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Report of the Regional Workshop

**Sensitization and Capacity-Building for the
Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central
Africa: Engaging Institutional and Civilian Actors
in Cameroon, CAR and Chad**

Yaoundé, Cameroon, 26-28 March 2019

ABBREVIATIONS

CMA: Civil-Military Actions

IGA: Income Generating Activities

AUCSRT: African Union Centre for Study and Research on Terrorism, Algiers

ECCAS: Economic Community of Central African States

CEIDES: African Centre for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies, Yaoundé

DCAF: Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Geneva

FDFA: Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Bern, Switzerland

VE: Violent extremism

DSF: Defence and Security Forces

IO: International Organizations

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

CSO: Civil Society Organization

PVE: Prevention of Violent Extremism

SSR: Security System Reform

CAR: Central African Republic

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

AU: African Union

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS.....	1
SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	5
TITLE 1: CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE	7
TITLE 2: ANSWERS FOR PVE (PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM).....	8
A- DIALOGUE AS KEY ELEMENT OF PVE	8
B- A NEW LOGIC OF SECURITY: THE ROLE OF THE DSF IN THE PVE	10
C- A NEW APPROACH TO JUSTICE: PREVENTION	11
D- THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH ON PVE.....	12
E- THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA, OSC AND WOMEN	13
F- THE SYNERGY OF ACTORS IN PVE.....	14
CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PVE.....	15
ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS	20

SUMMARY

The initiative of "Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) in Africa" was launched in Dakar in 2016, before continuing in Ndjamena in June 2017 and Algiers in June 2018. In Cameroon, and in the context of these Conversations, the African Centre for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES), the focal point for this initiative in the Lake Chad Basin and Central Africa, together with Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), organized a series of three meetings on the Prevention of Violent Extremism. The first was held in Yaoundé in November 2017, the second in Maroua in July 2018 and the third, which is the subject of this report, in Yaoundé from 26 to 28 March 2019, under the topic: **"Regional Awareness and Capacity Building Workshop for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa: Engaging Institutional and Civil Actors in Cameroon, Chad and CAR"**.

As a first step, participants addressed the causes of violent extremism (VE) in the three countries concerned. These causes are complex but could, according to them, have their origin mainly in the difficulty for citizens to make their voices heard without resorting to violence, political violence, poverty, stigmatization, exclusion, low schooling and the absence of the State in the most fragile areas.

There are many possible responses to these findings. However, participants identified dialogue as an essential, even indispensable tool for preventing VE. This dialogue can take various forms depending on where and why it is being implemented. For example, the Workshop favoured the organisation of inclusive dialogues within countries affected by VE, so that the aspirations of all social categories are taken into account in policy discussions. This dialogue should include both political actors, the different components of society, and the armed groups themselves. Participants also stressed on the need for the army, police and judiciary forces to base their actions on the basic principles of human security with a view of reducing the mistrust of the civilian population towards these institutions.

Such an approach requires the assistance of researchers, civil society organizations (CSOs), political actors, the State and international organizations (IOs), as well as active synergy between them.

Finally, the Workshop did not only examine the needs in the field of prevention of violent extremism, but also provided a forum for participants to engage, strengthen links and provide tools for dialogue processes. The realization that exchanges between actors from diverse backgrounds were an important support to the PVE efforts enabled participants to envisage partnerships that would consolidate their attitude towards violence.

At the end of this work, several proposals were formulated by the participants in order to enable actors from Cameroon, Chad, CAR and other countries to face the challenges of the PVE implementation. Among these proposals, we can enumerate:

- The implementation of inclusive economic, social and development policies that take into account the needs and aspirations of populations (they must therefore be consulted and integrated in the development of these policies) so that they will no longer use violence as a means of expression;
- The use of dialogue as an essential and indispensable tool in the development and implementation of PVE policies;
- The triggering of early warning when the first signs of VE are observable in society;
- Taking into account the mandate and composition of the DSFs as the main unifying agent of the population, i.e. by integrating all components of the nation on an equal footing;
- Promoting the integration of the PVE in the DSF formations;
- The development of the civil-military character of DSF actions by taking full account of the needs of the population;
- The integration of women and young people at all levels of PVE-related activities;
- The setting up of a synergy of actions bringing together all stakeholders involved in the PVE, in order to share their experiences and converge their objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Central Africa is victim of several forms of violent extremism (VE) which constitute a real obstacle to peace and development in the region. Considering the area composed of Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR), there are about fourteen (14) active armed groups in CAR (where they control about 80% of the territory); in the Far North of Cameroon, armed factions of Boko Haram have been increasing atrocities against the civilian population since 2013; in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, more than forty armed groups are also active; and in Chad, rebellions and various factions of Boko Haram continue to be active. These armed groups have in common, the instrumentalization of extreme violence, the intensification of political pressure on States, and the contestation, weakening and even erasure of institutions at the local and regional levels. On the basis of these threats, former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon declared in December 2015 that violent extremism "*undermines peace and security, the enjoyment of human rights and development, and no country or region is safe from its effects*"¹.

Awareness of the existence of this collective threat in the region is an important element in the development of a regional policy that can limit its development or even help to prevent its emergence. Moreover, while there is agreement on the danger of the VE phenomenon for the countries of the region, it is imperative to investigate on the causes and draw the necessary practical consequences.

With this in mind, a series of meetings and dialogues were initiated in 2016, first in Dakar, then in June 2017 in N'Djamena, and in June 2018 in Algiers. In the form of "Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism"² these meetings directly led to the Seminars and Workshops that subsequently concerned Central Africa.

Thus, a first "Regional Seminar for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) in Central Africa" was held in Yaoundé in November 2017³, followed by a "Participatory dialogue for the prevention of violent extremism in and around the Far North of Cameroon", in Maroua, in

¹Plan of Action of the United Nations Secretary-General to Prevent Violent Extremism (24 December 2015)
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674.

²"Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Sahel-Sahara" /Dakar, June 2016 :
www.ipinst.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/09/1609_Investing-in-Peace-FRENCH.pdf
www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/1609_Investing-in-PeaceENGLISH.pdf

- N'Djamena, June 2017 :

www.ipinst.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/08/IPI-E-RPT-Chad-Meeting-NoteFrench.pdf
www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/IPI-E-RPT-Chad-MeetingNoteEnglish.pdf

- Algiers, June 2018 :

www.ipinst.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/09/1809_Algers-Meeting-Note-French.pdf
www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809_Algers-Meeting-NoteEnglish.pdf

³ Regional workshop on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin
Yaoundé, 27 -28 November 2017
www.ceides.org/newsletter/final%20report%201.pdf

July 2018⁴. Both meetings were organised by the African Centre for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES) and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

CEIDES, the focal point of the above-mentioned "Regional Conversations for the PVE" initiative for the Lake Chad Basin and Central Africa region, then initiated and organised, again in partnership with the Swiss FDFA, the workshop, subject of this report took place on 26, 27 and 28 March 2019 in Yaoundé (Cameroon). It is therefore the third stage of this sub-regional programme.

Entitled "Regional workshop on sensitization and capacity-building for the prevention of violent extremism in Central Africa", the meeting focused on the tools, knowledge, know-how, support and attitudes that all actors must have and demonstrate in order to carry out PVE activities.

This workshop first of all called for a change of perception on the reality of violence. Whether it is public or private, licit or illicit, violence starts from a motivation that it is important to discern and understand (understanding does not mean justifying). Looking at violence through new glasses inevitably leads to a human security approach to better control it by focusing on the population. It is a viewpoint that carries with it a political will: that of transforming the causes of violence by providing concrete responses to the populations concerned, of which dialogue with all is one of the essential components.

Moreover, this meeting, like the previous ones, proposed an informal and interactive framework for discussion aimed at strengthening everyone's commitment to prevent VE. The aim was to provide a meeting place for women and men with different professional trajectories, but who are called upon to listen to and understand one another with a common objective: to reject violent extremism and promote acts of prevention that impels a change of attitude by all actors concerned. On the basis of concrete cases drawn from their personal and professional backgrounds, the participants in this meeting were thus able to share experiences related to VE and PVE, and propose avenues for future action.

This report first of all underlines the need for a political understanding of the complex causes of VE in Africa and in the world. The causes reported here come from personal accounts, testimonies and analyses. Secondly, the report examines the need of rethinking the logic of participant engagement: working to prevent violence requires attitudes and skills that are not the same as those that are mobilized in the struggle "against" violence. It is, in fact, a matter of restructuring both political behaviour and judicial, military, social and scientific approaches. Political restructuring is not self-evident; it comes up against many obstacles linked to the contradictions and motivations of the actors. This is the reason why the third part of this report highlights the exchanges that took place on the participants' skills and

⁴ Inclusive dialogue for the prevention of Violent Extremism in the Far North Region of Cameroon and its surroundings, Maroua, 24 -25 July 2018

: http://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/final-report22_10_2018-.pdf

competences in the field of PVE, stressing on the importance of a synergy between actors at individual, institutional and international levels.

Title 1: CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE

Participants in the Workshop began by deconstructing the catastrophic vision of conflicts in Africa. Contrary to all the appearances, the African continent today has fewer armed conflicts than it did fifteen years ago. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the new forms of asymmetrical conflicts where violence of a political and/or ideological nature mixes with conflicts of a social and economic nature currently claim more victims among civilian populations (80% of victims since the 2000s) than traditional conflicts. These new faces of armed violence therefore require the issue of their prevention to be placed on national and international public policy agendas. It is more in the light of this dual perspective that the plural, socio-historical causes of violent extremism were presented during the Workshop. At the international level, the major powers have been criticised for not investing enough in the PVE, keeping the repressive response high on the international agenda. The Workshop demonstrated that the prevention of violent extremism requires from all States a voluntary and therefore political commitment in terms of anticipation, immediate and long-term action on the root causes of VE.

These causes are complex. The outcomes of the Workshop clearly demonstrated that it is difficult to define the causes of VE in terms of their nature, as they are interrelated and concern the economy, land, pasture, water disputes, governance and justice. The religious element has not been considered as the only explanatory factor for VE but, depending on the case, as opportunism (an opportunity for the actors of violence to give a spiritual or ideological justification for their actions), a marginal vector or, on the contrary, a foundation for violent extremism. Factors such as the absence or weakness of the State, its disconnection from the socio-economic realities experienced by local populations, particularly those in regions farthest from capital cities and urban centres, the breaking of the social link between the population and political elites, who are often not very interested in the daily experience of the lower class, were also mentioned during the work of this Workshop. Exogenous causes, such as foreign influence also proved to play an important role. The Central African Republic is an edifying example of this in Central Africa, illustrating the tangle of causes of violence that come from outside and inside. The fragility of the CAR State and its inability to fulfil its key missions are, indeed, added to external influences in its chronic instability.

The participants stressed the links that VE presents with cross-border criminal phenomena, such as large-scale banditry, militias, trafficking of all kinds, including arms and exploitation of the subsoil, revealing that the porosity of the borders as one of the main causes. Violent extremism feeds on robberies and kidnapping as witnessed in Cameroon, in Far North and Adamawa Regions. This socio-political and economic marginalisation of community groups such as the Bororos and the Kanouris whose populations are victims and actors of this VE account for these conflicts.

The Workshop also strongly emphasized that the failings of the State do not only favour VE, but it is its rules of governance that need to be reconsidered in order to better take into account the socio-political and economic needs of the populations, as well as the building of alliances between the State, civil society organizations (CSOs) and international partners for the construction of collective peace and common welfare.

Title 2: RESPONSES FORPVE

A- Dialogue as part of the PVE

One of the major emphases of the Workshop was dialogue. This was presented both as a challenge to VE and as a central response to the PVE. Its absence was recognized as one of the causes of violence when people's grievances or demands cannot be expressed otherwise. However, it has been recognized as indispensable for the resolution of conflicts, including those in the Central African Republic or those pitting the States and populations of the sub-region against the extremists of Boko Haram.

Dialogue is never definitive. It is both a permanent need and a flexible process. It requires very different formulas depending on the type of violence. It requires taking into account, in an inclusive manner, all the actors concerned. For its implementation, a preliminary identification of the subject to be addressed and the participants (according to their skills and willingness to engage in dialogue) is necessary. The advantages of dialogue are no longer to be proven, but the difficulties in structuring it persist, in particular between armed groups and political actors and, more broadly, between those who govern and those who are governed in terms of inclusive dialogue. However, it must be articulated on a case-by-case basis. Careful identification of each actor in the inclusive dialogue will help to avoid botched processes that sow the seeds of future outbreaks of violence. In the specific case of dialogue with armed groups, involving ex-combatants in the dialogue (e.g. leaders of armed groups integrated into the government or simply ex-combatants who have returned to their communities) helps to address the political, social and economic issues of armed groups who often have an economic and financial interest in sustaining violence. This is the case in CAR, for example, where non-State armed groups participate in the national dialogue but weigh their military and economic benefits more heavily than those of the populations in the territories they control.

However, whatever the difficulties related to the specific challenges of the dialogue, one should not depart from its imperative necessity in times of war as well as in times of peace, because, in the end, there always comes a moment for negotiation and reconciliation and the on-going task of peace-building. In its purpose, therefore, dialogue should always follow the course of the general interest, which requires compromise, patience and the will to succeed.

In inclusive dialogue, both the governed and the rulers are stakeholders in the discussions. The participants stressed the extent to which local actors on the ground are essential partners in the dialogue, even much more than the international actors whose expertise is sought but who sometimes supplant them. These local actors can be CSO leaders, researchers, local

authorities, judges, community leaders (religious or traditional) or journalists, psychosocial workers, doctors, educators, teachers, women and youth. They are often the first to be in contact with vulnerable populations but also with violent extremists or their relatives. Depending on the case, they may be able to better understand the context and pave the way for constructive dialogue.

The place of the debate is also important. Some participants stressed the need for dialogue leaders to travel to the place where the people they wish to exchange with live and to bring all those concerned to that place. In their experience, youth groups often welcome this type of dialogue as a great opportunity for discussion and exchange. They feel considered because personalities, authorities and leaders of civil society have come to them.

It was pointed out that dialogue was neither the consequence of a weakness of a political actor facing events beyond his control, nor the response to an injunction from "adversaries". When one is the depositary of the constitutional order, he who believes in the value of his State is ready to reach out to others and build peace with them.

Dialogue is an important practice and attitude, whether in the family, the profession, the village community, the administration or civil society. Dialogue implies openness to sit down at a discussion table with the other, to exchange and to understand them. The construction of dialogue is also linked to a necessary introspection to be pursued in the light of the four fundamental moral points of love, honesty, selflessness and purity. These moral points are bearers of individual transformation and lead the individual to seek what is good for him and for his society. They also allow the individual to correct his own mistakes and to know how to put points of view into perspective.

According to the participants in the workshop, societies affected by VE are thus the image of the individual. Indeed, it is the individual who makes it possible for his society to fall into violence, through his behaviour and the socialisation through which his personality has been shaped. It is therefore necessary to refocus on the individual in order to build an open and sincere dialogue, which makes it possible to say that the PVE consists in putting the human being back at the centre of concerns. It requires the human beings to sharpen their ability to listen to and understand the other.

When it comes to engaging in dialogue, it was stressed that the responsibility of political actors is fundamental and depends both on the posture of the political actor himself and the perception that other actors may have of him. When political actors decide on concrete actions concerning the community, even if it is by their own conviction, some social actors in the PVE often feel powerless because they cannot participate in the elaboration of these decisions. They feel that they have a kind of leaden blanket over them, that protects the decision-makers, but does not allow them to intervene. It is therefore all the more important for the political actor to show the willingness to engage in dialogue (and to do so effectively), in order to overcome this particular obstacle

B- A new logic of security: the role of DSFs in the PVE

The PVE is not always unanimously supported by the Defence and Security Forces (DSF). Although they are often engaged in civil-military actions (CMAs), some security authorities continue to believe that prevention is not consistent with their mission of maintaining law and order, fighting crime and guaranteeing the defence and security of the national territory. It was reminded that, in the three countries considered during this Workshop, the national armies are the heirs of the former colonial armies. The crisis of confidence between the DSF and the populations partly stems from this legacy, from the fact that the colonial army was not intended to serve the nation, but to repress any desire to contravene the interests of the colonial power. There is therefore a real challenge to be met in terms of the deep meaning of the defence and security mandate in the service of the population - it is the meaning of human security.

Although the predominantly repressive role of the DSF is often decried because of the abuses it unfortunately often generates, these forces can be an important factor in the PVE, as shown by successful PVE experiences by the DSF in other African countries (e.g. Senegal). Indeed, West and Central Africa face similar threats. Interactions between DSFs and other actors of violence are mostly on the register of confrontation, far from dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. This explains why the DSF, too, have been called upon to take ownership of the concept of human security and to contribute to peace-building through dialogue at all possible levels. This visionary approach to the contribution of the DSF to the construction of the rule of law does not, however, reduce the central role they have to play. That is why good security governance is about extending political participation and respect for human rights within the DSFs as well. This is, for example, the work being pursued by the DCAF (Democratic Control of Armed Forces), it was pointed out. This institution makes it possible to accompany DSF reforms on issues of transparency, the fight against terrorism and the construction of social cohesion.

Through this strategic priority, the DSF can rebuild the social link between the army and the nation, while benefiting from the intelligence essential to their action. When anticipation and prevention are part of their missions, in addition to combat operations, DSFs become essential contributors to eradicating the root causes of VE. However, this preventive role presupposes the existence of three preconditions: (i) the composition of DSFs must reflect the sociological diversity of the country so that they have a truly national dimension, (ii) the presence within DSFs of all the competences that can contribute to the prevention of VE, and (iii) the effective presence of DSFs throughout the national territory.

In addition, the implementation of CMAs can affect a wide range of activities: health, transport, roads, schools and education, support for sensitization of the most vulnerable people, and the integration of young people into social life (for example through the national civic service). Equally important, however, is the creation of inclusive consultation frameworks on local and regional security and defence issues, giving people and other professionals, including women, the opportunity to voice their needs and provide their vision on how to maintain security and build peace.

As for security system reform (SSR), it must be carried out on a case-by-case basis by adapting it to real threats, even if some challenges are common to all theatres of operation. This reform must revitalise the links between the army and the population, in particular by integrating the PVE into the training of the DSF, which will contribute to change.

In addition, the army must be able to accept criticism and be self-critical itself. In the fight against terrorism, they sometimes commit abuses that are not deliberately planned. What is important for the population is how the State responds to it - for recognition of the act of violence is already a form of appeasement of the victims' need for justice.

C- A new approach to justice: prevention

Workshop participants acknowledged that it is complicated in the era of combating VE to know whether the role of justice actors is to punish a crime or to prevent those that might occur. Judges who are, most of the time, caught in the middle between victims' calls for revenge and the application of the law must imperatively give priority to the law in all circumstances, according to the view clearly expressed at the Workshop. The use of an essentially repressive justice system is counterproductive when it feeds the ideological and anti-governmental discourse of extremists, especially when the judge, instead of playing a preventive role, limits his or her action to punishment. The justice system, particularly the criminal justice system, can indeed make it possible to explore in depth the circumstances of a particular VE tragedy and to highlight certain shortcomings or defects in the warning systems. It is because the justice system will be able to demonstrate dysfunctions in institutions or social structures that effective measures can be taken within the framework of the PVE.

The Workshop also stressed the need to take the prison environment into account in the PVE. Indeed, recognised violent extremists cannot be allowed to rub shoulders in prisons with ordinary prisoners. The risk of radicalisation of the latter is greatly increased. Isolating violent extremists in special sectors is one possible solution, but this option is difficult to implement in contexts of prison overcrowding. Another solution is the establishment of education, awareness-raising and rehabilitation programmes specifically dedicated to these prisoners.

Preventive justice also involves the protection of the actors involved and the rehabilitation of violent ex-extremists. Magistrates, repentant persons, former militiamen, victims and witnesses, who are potentially subject to reprisals by violent extremists, must be protected by an effective legislative framework. Well-adapted rehabilitation programmes must be designed for former recruits and implemented. The administration of justice must be responsible for this, as most of the people who end up in the VE are vulnerable and should benefit from adequate programmes when they come before the courts.

In addition, justice actors face three additional challenges. The first is that of adapting legislative frameworks to the PVE. Laws must be non-discriminatory and not stigmatise certain social groups. The second is that of building skills and capacities. Shortcomings in the proper implementation of procedures to address both individual and social injustices arise

from frustrations that fuel feelings of exclusion and the possible use of violence to obtain alternative justice. People may seek justice through violence when the State fails to meet its obligations. Finally, fundamentally, what message does a society send to itself when the judiciary is hyperactively mobilised when it comes to this group of "criminals" (the violent extremists), when the same apparatus does not show the same responsiveness to the prevailing crime? Is this not precisely one of those biases that must be corrected in order to prevent frustration?

Faced with these challenges, an effective mobilisation of the justice system and the guarantee of its full independence placed at the service of the construction of the rule of law and the respect of citizens in the face of abuses, will give back its full sense of regulation to justice.

D- The development of research on VE

The role of research was widely discussed at the Workshop, as researchers have an important responsibility in terms of the quality of the work produced, the scientific methodology adopted, the collection of field data, the reflection of the realities of populations and the causes of violence, and the synthesis of research findings to make them intelligible to a non-specialized reader.

The encounter between research and politics, the use or non-use, and even the misuse of research by politics, raises the question of how to get the authorities to take into account and listen to researchers so that they take their responsibilities on the basis of a better understanding of VE.

The role of researchers is crucial to ensure that the realities of violence are well understood, that the missions of each PVE actor are better oriented and that institutional responses are better adapted. Researchers must learn to orient and prioritize the representations of the world that are proposed and sometimes imposed on them, to reject them if necessary and, above all, to defend, if need be, those that convey the values to which they believe. Research must therefore constantly rethink its relationship with politics and avoid being trapped in a relationship of dependence (financial, institutional) that handicaps it in its role as an objective critic.

“Will debates, like those initiated during this Workshop, help to reorient the policies pursued by our leaders?” the participants wondered. They acknowledged that the path of the PVE is not always easy and requires commitments from all social actors.

E- The role of the media, CSOs and women

The media are both tools and actors in the PVE process. The Workshop recommended the creation of subsidized community radio stations and listening groups that record information and relay it to communities in remote areas, the dissemination of messages (radio or posters) in local languages, especially in rural areas, the active presence of the media in social networks for proximity communication, the production of alternative discourse and the management of false information.

Some media, such as community radio stations, operate in contexts where the State is not effective and there is real scarcity of public or private institutions undertaking prevention work. This is the case, for example, in Kasai in the DRC. The aim of community radio stations such as Radio Hirondelle is to demonstrate that just because young people in Kasai have problems with hunger, electricity, unemployment and water, peace journalism initiatives should not be postponed to a later date. Peace is therefore high on the media agenda.

In cases where the State is absent and/or ignores social demands, the role of the media actor is to give a voice to those who are neglected, who suffer from indifference, but without substituting the State. The media actor must be a facilitator. However, some media, for fear of reprisals, do not play this early warning role when society is threatened by VE or State inaction. By depriving the society of information, they give free rein to rumours that may provoke reactions unrelated to the facts. Sometimes too, the media sensationalise the news of violence, but refrain from questioning the motives behind it.

In the framework of the PVE, the State has the responsibility to communicate through these tools, which are in fact mostly not State resources. Other actors such as CSOs can also have and even have a crucial role, alongside the State, in denouncing and sensitizing the populations thus exposed to all kinds of discourse inciting hatred and violence.

Furthermore, forgotten CSOs can play a crucial role, as can the media, in the policy of social recognition of the rejected. Some are engaged in advocacy work aimed, in particular, at getting the State to take into account gender-based violence that endangers the lives of girls and women. Others are working to ensure that the victims of VE are not abandoned. Others take care of children who have lost their birth certificates during armed conflict, essential documents for their schooling.

Testimonies from CSO members during the workshop attest to the commitment of their organizations in providing access to education for children identified as both extremists and children of extremists. Some have invested in the education of disadvantaged children to ensure that education, which is central to the PVE, is not a field of social exclusion. For young people who have income-generating activity (IGA) projects, some CSOs support them through training in the management of collective property, while others attach particular importance to the investment of women in the PVE.

The vision of women as sole victims of VE is no longer valid, if ever it was. They are now seen as actors who can be involved in both VE and PVE. It is therefore important to

determine their relationship to violence and the reasons why some women practice it. While there is often talk of constraints on women's involvement in VE groups, many testimonies point to the possibility of escaping from the inferior social role they often play in their communities (the power of patriarchy), of which forced marriage is only one facet. Nevertheless, field experiences show that their capacity for resilience is extraordinary. In African society, the mother plays several roles, which can be an asset or a risk. Women probably have a better knowledge than men of the social components of VE due to their importance in the family root. They do not turn to a violent extremist group out of ideological adherence, but rather out of an instinct for family preservation, as a bulwark against the absence or failure of the community or the State.

Finally, it was stressed that women's security needs are not necessarily the same as men's and that effective participation of women in VE responses is essential. The recognition of women's role in violence prevention, because women have different and complementary needs and skills to men, still needs to be consolidated, it was stressed during the work.

F- Synergy of actors in PVE

Workshop participants stressed the importance for PVE actors to correlate several types of knowledge, skills and know-how, various experiences of different generations, in order to contribute to providing an operational response to the problems they face. These encourage them to better discover the instrument that is the synergy of actors involved in the PVE. This does not go without difficulty. State (or private) elites are often reluctant to the idea of collaboration, especially with those who criticise them. The NGOs lack resources even though they are permanently in the field. PVE policy is, therefore, often developed by governments without real consultation. It is in this respect that the synergy of actors is an essential element of a PVE policy that can achieve results.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PVE

The Regional Sensitization and Capacity Building Workshop for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa aimed mainly at strengthening the commitment to prevention of actors involved in the fight against VE, to strengthen everyone's knowledge of PVE by comparing experiences in a large number of African countries and particularly in Central Africa.

The general objective of this meeting was based on capacity building, in order to bring institutional and civil actors from Cameroon, Chad and CAR to integrate and effectively practice of VE prevention instruments in policies, strategies, programmes and daily practices.

At the end of the proceedings, participants stated that they had deepened their understanding of the challenges of dialogue. For example, they learned taking into account the individual dimension of dialogue, PVE and violence. They were built on the importance of research in

the PVE, on the indispensable involvement of women in prevention, on the care of victims, child soldiers and former soldiers, as well as on the reforms (judicial, security, political) necessary for the PVE. Participants said they had a better understanding of the consequences of social frustration, marginalisation and exclusion in the *raison d'être* of the VE, as well as the capacity of dialogue to transform conflicts and defuse tensions.

Specifically, five objectives were assigned to the work of the Workshop.

- Firstly, this work aimed at improving the participants' skills in mastering the different concepts and tools of the PVE and their modalities of implementation. An overview of the different forms that the PVE can take, its logic of action and its political and social operability enabled the participants to appropriate these tools and to refine their analyses of the complexity of VE and its prevention.
- Secondly, analysing the notion of inclusive dialogue in the broad sense, but also that of dialogue with armed groups and the place of militias and ex-combatants in such a dialogue. The different experiences of the participants in the field of dialogue made it possible to grasp the grammar of this concept, to fragment it in its different dimensions, and to provide the audience with a better understanding of this tool.
- Thirdly, it was about appropriating the PVE by the actors. An appropriation which was expressed through a strong capacity of the participants to recount their experiences of the PVE and to take into account those of others.
- Fourthly, the need for synergy among PVE actors at the local, national, regional and international levels was stressed, and the Workshop itself provided a space for dialogue and synergy among participants.
- Fifth, the work also aimed at improving and/or developing national and regional PVE action plans. In this section, the need to take into account new perspectives for analysis, intervention in the field and collaboration between actors was stressed. It also noted that the development of such action plans, as well as their implementation, are opportunities to change the ways of working and approaches by encouraging the promotion of inclusive processes.

Conclusions

At the end of three days of work, several conclusions emerged.

In terms of understanding:

- VE was analysed during this workshop from a socio-historical perspective. Participants demonstrated that it is a reality that has existed for decades and that it is an obstacle to development initiatives and economic and social well-being. One of the challenges of violent extremism is the difficulty for governments to find solutions to the structural problems (poverty, education, social exclusion) faced by their citizens and in particular to engage in policy approaches that would challenge the dominant institutional hierarchies.
- VE was also characterized by participants as a phenomenon of extreme mobility and difficult to predict. An illustration was made in countries such as Chad, Cameroon and CAR, through the existence of nomadic groups.
- The complexity of the causes of VE was illustrated during the Workshop by several endogenous and exogenous factors. These included the absence of the State, the refusal to listen to local and border populations targeted by extremists, the lack of capacity of regional authorities (Central Africa) in understanding the causes of conflicts from their inception, the difficulty in implementing corrective counter-measures appropriate to the causes when they are identified, and recourse to political repression.

In terms of responses:

- Going beyond VE in such a context cannot be limited to a repressive approach, but should extend to all the causes that make young and old people vulnerable (and therefore easy to recruit by violent groups). The problem of VE thus inevitably leads to the problem of good governance of States and the establishment of the rule of law.
- The role of the PVE actors, including governments, DSFs, the judiciary, religious and traditional leaders, local communities, research centres, the media, etc. was discussed at length. While the role of some may have seemed self-evident, this was not the case for the role of DSFs and justice personnel. It was demonstrated that beyond their interventions downstream of VE (through the repressive component), it is possible to assign an active preventive role to DSFs.
- Participants also stressed that the mobilisation of different actors to fight VE should be accompanied by a synergy of actions, listening capacities, and a mastery of PVE tools.
- While many initiatives exist to prevent violent extremism in Central Africa (many actors have been involved, many tools have been tested, many financial and logistical means have been mobilised), the lack of communication, coordination and cooperation unfortunately gives the impression that little has been done in terms of PVE on the ground, and that there is little alternative to the military response.

- It is, therefore, important from now on to foster the creation of spaces for dialogue between PVE actors, extremists and victims of the VE by favouring a participatory approach through mutual listening, understanding, ownership, strategy and synergy.

The main conclusion reached is that a collective (in)action is perceptible through the lack of common strategies and opposition between actors in the fight against VE. For this reason, common frameworks for dialogue, exchange, reflection and regional conversations have been initiated by the FDFA, CEIDES and their partners in recent years. These conversations are a step, an effort and a path towards multiple collective actions. They deserve to be disseminated and discussed in other cenacles.

Proposals for implementing the PVE

Many proposals were made by the participants to enable everyone to take into account the importance of the PVE.

➤ General proposals

- Implementing inclusive economic, social and development policies that take into account the needs and aspirations of the people (they must therefore be consulted and integrated into the development of these policies) so that they no longer use violence as a means of expression;
- Fostering dialogue as an essential tool for the development and implementation of PVE policies;
- Taking into account data from scientific research, in order to better understand the root causes of VE and to better construct the PVE;
- Promoting education of the population in general and of women in particular on the role they can play in the PVE;
- Taking measures to resolve local conflicts before they escalate;
- Implementing policies to help young people out of economic precariousness, an essential cause of VE;
- taking into account women's aspirations in the development of PVE policies;
- Coordinating the rotation of public PVE actors in an efficient manner, so that they are not quickly relocated;
- Supervising teaching in Koranic schools and educational establishments, by introducing the PVE into the pedagogical objectives;
- Encouraging the involvement of political actors (including the opposition) and national assemblies in the PVE;
- Raising the interest of the private sector actors in the PVE so that they participate in the development of prevention policies.

➤ **Proposals concerning DSFs**

- Conceiving the mandate and composition of the DSF as the main unifying agent of the population, i.e. integrating all components of the nation on an equal basis;
- Promoting the integration of the PVE in the DSF training;
- Developing the civil-military character of DSF actions by taking full account of the needs of the population;
- Ensuring respect for the law in military interventions, in order to reduce the population's mistrust of the DSF, and develop knowledge of this law within the units;
- Reforming the intelligence services so that they direct their actions more towards the promotion of human security;
- Dedicating specific budget lines in the DSF budgets for PVE activities.

➤ **Proposals concerning justice sector actors**

- Correcting the shortcomings of the justice system and the abuses of the SDSs so that they are no longer a source of social frustration likely to fuel the VE;
- Establishing protocols for the protection of witnesses, justice actors and others involved in the PVE;
- Placing human rights and human security at the core of legal action against the VE.

➤ **Proposals for scientific research institutions and actors**

- Taking responsibility for disseminating PVE-related research so as to make it visible to as many citizens as possible;
- Developing systematic and documented studies based on empirical research that can be useful to policy makers engaged in the PVE.

➤ **Proposals for the medias**

- Promoting early warning when the first signs of VE are observable in society;
- Communicating for peace by taking into account the aspirations of all parties involved in actions of violence;
- Promoting dialogue, debate and discussion among populations so that they no longer need to resort to violence as a means of expression;

-Supporting community media and using social networks to promote the PVE.

➤ **Proposals for Workshop participants**

- Spreading information, discussions, exchanges and debates resulting from these regional conversations within their respective social networks;
- Continue to work in favour of the PVE on a daily basis, and change the way we look at violence by opening up to the values of tolerance, dialogue, human rights and human security;
- Integrating women and youth at all levels of PVE activities;
- Developing a synergy of actions bringing together all stakeholders involved in the PVE to share their experiences and converge their objectives.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS

❖ The African Centre for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES)

Since its creation and official launch in 2013, the African Centre for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies, in short (CEIDES), based in Yaoundé (Cameroon), has set itself the mission of building and engaging African expertise in favour of Peace and Development on the continent.

Within CEIDES, the Human Security Unit asserts its competence in the field of prevention of violent extremism, but also in areas such as peacebuilding, the conduct of international negotiations, civil peace intervention, conflict analysis and management, and transitional justice.

In the dynamics of the Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) in the Sahel-Sahara, held in Dakar (Senegal) in June 2016, in N'Djamena (Chad) in June 2017, and in Algiers (Algeria) in June 2018, CEIDES, the focal point for this initiative in the Lake Chad Basin and Central Africa, organized, together with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and with the support of the government of Cameroon, a series of three meetings on the prevention of violent extremism (PVE). The first was held in Yaoundé in November 2017, the second in Maroua in July 2018 and the third in Yaoundé in March 2019.

In the same vein, in partnership with the FDFA and at the initiative of the African Union's African Centre for Study and Research on Terrorism (CAERT-AU), CEIDES organised in Yaoundé in August 2019 the first Executive Course for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the countries of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

Violent extremism is gaining ground in Africa in general and in Central Africa in particular. The number of terrorist attacks there has increased considerably over the last two decades, causing great suffering and reversing development progress. For all these reasons, CEIDES is convinced that it is time to invest in prevention.

www.ceides.org

- Report of the regional seminar in Yaoundé, 27-28 November 2017: www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Rapport-final-.pdf
- Report of the Participatory Dialogue for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in and around the Far North of Cameroon, Maroua, Cameroon, 24-25 July 2018. <http://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Final-report-2.pdf>

❖ The Human Security Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) of Switzerland

Following the presentation by the UN Secretary-General of his Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism at the end of 2015, the Swiss FDFA has made this topic a priority and adopted a Foreign Policy Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in April 2016.

The Human Security Division of the FDFA, which is the Department's centre of competence for the implementation of political priorities in the areas of peace and security, has since been undertaking a range of advocacy activities in favour of this prevention approach focusing on the causes of violence and the alternatives that can be provided, and is mobilising its experts to carry out activities with its partners in the field.

In particular, it has launched, together with several other partners, the initiative of the Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Sahel-Sahara, the first edition of which took place in Dakar, Senegal, in June 2016, the second in N'Djamena, Chad, in June 2017 and the third in Algiers in June 2018. This space for dialogue brought together more than 500 personalities from various professional backgrounds from North, West and Central Africa - joined by some external experts and regional or international organizations active in these regions. Voluntarily informal in nature, these exchanges made it possible to address the sensitive and complex dimensions of this approach to preventing extreme violence (including its political nature) in a space and climate of openness. The aim is to provide a forum for exchange and dialogue on the prevention approach, to strengthen the links between the various players and to highlight/reinforce the positive initiatives representing concrete alternatives to EV that are being taken by players in these regions.

The Competence Centre of the FDFA serves both as coordinator of this initiative and provides its expertise in the animation of the spaces for dialogue.

www.dfae.admin.ch

- Summary of the Dakar meeting (2016): https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/1609_Investing-in-Peace-FRENCH.pdf
- Summary of the N'Djamena meeting (2017): <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/IPI-E-RPT-Chad-Meeting-NoteEnglish.pdf>
- Summary of the Algiers meeting (2018): https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809_Algiers-Meeting-Note-English.pdf