



## THE CARTER CENTER

### **Responding to the Changing Landscape of Violent Extremism: Practical Approaches to Conflict Transformation and Rehabilitation**

**January 25-27, 2019**

#### **Executive Summary**

The dynamics of violent extremism are ever-changing.

Syria, violent extremism continues to metastasize. Daesh and similar groups continue to recruit and accelerate civil conflicts in Mali, Somalia, Indonesia, and elsewhere. Unfortunately, efforts to develop rehabilitation and reintegration programs for returned foreign fighters are either nonexistent or severely inhibited by the hyper-securitized environment. Repressive security measures have fueled Islamophobia and emboldened right-wing extremism in Europe and the United States. The threat posed by violent extremism, from Daesh and al-Qaeda affiliates and from right-wing extremists in the West, requires a multipronged and sustainable response.

To respond to these challenges, The Carter Center convened its third reiterative workshop with religious and community leaders from Jan. 25-27, 2019. Workshop participants included practitioners from across ideological and political divides with the credibility and social capital to influence their communities in Morocco, Tunisia, Belgium, France, and the United States. The workshop examined four main themes: a) the changing landscape of violent extremism; b) practical approaches to conflict transformation and negotiation; c) rights-based approaches to reintegration and rehabilitation; and d) the legal landscape of terrorism prosecutions.

#### **The Changing Landscape of Violent Extremism**

ion Program, opened the workshop by mapping current threats to peace and security and emphasizing preventative measures to address the root causes of violent extremism. Insurgencies and terrorist attacks continue to increase in failed and fragile states; white supremacist attacks in the U.S. continue to

outpace attacks from groups inspired by Daesh or al-Qaeda; and narratives of racial or religious purity and toxic forms of masculinity find currency online and in public discourse. At the same time, democratic norms are being eroded in the U.S. and abroad, the rule of law is under threat, and the political space is closing. With the securitization and politicization of terrorism, emergency laws and states of exception have become the new norm.

These problems are global, but in desperate need of localized, context-driven solutions that

## Legal and Psycho-Social Aspects of Rehabilitation

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primary concern of participants from early on. This includes figuring out how to help the thousands of foreign fighters and their families in Syrian northeastern Syria, those who have returned home in need of rehabilitation and reintegration, and those who were arrested in the early days of the Syrian civil war for attempting to travel. For religious and community leaders, developing the knowledge and skills to deal with these issues is an acute and growing need.

To close this gap, a Belgian lawyer and specialist in terrorism cases addressed participants on the complex profiles of returnees and their prosecution in Europe. He argued that there is no single profile of foreign fighters in Belgium, a fact confirmed by workshop participants from France, Tunisia, and Morocco who deal with these cases. The lawyer said that the young people he has worked with were motivated by what Daesh and others offered. In an impoverished neighborhood in Paris or Brussels, in a one-

told that you are nothing, will be nothing. And [then] you are told that you can be part of a revolutionary project where you can save a whole people! Instead of fighting jihadis, we would do better to stop making

The lawyer explained that, given the public fear of terrorism in Europe, the rate and aggressiveness of terrorism prosecutions increased dramatically after the rise of Daesh and the terrorist attacks in Europe in 2015-16. The public anguish over these attacks created a toxic environment; what counts as radicalization in France is oversimplified – a beard or clothing or even prayer become, for the security services, indicators of violent extremism. Terrorism prosecutions are politicized and occur

are taken as evidence of terrorism. For example, legal debate in

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extremism. The Moroccan cohort just concluded its first training with youth on media literacy and civic engagement. Like the Belgian project, the goal is to encourage the creativity and innovation of youth to turn them into positive agents of change.

sign, monitoring, and evaluation expert, participants from the new cohort will refine their projects and implementation strategy in their fourth and last workshop.

Participants also often emphasized the importance of building and maintaining a network of practice for their work. For example, after the second workshop, a young imam from Tunis traveled to Belgium and France to meet independently with other members of the cohort, tour their projects, and learn what they are doing. Participants from the current cohort are planning documentaries and podcasts, youth engagement, the training of imams, and social media campaigns.

Participants requested the continued engagement of the Center and said they look forward to meeting with, and learning from, the first cohort of religious and community leaders. Rehabilitation and reintegration of returned fighters, women, and especially children, as well as rights-