



**7<sup>th</sup> Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations**  
Baku, Azerbaijan, 25-27 April, 2016

**Breakout Session “D-Goals of Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: Educating for Development, Diversity, and Dialogue”**

**Background**

Education is an essential factor among the tools to prevent violent extremism, because of its basic role in addressing many of the conditions conducive to violent extremism. These conditions include the lack of economic opportunity, discrimination and marginalization, violations of human rights, and – in the worst case – continued political instability and conflict.

These factors conducive to extremism also impact on development. [Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) therefore calls for ensuring “inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.” Particularly relevant to this panel, Target 4.7 calls for ensuring that “all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.”

This session will address some of the educational tools that contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal and target mentioned above, which are also relevant in helping to prevent violent extremism.<sup>1</sup>

Generally, education for intercultural competence and cooperation -- including education geared toward creating respect for diversity and encouraging dialogue on shared values -- is sorely needed. This kind of education acts as a bulwark against polarization and a tendency to see the “other” in negative terms. International education, educational collaboration across borders, and study-abroad programs, are particularly relevant in this regard by building networks of individuals and institutions who understand their differences, but still focus on their commonalities. There is also considerable evidence of the benefits of international education as a booster for individual, sectorial, local and national development.<sup>2</sup>

An important element of intercultural competence, cooperation and cultural diversity is the need for religious literacy -- not to be confused with religious indoctrination often associated with single-faith schools. However, even in the latter case, contrary to popular belief, studies show that most Islamic schools, for

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to point out that just education alone is not necessarily a panacea against violent extremism and/or terrorism. As several studies have pointed out, some members (and most leaders) of violent extremist groups and terrorists are highly educated, although not in humanities and/or social sciences (see, for example, a report on a study pointing to the preponderance of engineers in Islamist groups in Henry Farrell, “[This is the group that’s surprisingly prone to violent extremism](#)”, *The Washington Post* (November 17, 2015); Peter Bergen, “[Jihadi John: The bourgeois terrorist](#)”, CNN, (February 17, 2015); and Anirban Ghosh, et al, “[The Fighters of Lashkar-e-Taiba: Recruitment, Training, Deployment and Death](#)”, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Occasional Paper Series, April 2013.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the United States-based [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#) has estimated that international students contributed \$30.5 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2014-2015 academic year; [international students in London](#) spent over 2.8 billion pounds, according to a May 2015 report; international education was the fifth-largest export for [New Zealand](#) in 2014-15; and the fourth-largest export for [Australia](#), according to a March 2014 report.

instance, are not breeding grounds for terror directly.<sup>3</sup> It is true that **some** of the schools may end up providing support for beliefs supporting violent extremism.<sup>4</sup> This is of course dependent on the content and provider of religious education. In countering and preventing violent extremism, all schools must not only learn about their own religions in the context of history and geography, but also the basic tenets and context of other religions.<sup>5</sup> This is critical in refuting stereotypes and misinformation -- particularly in the media -- and helping to prevent polarization that often contributes to violent extremism. Further, knowing one's own religion and having an appreciation of the main features of other major religions provides tools to guard against, and question, selective interpretations by those peddling a more extremist narrative.<sup>6</sup>

In examining education as a tool to prevent violent extremism, we should not confine ourselves to formal educational systems in schools, colleges and universities, but also involve the larger community as part of lifelong learning. Particularly relevant here is to build the capacities of migrants in equipping them with skills to navigate life as full and productive members of their host societies. One recent publication emphasizes the role of active education settings, which would "carry within them the inclusiveness to create the wide collaborative communities enable to protect our democratic societies."<sup>7</sup>

### Points of Discussion

- What are some examples of good practices in the prevention of violent extremism through education?
- What are the challenges in the area of educational programming/projects for the prevention of violent extremism? How do we best educate students and professionals about religious and cultural diversity to prevent violent extremism?
- How do we best prepare teachers, social workers, faith leaders, practitioners in health, and fellow employees as well as family and friends of individuals to recognize tendencies that may lead the individuals to the path of violent extremism?

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey, "[The Madrassa Scapegoat](#)", The Washington Quarterly Volume 29, Issue 2 (Spring 2006), as also a study on Indonesia *pesantren* (Islamic schools): Mark Woodward, et al, "[Muslim Education, Celebrating Islam and Having Fun As Counter-Radicalization Strategies in Indonesia](#)", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 4, No 4 (2010).

<sup>4</sup> See Victor Mallet, "[Madrassas: behind closed doors](#)", *FT Magazine*, (October 30, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> We may recall that the [United Nations Alliance of Civilizations HLG Report](#) (November 2006) called for education systems to "provide students with an understanding and respect for the diverse religious beliefs, practices and cultures in the world".

<sup>6</sup> For an example, see Frank van Lierde, [Looking for that Other Face: Women Muslim Leaders and Violent Extremism in Indonesia](#) (Cordaid: The Hague, Netherlands, April 2013), p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> See European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning, "[Education to foster Intercultural Understanding and Solidarity in Europe](#)". (January 2016).