



**Putting a Stop to the Collateral Damages of CVE**  
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**Side Event**

***“A comprehensive approach to preventing radicalization, violent extremism and atrocity crimes: activating voices from actors in the field”***

**October 1st, 2015**

*ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations, New York*

**Your Excellences,  
Dear Speakers, Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

At first glance, the issues at the heart of this UNGA side event on preventing violent extremism may seem very distant from those of a University initiative concerned with documenting the development of global norms related to freedom of expression and information.

In fact, the security concerns of this decade greatly impact upon, if not define, the nature and exercise of free speech and access to information. For the last decade or so, these concerns have been largely, although not exclusively, derived from “terrorism,” “extremism” or “radicalisation.”

Violent militant groups have emerged as one of the single most important sources of violence against freedom of expression, including through the killing of journalists, bloggers and others, in the most brutal fashion. Earlier this year, some ten years after the first publication of the “Prophet Mohammed cartoons”, the offices of French magazine Charlie Hebdo were attacked in broad day-light in Paris, and 12 persons, including four cartoonists, executed in cold blood, in a seeming revenge for the magazine’s publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed years earlier.

Aggressive states responses to “terrorism” since 9/11 have been no less impactful on freedom of expression and information, as reports from a range of human rights and press freedom organisations have demonstrated and warned against<sup>1</sup> repeatedly.

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This is why the event today and few others like it matter so much. Working directly, and unequivocally with actors who know first hand the mechanics and ravages of violent “extremism” and terrorism – Former violent extremists; their families; youth workers; teachers; religious leaders - must be at the heart of any meaningful strategy of responses.

They are telling us: “there are other ways to respond to violent radicalisation. ”

The responses must be measured, principled, proportionate; they cannot weaken human rights. They must strengthen the human core – not weaken it. They must enhance the global interest, not divide it; and they must be based on the universal and equal value of all human beings, not just some.

We have heard that an approach predicated on internal security and external military intervention is not enough.

So to be comprehensive we must expand. We must expand our thinking and our engagement to consider education, social and youth policies, unemployment, the role of religion in our societies, and the education of religious leaders, prisons.

Testimonies indicate that to date, governments, with only a few exceptions, have largely paid lip service to these questions.

Expansion of the policy net has been neglected.

Our response must also hear the pain, the mistrust, the turmoil – at and between individual, family, generations, community, institutions.

Most importantly, we have been told that we must give **content** to this framework. This requires understanding the needs of those on the front line, in terms of skills, expertise, means - and be prepared to offer remedies and support.

The experiences described today and the recommendations put forward are painstakingly demanding, long – *one person at a time*. Responding to and countering

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<sup>1</sup> These include the annual press freedom index from Freedom House and Reporters without Borders, the reports from the Committee to Protect Journalists on the killings and imprisonment of Journalists; the annual reports from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty international have also highlighted the consequences of counter-terrorism policies on freedom of expression.

violent radicalisation requires time, dialogues, understanding, trust – investment in research, education, skills set, parenting, strengthening trust between some segments of the populations and the public institutions.

There is no quick fix. We should be suspicious of any “experts”, policy makers or politicians who come up with a magic bullet.

-- II --

Are there alternatives? Continuing on the same path of the past decade?

Columbia Global Freedom of Expression monitoring of court decisions in 2014 shows that the global jurisprudence on freedom of expression stands out for “its clear, and quasi-global, consolidation of (national) security – in law, mind and spirit - as an all-encompassing framework and subjected to little opposition.”

Unfortunately, too many of the individuals caught up in the security driven nets of the Justice system should not be there.

And so, caught in the counter-terrorism / counter violent extremism nets, we can find journalists doing their public interest work; activists and lawyers defending human rights; idiotic drunks who uttered something foolish only to find themselves facing 6 month imprisonment; young people demonstrating for democracy, equal rights for all religious minorities. And the list goes on.

The collateral damage caused by the current approach is not visible just in the Courts of Justice.

They are evident in the assembly of inter-governmental organisations, which fails to respond impartially to clear violations of the laws of war or human rights violations when these have been committed under the guise of countering “terrorism”.

Collateral damage is seen in the weakening of global norms related to peace, security, human rights, humanitarian interventions - in the name of a pragmatic pursuit against a “greater” need.

Greater than what? Greater than Who?

Greater than the bodies of little children, in the ruins of their house, or washed off a beach.

Greater than the tears of mothers, the cries of fathers?

Greater than the endless lines of refugees walking an endless march in search of safer zones? How much longer will they need to?

In response to a monster, we too may well have created a monster.

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So let's listen carefully to the voices, experiences and expertise of parents and siblings, youth workers, religious leaders, and former "violent extremists". We may not have that much time left to get it right.