***Hedayah* and GCTF Event on Education and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)**
18-20 May 2014
Sofitel Abu Dhabi Corniche
Abu Dhabi, UAE

Meeting Summary

On 18-20 May 2014, *Hedayah*, in coordination with the Global Counterterrorism Forum's (GCTF) CVE Working Group, hosted a workshop that brought together practitioners and policymakers from ministries of education, ministries of the interior and foreign affairs, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and the private sector to share examples of good practices from initiatives that have used education as a tool for CVE. The workshop aimed to: (1) present examples and case studies for how education has been a tool to counter and prevent violent extremism; (2) produce a draft list of good practices for the GCTF; and (3) create an action plan that would allow GCTF members and partners the opportunity to collaborate on the implementation of existing or new CVE and education projects.

The good practices document, which will be presented for adoption by GCTF members at the September 2014 Ministerial Meeting in New York, will also include insights from three other meetings hosted by *Hedayah*. These meetings include: (1) an expert roundtable on the Role of Education in CVE co-hosted in New York from 17-18 September 2013, by *Hedayah* and the Global Center on Cooperative Security (GCCS); (2) a Senior Official Meeting on Education and CVE hosted on 25 September 2013, by *Hedayah*, and (3) an expert roundtable entitled, "CVE: What Role for Sports, Arts and Cultural Programs?" co-hosted by *Hedayah* and the GCCS from 21-22 May 2014.

The discussions at the workshop consisted of a series of case studies of how education has been used to counter violent extremism. The first session contextualized the concept of CVE to give a baseline point of reference to those organizations that were unfamiliar with the concept. Participants discussed the relevance of *Hedayah* to CVE, and how educational institutions could serve as a mechanism for CVE interventions. Discussions also noted that education in and of itself is not enough to counter violent extremism, but that CVE through education implies a basic existence of educational organizations, institutions, or approaches – both formal or informal – that can offer secondary CVE benefits.

The second session featured examples of evidence-based approaches to education and CVE. The speakers discussed how certain lessons from psychology, sociology, and child development have been applied in a context of violent extremism, and have achieved successful results. Participants noted that increasing an individual's cognitive capacity to evaluate different values and ideas and recognize that different viewpoints exist is one way to help counter violent extremism. For example, one speaker noted that low complexity in thought processes is one potential area of intervention in an educational setting; structuring the thought process to allow

for the validity of contradictory viewpoints may help reduce the perceived threat of the "other" as the "enemy." Moreover, developing critical thinking skills in young individuals may, in certain circumstances, build resilience to the risk of recruitment into violent extremism. Participants noted that these sorts of complex and critical thinking skills were best developed through modeling real-life scenarios.

The third session discussed ways in which CVE interventions in educational institutions could have ripple effects in the broader community, or the ways in which the community and the family can help educate young people to develop community resilience to violent extremism. Participants noted that training on awareness of emotions, and the body's natural reaction to these emotions, can help build resilience for families, teachers and students. It was particularly noted that these tools were most useful in environments where motivations to join violent extremist organizations were linked to fear or coercion. Participants also discussed the need for a coordinated approach to CVE and education through multiple layers: in formal institutions; but also in coordination with families, parents, coaches, and community actors. Participants also suggested that implementing peace education across a country, both formally in schools and through community groups and after-school programs, could be a possible CVE intervention.

The fourth session opened the second day with a discussion of how technology can help develop skills to build resilience to violent extremism. Discussions noted the importance of the private sector, particularly in cultivating vocational and technical skills that can help create jobs in areas where lack of employment is a driver of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism. Participants also suggested that gaming (e.g., online gaming, computer gaming, and board games) can be used as a tool to build critical and creative thinking skills, if the games are designed properly. However, participants also noted that gaming can create environments that are more conducive to recruitment by encouraging social exclusion or violence.

The fifth session discussed the ways in which media can be an effective tool to reinforce values taught in a formal educational setting, re-emphasizing the need for a coordinated, whole-of-society approach to CVE. Participants showed how media – such as television, radio, cartoons, books and movies – can be a way to teach civic values and critical thinking skills to children in a way that makes learning fun. Participants also noted that in designing interventions through media, program designers need to find the right balance between fun and learning in order to make them both popular and effective. The discussions noted that media interventions should always be careful to be culturally relevant to the local context and country.

The sixth session allowed countries the opportunity to share their own experiences in CVE and education, including greater cooperation between ministries of education with ministries of the interior and ministries of foreign affairs. The discussions noted that convincing the ministries of education that they have a stake in CVE is a main obstacle, and more efforts should be made to train on CVE. Participants also suggested that in certain contexts, a lack of integrated schooling systems (e.g., between religious and/or ethnic groups) may reinforce concepts of distrust and marginalization that can lead to violent extremism.

The last session presented Nigeria as a case study where multiple sectors of society, including governments, private sector, NGOs, and communities, are working toward a coordinated effort to

prevent and counter violent extremism. Participants specifically noted the need to better train teachers on ways to build resilience in a formal setting. Participants also noted some of the challenges to coordinating between policies and programs, and highlighted that a lack of coordinated efforts were often counterproductive.

During the breakout and session discussions, a number of themes emerged. First, there was a consistent theme that addressing drop out rates in school systems, especially in poorer countries, could help indirectly address violent extremism by limiting the number of available young people for recruitment into violent extremist organizations. Secondly, participants consistently noted the cognitive differences between "foot-soldiers" and "generals" in violent extremist organizations, and the need to differentiate between these two groups when designing interventions. Third, participants emphasized teaching civic values to the broader society as a baseline, noting that civic values, such as tolerance, could help prevent the development of attitudes that lead to exclusion and marginalization.

However, participants also discussed that these methods alone are not sufficient—that targeted interventions are still necessary. Participants concluded that a holistic or whole-community approach to CVE in education needs to:

- Identify the push and pull factors of violent extremism.
- Provide an evidence-based approach to CVE that includes areas such as sociology, psychology, and child development.
- Recognize the important role families and communities play in educating youth against violent extremism.
- Utilize technology to develop skills to build resilience against violent extremism.
- Understand the powerful role media and social media play in reinforcing values taught in education settings.
- Share best practices and lessons learned from different countries and different governmental departments to increase awareness on alternative approaches to CVE.
- Realize that a whole-of-community approach requires police, communities, youth, governments, NGOs, and private organizations to develop a coordinated effort to prevent and build resilience against violent extremism.