



The Vienna Exchange: Victims as a Face of Countering Violent Extremism

**Vienna, 2-3. September 2013
Synthesis and summary of roundtable discussions**

Introduction:

From 2-3 September 2013, eighteen experts, practitioners, academics, policymakers, government officials and victims of terrorism convened at the Hotel Astoria in Vienna, Austria in a roundtable format to discuss how the international community can better support victims of terrorism, as well as the role of victims of terrorism in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs and policies. The following document summarizes the outcomes of the discussions and debates, and makes concrete recommendations for the next steps in supporting victims of terrorism, and promoting voices of victims in CVE efforts.

Who are victims of terrorism?

- The term 'victim' is a broad term which may include those killed, those injured, as well as the family members of those killed or injured terrorist attacks
- For the purpose of activism, the term 'victim' may also refer to those affected by political violence. However, this interpretation is highly controversial, and also carries some potential political consequences
- 'Survivor' is more positive term, but victims includes formers and perpetrator's parents
- There are many 'invisible' victims in the sense that after an attack, only a small number are heard from again. It is important to promote availability of victims' support networks to reach these victims, as the process of healing may take years or even decades

Why mobilize victims of terrorism?

- Victims of terrorism are not usually personally targeted in attacks. They are collateral damage of attacks directed against state policy or management. In this way they are different from criminal attacks and deserve recognition as such by society and state

- Victims carry the most credibility, legitimacy and resonance in CVE campaigns; Victims genuinely do not wish for the same pain to happen to others, and can be a powerful source of energy, activism, ideas and passion in CVE work
- In civil society, victims are able to speak out or act in ways that may be contrary to current state agendas, this independence may provide useful leverage in messaging
- As the number of victims rise, it is not prudent for any community to have members with trauma, resentment, or social issues

Journey through the eyes of victims

- There are common patterns but no single profile of a victim
- Victims have a pre-history: personal issues, supportive families, resilient communities, supportive legislation and communities or not which effects their experience
- Just after an attack there can be many agencies around and media, they may offer practical support: medical, financial, legal, and psychological. The Criminal Justice Response to Support Victims of Act of Terrorism is not an international legal instrument for victims of terrorism, only principles and guidelines of 1985 (for victims in general) on how to states should assist their victims. Very different support from country to country
- Victims may feel used for media stories and criminal investigations. They may feel double victimization if harassed. Stoicism and acceptance may actually mask issues
- Support for victims of terrorism, if it exists at all, ebbs after about 18 months and is typically better provided in developed countries with a history of terror attacks or similar
- Before victims are willing and able to mobilize for CVE they need:
 - o To be recognized by the state, not to feel alone
 - o Manage the practical consequences of attack: physical, social, economic, mental and emotional
 - o Be protected and provided for in the legal system or at least the community
 - o Feel no guilt or shame in the family or culture

- Understand their trauma, including psychosomatic illness
- Need much time and support ...it can be 3 weeks, 3 or 30 years
- Examples of journeys
 - 1- Some might disappear and have to cope by themselves (invisible victims, might be important but we do not know them)
 - 2- Some heal by themselves, their journey continues. They might get in contact with organizations after many years
 - 3- Some are very active, immediately contact organizations or media
 - Some burnout / overload and stop their activism, they might start again
 - 4- Some become active by themselves, create organizations

How can organizations/practitioners reach out to victims?

- Emergency services can refer victims to organizations
- Associations are represented at funerals, anniversaries, and other events; this representation should be approached supportively—victims should know that the associations are there only if the victim needs support
- Through media (e.g website), respectful outreach, and very often word or mouth
- Through direct contact with families (names given in media) and relationship building

Victims interventions in CVE

Out of the discussions that took place at the Vienna Exchange, 7 types of possible interventions evolved. For optimum impact and resonance, interventions should be appropriate to the audience and victim to promote empathy and provide alternatives for audience. In other words, for the interventions by victims of terrorism to be effective, the narrative needs to be focused and goal-oriented. Victims of an attack should speak to people with similar backgrounds, language, culture and values for their narrative to be most effective in countering violent extremism.

- **1-Counter/ Positive-narrative** through neutral, personal testimonials
 - Education programs, school visits
 - Public speaking events with communities, practitioners and policy planners
 - Short-films, radio programs, documentaries, social media

- These should only be considered 'snapshots' of someone's narrative, which can change either positively or negatively after time
- **2-Community cohesion**
 - Anger management for individuals and groups
 - One on one dialogues, community dialogues to reduce fear and build trust
 - Victims learning about context of perpetrators act, becoming ambassadors for understanding and tolerance e.g. neighbors visits into mosques and churches
- **3-Healing for Victims**
 - Victims helping other victims to recover, cope and energize each other
 - Victims supporting and mentoring other associations or individual activists
- **4-Prevention**
 - Victims sharing testimony from dysfunctional or dystopian political systems practicing or promoting terror, in order to prevent others from being lured
 - Victims promote new solutions or information e.g. the Peace Index, research
 - Victims organize after school activities and education to promote resilience and provide alternatives for youth and parents in communities at risk
- **5-Political element**
 - Victims can take on a political role, lobbying with policymakers, security sector
 - Victims can take part in peace movements and marches for global culture of CVE
- **6-Media**
 - Enhance, empower victims communication strategy and protect privacy
- **7- De-radicalization**
 - Prison visits and de-radicalization programs

General points on mobilizing victims of terrorism

- Victims are hard to reach and need a lot of support: and what do they actually want?
- Basic human rights of victims should be the baseline for all activity involving them
- Victims voices in publically funded institutions should promote peace, not revenge
- Difficult to show the direct impact of victims work, so it is often difficult to receive funding
- Governments need to see the clear benefit for them to work with victims voices in CVE before they are likely to support their agendas
- Over exposure of individual victims can be harmful, painful and become mechanic
- The difficult balance of the media relationship: too much versus too little exposure and personal privacy and dignity versus utilizing media for CVE benefit
- Neutral victim activists that do not moralize seem to be more effective than politicized
- Victims can take part in CVE programming in schools, including building skill sets such as critical thinking, conflict resolution and problem solving to strengthen resilience and decrease risk
- The need to provide opportunities for victims to meet to galvanize each other
- Difficulty of handling the ideological context in CVE - can /should work be neutral?
- Need to meet the needs of potential perpetrators, provide ambiguity and alternatives
- Gender differences? Can male/female victims work in some ways better than others?

- The need for cataloguing and sharing best practice work between practitioners and policy makers without hindering or detracting from the work itself

- Potential to get creative and tap into public private partnership sector social responsibility schemes for financial support: e.g. Google, Coke, individuals also insurance firms with interest in CVE

Next steps

Overall, the participants of the meeting made the following recommendations for the next steps of how to support victims and promote their voices in CVE:

- Expressing a desire for similar exchange and sustained network of people working on programs involving victims; next opportunity SAVE conference December 2013
- Coordinating best practice sharing to catalogue and list the existing victims' initiatives around the world. Hedayah can begin to do this through the GCTF capitals, and potentially coordinate with Institute for Strategic Dialogue to add case studies to the already-existing counterextremism.org and policy planners network
- Promoting easier funding for victims work through EU, national governments
- Mapping existing funding opportunities would be useful for victims' associations and programs that are having difficulty with funding
- Promoting mentoring among victims at different life stages, and set up of victims association on global scale e.g. US, Pakistan
- Creating a platform for victims to meet each other to promote healing and discourse