



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by The Journalists and Writers Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Women's Empowerment as Key Factor in Countering Violent Extremism**

The Journalists and Writers Foundation believes that the role of women in international peace and security needs a strong support. It is generally recognized that women are disproportionately affected by acts of extremism and terrorist violence. Many observers also believe that women have strong motivations for preventing such acts. At the same time, an increasing number of women supporting and joining violent extremist groups is witnessed.

Countering violent extremism is a topic high on the policy agenda of many governments around the world. However, understanding the gendered dimensions of violent extremism, especially in the policies concerned with preventing and countering violent extremism has fallen short.

The ground-breaking United Nations Security Council Resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) explicitly recognized the link between the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Nevertheless, a coherent international framework is still needed. Indeed, women are not one cohesive group, and as men, they play multiple roles in societies. They can be victims, enablers, and actors for positive change — each requires a different response and approach. Moreover, there is little research and data with respect to these various roles that women occupy.

The Journalists and Writers Foundation believes that a greater understanding of the processes of radicalization requires greater understanding of the gender dynamics within institutions and the society as a whole. Consideration of gender has been largely absent in strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism. Men and boys are assumed to be the key targets of countering violent extremism efforts. The roles of women and girls in violent extremism are generally dismissed as anomalous or marginal. From the security sector to community elders and religious leaders, countering violent extremism efforts often privilege men.

However, by approaching gender in this limited way, national and international actors miss some key elements that fuel violent extremism, and thus they miss opportunities for more human rights-compliant and effective countering violent extremism efforts. Best practices recognize that the causes of violent extremism are highly localized, context-specific, and tied to socialization processes — and that the responses will need to also be multidimensional. A true gender lens will allow us to perceive how the social experience of gender differs across specific contexts and influences the push and pull factors of violent extremism. A genuine gender perspective will highlight specific policy blind spots — that is, oversimplifying women's roles as only victims, perpetrators, and/or preventers. It enables a deeper understanding of how these roles interact with each other, as well as with other gender realities in a community. Addressing the complexities of gender helps us understand how terrorist violence may encourage women and girls to participate in countering violent extremism, but also how gender discriminatory government policies, such as a lack of education, can impede their participation in countering violent extremism efforts. Similarly, the effects of gender discriminatory countering violent extremism and counterterrorism measures, such as anti-terrorism financing

rules that cut off funds to small organizations or laws that criminalize women's rights defenders, can actually inadvertently undermine counterterrorism efforts by such organizations. These complexities invite caution with regard to those approaches that seek to subsume the promotion of gender equality, and all women, peace, and security issues, into the countering violent extremism agenda.

It has also to seek to analyse how traditional stereotypes, attitudes and behaviours affect women and men and how they may inadvertently encourage violent extremism. To sum it up, a gendered perspective in countering violent extremism examines these issues from the point of view of both women and men, and will seek to identify differences in their needs and priorities, and in their abilities or potential to promote nonviolence and peacebuilding. It will seek guidance from the tenants of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the principle of gender equality. The latter is a critical element in the empowerment of women and the strengthening of international peace and security. Violent extremism is most effectively countered through increased education, better critical thinking and enhanced opportunities. These empowerment concepts manifest in the impact a woman has within a family and community. In the words of the former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, "There is no developmental strategy more beneficial to society as a whole—women and men alike — than the one which involves women as central players."

#### **She4All — Mobilizing the Youth for Gender-Equality**

Being aware of this, The Journalists and Writers Foundation started 2015 the international Youth-Project, "She4All" in order to mobilize the Youth for Gender-Equality. The first year's focus was on women in decision-making positions, this year's focus will be on the role of women's empowerment in countering violent extremism. As a means to overcome the existing gender inequalities, the project participants critically reflect on socially ascribed gender roles and their overall impact on society. This, The Journalists and Writers Foundation believes, is fundamental to discover potentials for improvement and bring concrete proposals that include gender-specific issues of both women and men. Creating awareness among young boys and girls on this extremely important issue, The Journalists and Writers Foundation aims to contribute to the establishment of a level playground for future generations that it is a subjective responsibility for the present generation to leave a more peaceful and humane world. Without a doubt, this is only possible through sustainable development and the role of women's empowerment to sustainable development is very essential.

Consequently, they will acquire a more comprehensive perspective on the issue which will include a variety of solution-approaches and realize the context-sensitive difficulties concerning gender equality. In the end students will be required to write a "Call for Action" to improve gender equality and voice global and local solution-approaches — together, hand in hand.

In a broader sense, the project She4All will contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals No. 5, 8,10 and 17 of the United Nations post- 2015 agenda: Recognizing that power relations between girls and boys, men and women are unequal, and that these inequalities should be addressed, The Journalists and Writers Foundation tries to commit to address discrimination in all its forms. Through

raising awareness and understanding of the youth about the importance of women's empowerment in preventing violent extremism, it will give women the possibility to stand up against extremism.

### **Call to the United Nations**

Supporting an exchange of best practices: Examples from all over the World illustrate that contexts of violent conflict can provide important lessons to be learned for women's engagement against Violent Extremism. By deconstructing patriarchal interpretations of gender roles, trainings can show participants how patriarchal views fuel gender-based violence during conflict and how they can be challenged in everyday life. This type of initiatives sets the premise for a greater understanding of gender and can pave the way for new countering violent extremism initiatives in various communities.

Organization of activities and trainings designed to facilitate women's access to cultural, religious and political education might enable them to better challenge violent extremist narratives. Such narratives often rely on disputable interpretations of facts and religious tenets which, if left uncontested, might appear as the only "truth". These activities and trainings should be organized around the ideas of tolerance and pluralism.

Specific trainings could also be designed and delivered to facilitate women's participation in the public sphere and increase their interaction with public authorities. Although such activities may lift a barrier to women's engagement, there also needs to be a change in authorities' perception of women and willingness to cooperate with them.

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