



High Level Seminar
Peace, Security and Sustainable Development
The Role of Parliaments in Tackling the Root Causes and Consequences of
Violent Extremism and Terrorism
Brussels, Belgium | 8-9 October 2015

CONCEPT NOTE

The objective of this Concept Note is to frame the discussions in the High Level Parliamentary Seminar on Peace, Security and Sustainable Development. The seminar will focus on what African and European parliamentarians can do to tackle the root causes and consequences of violent extremism and terrorism. The seminar is organised by AWEPA's Sida-funded programme aimed at strengthening parliamentary capacity in legislation and oversight in Africa towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), by focusing on the empowerment of international parliamentary institutions such as the Pan-African Parliament and other regional parliamentary bodies across Africa. The Belgian Senate in Brussels, Belgium, is hosting the high level seminar on 8 and 9 October 2015.



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“There is no peace without development, no development without peace, and there is no lasting peace or sustainable development without respect for human rights and the rule of law”ⁱ

- Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General, United Nations

1. Background

Peaceful societies are a vital requirement for sustainable development. This has been one of the clearest lessons learned over the last 15 years, during which African states have struggled to meet the ambitious social and economic objectives laid out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Despite remarkable progress in many African states, fragile and conflict-affected states have underperformed on the MDGs.ⁱⁱ As a result, the Post-2015 Development Agenda provides a paradigm shift by focusing on the importance of peaceful and inclusive societies, with the Common African Position (CAP) confirming the “importance of peace and security in Africa and in the world, and the inextricable links between development and peace, security and stability,” including the urgent need to address the root causes of conflict.ⁱⁱⁱ This change of focus has resulted in broad support for a standalone Sustainable Development Goal^{iv} on peace and security, with the theme ‘promoting peaceful societies and strong institutions’, forming a cornerstone of the on-going interactive global dialogue on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

While the nexus between peace, security and sustainable development has been broadly accepted, there has only recently been an acceptance that combating terrorism^v is an important component of the peace and security agenda, and thus intimately connected to the Development Agenda. This can be traced back to a five-fold increase in the number of deaths caused globally by terrorism since 2000 as well as the emergence of a better understanding of how to effectively prevent terrorism.^{vi} The complexity of the threat has increased in the last decade, as terrorist networks have become decentralised with diverse sets of armed actors, groups of radicalised individuals and ‘lone wolves’ tenuously linked to a common objective or interest. In Africa, terrorist and violent extremist groups have expanded influence and control to several portions of territory, such as the Sahel-Saharan zone. They have radically affected the lives of local populations, conducting terrorist attacks such as those perpetrated by, among others, al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya, Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria and surrounding countries and Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Mourabitoun in Mali.^{vii} These conflicts have no frontlines and require urgent and concerted regional and international responses.

Root Causes

In order for States to counter these threats, it is imperative that policy makers understand the complex and often inter-linked conditions that are conducive to radicalisation. For example, while there is no direct correlation between poverty and terrorism, extremists can prey on populations, most notably the youth, suffering from poverty, exclusion, unemployment, discrimination and marginalisation. Allegiance to terrorist groups may be a source of financial security and bring a sense of belonging and ideology to disillusioned youths who may perceive urban elites as arrogant and corrupt. Initiatives to tackle youth unemployment by, for example, supporting investment in agriculture, inclusive growth strategies and stimulation of job creation for young people are crucial. Initiatives that focus on the role that can be played by individuals or groups (teachers, religious leaders, health workers, etc.) who directly interact on a daily basis with individuals or vulnerable groups of the population targeted by terrorist groups for recruitment are also required.^{viii} The social media and extremist propaganda used by recruiters to radicalise young people requires a particular set of international strategies to fight/counter them. Broader factors include political stability, intergroup cohesion and state legitimacy.^{ix} Finally, finding ways to cut off arms supply

and financing of terrorist groups is equally critical, as the illegal trade in drugs, human beings and other goods, combined with ransom from kidnappings, provides huge financial boosts that allow terrorist groups to operate and expand in size.

Consequences

Tackling the numerous direct and indirect consequences of terrorism and violent extremism is equally challenging. Given the cross-border nature of the security threat posed by groups such as Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, regional collaboration is often a necessity. While military collaboration between African States does occur, sometimes in cooperation with European States, many States still prefer to operate unilaterally when it comes to security. Efforts are required to further strengthen regional cooperation and build trust between States; particularly in such a politically sensitive issue area. Terrorist attacks do not only have a direct impact on local populations through the loss of lives and the spread of fear, but also cause fragmentation and divisions in society that can lead to further extremist reactions. Avoiding the onset of this vicious cycle is essential. Similarly, while Europeans and Africans alike may be the victims of terrorist attacks they can also be the perpetrators, recruited and travelling to areas for training and further radicalisation by groups such as the Islamic State. The potential security threat posed when these 'foreign fighters' return to their home countries is significant and must be tackled head-on. African and European states alike also face the daunting task of potentially reintegrating former members of terrorist groups back into society, particularly when these constitute a large number of individuals with some forcibly recruited at young ages. Finally, violent extremism and terrorism have important indirect consequences, ranging from effects on regional and international migration patterns to impacts on levels of sexual and gender-based violence. Ultimately, each State must find its own response to the key root causes and consequences of violent extremism and terrorism faced by their society.

2. The Role of Parliaments and Parliamentary Initiatives

Parliamentarians have a key role to play in developing policy and legal frameworks that tackle both the complex root causes and the multiple consequences of violent extremism. International dialogue and cooperation are needed to reach this goal, particularly at the regional and global level, as the threat of terrorism is rarely local. The Pan-African Parliament can influence the African Union while regional parliamentary bodies can influence their respective regional communities and member states to build trust and strengthen cooperation while serving as a platform for experience-sharing to build regional trust. While the best prevention of terrorism in Africa may be sustainable and equitable development, parliamentarians are central to the development, review and amendment of anti-terrorism and anti-radicalisation legislation through their core functions of legislation, oversight and representation. It is imperative that parliamentarians become more involved and informed on security matters rather than leaving this to the executive alone. As the elected representatives of the people directly affected by terrorism or violent extremism, they are also best placed to bring the concerns and interest of these people to the debate.

Parliaments can use their legislative powers to contribute to the development of legal and normative frameworks for handling, for example, legislation dealing with the complex reasons why young people in particular join terrorists groups. Through appropriate legislation, parliaments can incentivise former members of extremist groups to reintegrate into society; they can adopt legislation and oversee the allocation of budget resources for youth education as well as youth employment-boosting measures.

Regional parliamentary bodies and continental parliaments (such as the Pan-African Parliament and the European Parliament) can develop frameworks for anti-terrorism legislation that seek to strike a balance between the need to prevent terrorist attacks while protecting the inherent rights of citizens.

Through their oversight powers, parliaments can ensure that anti-terrorism legislation by the government does not undermine the rights of citizens; they can hold government to account on decisions made with regards to counter-terrorism operations and expenditure in the security sector; they can promote and oversee the ratification and implementation of the many international and regional instruments dealing with terrorism at a global level. For instance, parliaments can encourage African governments to ratify the United Nations Security Council Resolutions that aim to stop financial flows to terrorist groups or deal with the return of foreign fighters.

Through their representation and outreach functions, parliaments can help sensitise public opinion on the need for an open dialogue within communities on why people may turn towards extremist groups as a way to deal with their grievances. Public recognition of the challenges faced, in particular by disillusioned and unemployed youth, can be conducive to the development of governance frameworks that manage to address head-on the root causes of violent extremism. They can also provide strengthened visibility to existing initiatives and stimulate national and regional executives to be further engaged and focused on more effective ways to prevent terrorism and violent extremism. European parliamentarians need to engage and support African parliamentarians in these efforts, encouraging critical North-South cooperation on anti-terrorism, security and sustainable development.

3. The High Level Seminar (Brussels, Belgium; 8-9 October, 2015)

The theme for the high level seminar “Peace, Security and Sustainable Development” was chosen in light of growing international attention to the role of peace and security in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The seminar will specifically discuss on-going African and European national and regional parliamentary initiatives and strategies to combat violent extremism and terrorism. Examples include parliamentary initiatives that focus on what teachers and religious schools can do to prevent young people from being radicalised; initiatives that deal with the particular impact of violent extremism on women, young girls and minorities; as well as initiatives to increase dialogue and information exchange between States at the regional or continental level. Participants will discuss best practices in Europe and Africa, including regional responses and cooperation, with a special emphasis on initiatives taken by regional parliamentary bodies in Africa.

The seminar will bring together African MPs from national parliaments, from regional parliamentary bodies and the PAP, MPs of several European parliaments as well as the European Parliament, members of AWEPA, African parliamentary staff, representatives of the European Commission, international organisations, NGOs, academics, and other participants.

The seminar has the following objectives:

1. Inform African and European MPs on the latest trends in parliamentary initiatives in both Africa and Europe on violent extremism and terrorism;
2. Raise awareness among MPs of the nexus between security and sustainable development as we transition from the MDGs to the SDGs;

3. Build knowledge on on-going policy initiatives on violent extremism in Africa and Europe at the national, regional and continental levels;
4. Stimulate debate and reflection on how national, regional and continental parliaments in Africa and Europe can strengthen their role in achieving lasting peace and security.

Expected outputs and outcomes of the seminar:

1. Deepened understanding by African and European MPs of the complex underlying causes of radicalisation as well as the importance of striking a careful balance between strong counter-terrorism legislation and the rights of citizens;
2. Strengthened parliamentary dialogue in Africa and between Africa and Europe on peace, security and sustainable development as a part of the Post-2015 Development Agenda;
3. A heightened sense of urgency among parliamentarians for the need to hold the executive to account through examination of budget allocations, including for anti-terrorism campaigns, and to push for freedom of information when these allocations are not transparent;
4. Parliamentary recommendations on how to build trust, dialogue and cooperation between countries that face the same regional security threats.

ⁱ “A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015,” Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations General Assembly 68th session, 26 July 2013, §95.

ⁱⁱ “TST Issues Brief: Conflict Prevention, Post-conflict Peacebuilding and the Promotion of Durable Peace, Rule of Law and Governance,” Technical Support Team (TST) Issues Briefs. Available [here](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ “Common African Position (CAP) on the Post-2015 Development Agenda,” African Union, Addis Ababa, March 2014. Available [here](#).

^{iv} The SDGs, to be achieved by 2030, will be adopted by world leaders in a global summit in New York on September 27th 2015.

^v For the purpose of this Concept Note the definition of terrorism used is that of the [Global Terrorism Database \(GTD\)](#): “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation.”

^{vi} Statistics from the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), compiled by the Institute for Economics & Peace.

^{vii} Note that “there is effectively a spectrum between violent extremism and terrorism and it may be challenging to place some groups. There is a wide variety of ideologies, including nationalist and separatist ideologies, ideologies inspired by Al Qaida or now the Islamic State, violent left-wing, anarchist as well as right-wing ideologies.” Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response, Brussels, 15.1.2014 COM(2013) 941 final.

^{viii} For example, the European Commission established the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) to prevent radicalisation in Europe. The RAN Working Groups focus on everything from the role of police to the use of voices of the victims of terrorism in preventing radicalisation.

^{ix} Global Terrorism Index 2014: Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism, Institute for Economics and Peace.