into society as noncombatants; the second panel explored perspectives by UN experts and policy makers on the intersection of CVE and DDR frameworks, practices, and serious challenges of implementing DDR initiatives

The first panel included experts from four countries: Sri Lanka, Ireland, Colombia and Pakistan. They each presented on-the-ground challenges of rehabilitation and reintegration of former fighters in their respective region, and the ways in which the socio-political conditions were obstacles or supportive of DDR. For example, in 2009 Sri Lankan conflict, the government of Sri Lanka instituted local and national rehabilitation centers which worked with over 12,000 ex-combatants. These community-based rehabilitation centers consisted of local psychologists, social welfare care-takers, and trained government officials to oversee these activities. The National Rehabilitation Program tackled the core factors that can radicalize individuals, such as their sense of belonging, dignity, and respect among their community. The former official Sri Lankan rehabilitation officer who designed and implemented the National Rehabilitation Program said, “Successful rehabilitation programs can take at least five to ten years, and it is vitally important to incorporate religious, cultural, social, and spiritual civil society actors to increase the process of integration.” In the discussion, panelists and audience members discussed real obstacles

for rehabilitation programs, such as acceptance by their families and the community, and employment opportunities for former fighters. The expert expressed how the challenges in Sri Lanka were about efficiently allocating funds to the National Program, and the need to have consistent political support to continue and expand rehabilitation programs.

From the perspective of the Irish expert, who both served in the United Kingdom's National Reintegration Programs and worked closely with civil society organizations, he said before any DDR Program is designed, government officials need to appreciate, understand, and realize the historical significance of the cultural psyche of fighters. For instance in Northern Ireland, the war has a history of over two hundred years, and the opposition of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) efforts in 1920s to drive the British out of Northern Ireland with force contributed to the IRA to use arms, and eventually violent extremism. The Irish expert gave an example of how a five-month "cooling down period" agreed upon by all parties supported the process of restoring democracy, reducing the attraction of using terrorism, work within the rule of law, which all contributed to economy and the reduction of grievances. The discussion illustrated the significance of understanding the real needs and actual contexts terrorist fighters which lead to intense strategic dialogues and resulted with the "Good Friday Agreement." . With each side knowing that rehabilitation and reintegration depended on compromise and realistic goals- former prisoners were released in two years. Both international support and the public's appeal helped in the establishment of the Agreement, which is used as a case study within the DDR studies. The Colombian representative, who works closely with the current government efforts to reintegrate former FARC fighters, examined ways in which conflict in rural areas decimated land, local livestock, increased animosity between rural locals, FARC fighters, and the military's efforts in fighting against the rebels. The Colombian DDR programs focused on an inclusive approach as it incorporated aspects that dealt with the individual reasons for fighting with the FARC. The expert spoke about how the Colombia reintegration program considered factors like the ex-combatants' age, gender, provincial origin, and educational level. She spoke about many challenges facing the DDR process and programs in Colombia especially since there were exciting community-based approaches; however, with bottom-up approaches, there are challenges with widespread stakeholder engagement, discrimination against former fighters, insecurity of former fighters back in the community, the lack of education and jobs for them, and more importantly, the lack of proficiency of the private sector; the lack of trained psychologists to offer counseling, and the need to consider gender-based dimensions. These dimensions need to engage women in developing effective DDR programs most fitting to the communities they live in. The Colombian program is shifting from a counter-insurgency to a peace model approach will be effective.

The ongoing alarming rise in violent extremism in Pakistan shows that the situation affects a majority of the community and there are severe consequences to the whole nations. The Pakistani expert discussed her approaches working with mothers of extremists in order to better educate them on their roles in changing the minds and hearts of the potential extremist. . The expert explained her approach includes building trust within the leaders of the community, giving women economic empowerment, building their capacity in earning livelihood and life skills – particularly in critical thinking and situation analysis, as well as

their engagement in dialogue alongside religious leaders, teachers and other influential figures. Another important aspect is encouraging their self-confidence and pride in their identity as Muslims and Pakistanis. She explained that any reintegration program with former fighters must integrate a counter-strategy rooted in culture and tradition of that country.

The second panel of experts explored the relationships of current DDR frameworks and practices but keeping mind that a CVE perspective is integral in the conversation. . The issues raised include the following items to consider in DDR and CVE fields: (a) Who do you talk to in conflict zones such as Syria, and if there is no trust, then one has to calculate this in the conversations. (b) If there is a lack of political structure that could be held accountable in areas with security issues, such as in Chad and Somalia, where large numbers of people, including peacekeepers, are killed. The development of DDR programs in these many areas is vital, however, there is still a lack of prevention strategies in place. DDR deals with a situation once an extremist joins the groups, and these groups are active and the governments have the society at large have paid a great deal due to insurgencies but the key problem is that DDR does not work on preventing youth recruitment and/or offering other alternative counter-narratives to youth regarding violence and extremism.

DDR has become the only tool in peacekeeping, but it is still in vital need of development. With these DDR programs in place, success lies in the communities and whether or not they are willing to accept them back and ensure their safety. A majority of the members of these programs are rehabilitated in their own countries, but once the program ends those involved in helping will leave and they are usually forgotten. Another issue is what action to take with extremists who do not have these programs available for them in their country.

An emphasis on adopting the practices of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum's *Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders* as well as the Sydney Memorandum was highlighted. The states need to commit in the process of involving local communities by addressing key issues with: (1) extensive partnerships with civil society, youth groups and governments; (2) the limitations of governments to handle responsibilities alone; (3) the reluctance of supporting local communities an increased participatory role in de-radicalization activities led by the government; (4) the implementation of DDR programs in line with human rights and rule of law; and (5) the principle of counter-messaging to ensure it has roots in the fundamental values of humanity, freedom of thought, economic and social rights, tolerance, non-discrimination and the pluralistic respect for others. With regard to foreign terrorist fighters in the Horn of Africa region, the DDR expert panel expressed frustration that there is no clear law-based programs in receiving and offering FTF responsible security. Another critical point made by the experts are the challenges at core of CVE, in which people cannot be forced to rehabilitate and reintegrate, if they do not want to lay down their arms and negotiate a peace agreement. One expert expressed the concerns of countering violent extremism and tying it with DDR needs a new level of deep consideration because emphasizing the approach of collaborating with civil society organizations alone will be insufficient.

During the Question and Answer sessions, several discussions surfaced relating to case studies and the current realities and current limitations of reintegrating former fighters. In the first panel, the imbalance of power and demobilizing the role of the military has been touched upon but is an integral component from the view of the former fighters. Secondly, there were questions on the important role of social media and how it contributes to extremism, reintegration, and using narratives to de-emphasize the expansion of extremist activities. It was also suggested to incorporate structured courses on dealing with the trend of extremism and conflict studies into the school curriculum. Another topic raised is the interplay between CVE and DDR in light of future resolutions. That is to say, that CVE plays more of a role than DDR approaches when it comes to limiting or circumventing the flow of foreign fighters in to areas of conflict. There is a need to link up reconciliation and work with youth at risk. These wider issues need to be addressed with structured frameworks, or else many fundamentals to DDR will be defunct given the rising trend of violent extremism.

These two panels attracted new thinking on the subject of reintegrating and rehabilitating former fighters because it challenged the field as it stands and the DDR field remains fixed regardless of the changing world of transnational extremism. UN policy makers and experts of DDR stated that these interdisciplinary panels provided a rich and enhance perspective on expanding reintegration. Designing national DDR programs need to include a wide range of civil society actors in which government experts can cooperate and rely upon, while at the same time, ensure the safety of civil society organizations, the safety of former fighters, and also cultivating a culture of acceptance of former combatants who have agreed to a peace agreement. These conversations illustrated possibilities of crossing disciplines in order to inject new thought and practices into DDR, as well as for CVE experts to appreciate real policy concerns associated with national reintegration and rehabilitation programs.

The Hedayah and GCCS panel demonstrates the need to follow-up on these conversations with real policy oriented meetings with the incorporation of critical expert voices from civil society organizations who are committed to mitigating violence, preventing violent extremism, and supporting former fighters to becoming constructive members of society.