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## Fourth Regional Workshop for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa

“Consolidating the Prevention Approaches Through Experience  
Sharing and the Acquisition of Prevention Tools”

Bangui, CAR, 3<sup>rd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019

**FINAL REPORT**

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## Abstract

Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) entails a global approach that factors in all societal players. This approach aims at sustainably pre-empting violence where there is the temptation for groups to get armed to impose their views, values or political agenda using force. This pre-emptive approach is universal and differs from counter-terrorism in that, it delves into the causes of violence, analyses ways and means of forestalling its emergence, and figures out the application of peaceful, individual or public measures, of political, and societal nature. Listening to the other and dialogue are bedrock to this approach.

This clarion call for the prevention of violent extremism actually echoes the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism<sup>1</sup>, which recognises it is a global phenomenon, whose manifestation varies regionally depending on its causes, the manifestation of, and response to violence.

This is how a series of Regional Workshops, held in Yaounde in 2017, Maroua in 2018, and Yaounde in 2019<sup>2</sup>, within the framework of Regional Conversations for the PVE approach (see below), **paved the way for the implementation of the PVE approach in Central Africa**. These initial meetings led to a **better understanding** of the drivers, factors or causes of violent extremism, of its contextual manifestations, and of its consequences on the socio-political and economic stability of countries of the region. Through the **sharing of real-life experiences**, obstacles to the implementation of the PVE approach, measures to take and **synergies** that need to be created between institutional players, civil society actors and communities were identified. These meetings kick-started the process of **strengthening participants' personal commitment to the PVE approach** and their **knowledge** of tools, know-how and support required for this approach.

PVE tools, knowledge and the urgency of being aware of the importance of personal commitment acquired through these regional meetings were reported back in Bangui by Central African participants. This in turn gave rise to a significant Central African mobilisation for such a workshop to be held in their country. Their counterparts in the sub-region, both out of solidarity and cognizant of the real need to decompartmentalise their common space, subscribed to this call. This was also fully in line with the will of the Central African government, which, like other governments in the sub-region, wanted to put in place formal PVE policies that would enable the protection of their populations from violence, and asked for support in this undertaking and in the implementation of a PVE strategy and plan of action.

In this vein, the African Centre for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES) and the Human Security Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (HSD/FDFA) organised the **Fourth Regional Workshop for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa, Bangui, CAR**, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019 under the theme “Consolidating the Prevention Approaches through Experience Sharing and the Acquisition of Prevention Tools.” This

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (December 24, 2015) -

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674)

<sup>2</sup>Regional seminar on the prevention of violent extremism in Central Africa and in the Lake Chad Basin (Yaounde, Cameroon, November 27 and 28, 2017)

<https://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Final-report-Yaound%C3%A9.pdf>

Participatory dialogue for the prevention of violent extremism in the Far North of Cameroon and its periphery (Maroua, Cameroon, July 24-25, 2018)

<https://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Final-report.pdf>

Regional Workshop for the sensitization and capacity building for the prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa: Engaging civil and institutional actors in Cameroon, Chad and CAR (Yaounde, Cameroon, 26-28 March 2019)

[https://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Report-VE-Central-Africa-v-24\\_09\\_2019.pdf.pdf](https://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Report-VE-Central-Africa-v-24_09_2019.pdf.pdf)

series of Workshops in Central Africa were held within the framework of the more global initiative of **the Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism**, the main stages of which took place in Dakar in June 2016, in N'Djamena in June 2017 and Algiers in June 2018<sup>3</sup>, while other thematic regional seminars were held in Dakar in October of 2017, 2018, and 2019<sup>4</sup>, followed by the first regional course on the PVE approach for ECCAS government officials, launched by the ACSRT (African Union) and the Swiss FDFA in August 2019 in Yaounde.

In Bangui, after a **workshop day for the general public**, led by the Central African authorities, with a strong participation of young actors of Central African life and many groups of women, this 4<sup>th</sup> Regional Workshop mobilized, in a smaller scale and for three days, **more than sixty participants from CAR, Cameroon and Chad**. They included political leaders at national and local levels, public administrators, representatives of the various defense and security bodies, members of civil society (men, women, young people, NGOs), religious and traditional authorities, media experts, representatives of the private sector, researchers, representatives of regional and international organizations and diplomats.

This 4<sup>th</sup> Workshop aimed at deepening understanding, through frank and open exchange on the whys and wherefores of violence in CAR and in the sub-region and of the “how” each key player could contribute to the transformation of causes in order to make society more peaceful. The various participants, especially the numerous ones from the CAR, were thus immersed the understanding of how prevention instruments can be used in policies, strategies, programs and daily practices in the face of violent extremism. The Workshop offered them the opportunity to renew their determination to preventing the causes of violent extremism, to factor in the notion of inclusive dialogue as a prevention tool, and to reflect on the incorporation of these practices in their own actions, within ongoing dialogue processes for instance, or in the effective implementation of strategies and plans of action (national and regional) for the PVE. The aim of this Workshop was to reaffirm the possibility of introducing into Central African and regional political life an approach to preventing violence through meeting, listening, dialogue and the affirmation of personal commitment to peace.

The most important tangible result of this meeting was the successful introduction of the dynamics of dialogue that developed between participants from very diverse backgrounds, even though many already knew each another. Gripping testimonies, moving appeals, serious questions ran through the Workshop. The decades of violence experienced by the participants certainly left deep traces in everyone, but freedom of speech, which the conducive framework of the meeting fostered, gave room to calm and

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<sup>3</sup>“Investing in Peace and Violence Prevention in West Africa and the Sahel: Regional Conversations on the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action for the Prevention of Violent Extremism”, organized by the “ International Peace Institute (IPI), the United Nations Regional Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland (FDFA):

- Dakar, June 2016: [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/1609\\_Investing-in-Peace-ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/1609_Investing-in-Peace-ENGLISH.pdf)

- N'Djamena, June 2017: <https://www.ipinst.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/08/IPI-E-RPT-Chad-Meeting-NoteEnglish.pdf>

- Algiers, June 2018 : [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809\\_Algers-Meeting-Note-English.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809_Algers-Meeting-Note-English.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>Regional seminar on the role of journalists and the media in preventing violence, in particular violent extremism, in West Africa and the Sahel (Dakar, June 12 and 14, 2017)

Regional seminar "Defense and security forces in the prevention of violent extremism in Africa" (Dakar, Senegal, October 9 and 10, 2017): [https://www.cheds.gouv.sn/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2017-REGIONAL-SEMINAR-REGIONAL-SEMINAR\\_ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.cheds.gouv.sn/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2017-REGIONAL-SEMINAR-REGIONAL-SEMINAR_ENGLISH.pdf)

Second Regional Seminar "Defense and security forces in the prevention of violent extremism in Africa: political and institutional frameworks up to the challenges" (Dakar, Senegal, October 2 and 3, 2018)

<https://www.cheds.gouv.sn/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/RAPPORT-ANGLAIS-OK.pdf>

shared reflection on the follow-up in real societal life, in a bid to forestall the resurgence of hatred and violence. The necessity to let the most affected or the most sensitive express their pain (and many young people and women did not fail to underscore their distress in relation to the powers that be and the armed groups), did not blur the need for reconstructing the national community at large, with a focus on each individual. A strong case was therefore made to continue prevention efforts, both among young people (future leaders in peace or war) and abandoned communities, as well as political groups and authorities. Numerous examples of these realities and efforts are presented in this report. Indeed, there is hope that, if the conclusions of this Workshop are followed (see end of report), the benefits of listening and dialogue, which are the pillars of the PVE approach, will be ascertained as a major instrument for peace and the prevention of violence.

## **I- Violent extremism in Central Africa and in CAR in particular in 2019**

### **Sub-regional context**

Violent extremism, understood as the expression of radical behaviour that resorts to violence as a means of achieving political or power objectives, most often under the guise of ideological or "civilizational" arguments, is a reality in the sub-region. In Africa, **Central Africa is the second** region after West Africa with the highest escalation of extremist violence, whether countries around the Lake Chad Basin or those further South be considered. According to data from the African Center for Studies and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) at the African Union, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad, in the first quarter of 2019 alone, recorded 105 attacks and 707 deaths. The transnational dimension of extremist groups is obvious, like Boko Haram (or more precisely the various factions of this group), which attacks from Nigeria and which, in Cameroon, has been raging in the Far North region since the start of 2010 by murderous incursions, kidnapping of local elites, targeted attacks on civilians and armed forces, recruitments within the population, propaganda activities and the creation of new cells. It is worth noting that violence in the Far North of Cameroon, as in neighbouring Nigeria, is far from being over; on the contrary, there has been an upsurge in 2019.

Contextual analyses have shown that the emergence or expansion of violent extremist groups is fuelled by **factors of political, economic, social, identity and geostrategic nature**. Among these, the participants underlined widespread corruption and impunity among the ruling elites, the denial of fundamental political and civil freedoms, flagrant violations of human rights and government repression (ban on demonstrations, muzzling of the press, arrest of journalists and whistle blowers, censorship of social media, acts of violence etc.), social inequality and exclusion (gaps between the rich minority and the poor majority, nepotism, favouritism etc.), the lack of legitimacy of the rulers (biased elections, ballot stuffing, low representativeness of elected officials, incompetence etc.), poor territorial governance (low impact of public policies, distance between the central power and the citizens, poor allocation of territorial resources, etc.), poverty, dispossession, **the divides of contemporary societies** (digital divides, technological, social, generational divides). In addition, the prolongation of violent conflicts, fuelled by groups under the pay roll of specific political or economic powers harshly hits Central Africa, a part of the continent richly endowed in raw materials.

**Hyper-centralization and ineffective administration in States** of the regions lead to vulnerability of populations residing at the periphery, to their impoverishment, as well as to the dilapidation and degradation of road, health and security infrastructures. This centralization also prevents the materialization of a mode of governance close to the people. In addition, it creates bottlenecks that hamper the development of exchange between communities across borders. This socio-economic

situation accentuates the precariousness of populations, feeds social frustrations, weakens social cohesion, compromises national unity and prompts situations of conflict, risks of instability and serious problems of insecurity.

In several States of the sub-region, particularly in the East of the Central African Republic and in the Far North of Cameroon, these factors have caused **the populations to shrink away** and show a disinterest in the face of State actions. In fact, parallel mechanisms capable of providing even *ad hoc* solutions to their security and survival needs have been put in place. This is how local committees responsible for the surveillance and security of villages were created (see Ch. VI below).

### **Specificity of the CAR**

The Central African Republic is the country in the sub-region where violence is arguably the most widespread, as it is the case in eastern DR Congo now. **The proliferation of violent groups** (there are officially 14 of them, but they are probably around twenty) active in nearly 80% of the territory maintains a climate of terror. The instauration of democratic structures a few years after independence (1960) did not suffice to initiate a solid development process. **Mutinies, rebellions and putsches** (1965, 1979, 1981, 2003, 2013) succeeded one another. The main motive behind such putsches was the accession to power of their instigators and not the redistribution of the economic and social assets of the country. The CAR has therefore been marked since its independence by **political and security instability**, and a culture of violence which, according to several participants, raises fears that a "standard" of **tolerance to violence has taken hold in society**. One participant mentioned, for example, a survey carried out among young children in Bangui how they imagine their future: most of them indicated that they see themselves active in the armed forces or an armed group (see Ch. VII below).

Apart from these historical facts on violence and the factors mentioned above, **other conditions favoured the proliferation of local violent extremist groups**, according to the participants, who particularly mentioned the lack of a culture of dialogue, internal political instability, a very high unemployment rate (44%), especially for young people who represent the vast majority of the population (47% are under 17)<sup>5</sup>, the drastic reduction in socio-economic opportunities, the lack of essential infrastructure, tensions within society and their instrumentalization in the context of armed struggles and power struggles, latent, unresolved or poorly resolved conflicts, hate speech or the glorification of violence, especially in the media. A quite telling example is that of a workshop participant who took five days "journeying" from his place of residence to the Workshop.

The numerous crises in the region have facilitated the recruitment, in CAR, of **Chadian, Sudanese and Ugandan militia men**, some of whom had already found refuge with their arms and baggage in this country following conflicts in which they were involved in their own countries. **The very wide circulation of arms** in the region was also repeatedly mentioned as a factor fuelling the spiral of violence, given that CAR is geographically in the heart of a region riddled with armed groups.

Since 2014 (political transition and coming to power of President Touadera), **a phase of political stabilization**, however fragile, seems to be effective in Bangui. Hence, **the political will expressed by**

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<sup>5</sup>Voluntary national monitoring report on the implementation of the sustainable development goals in 2019, "Empowering populations and ensuring inclusion and equality", High Level Political Forum, UN, New York, July 2019

**the Central African authorities**, including the Workshop's organizers and participants, **to engage the country in an effort in favour of the PVE** needs to be encouraged.

## **II- Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE): virtues, difficulties and tools**

The main objective of the PVE is to make everyone, whether public official or not, in the context in which they find themselves, creator of **conditions conducive** to dialogue, peace and the cohesion of social groups. The PVE approach gradually shifts the systematic use of force towards a variety of responses that take into account the causes of violence. It also contributes to bridging the gap between public actors and the society, even though they often maintain distant or conflicting links among themselves; it facilitates the coordination of joint interventions supported by all key players, including external or even international actors. **However, the interest of the PVE as well as the implementation of its tools are not always well understood.** There is still resistance within the armed forces, political actors or segments of the population accustomed to thinking in terms of repression, as well as difficulties in assimilating the tools of the PVE. In addition, many actors, like young people, women and civil society, remain distant, or without real responsibilities, within the PVE consultation platforms set up by the authorities.

### **Useful PVE tools**

During the Bangui Workshop, it was clearly diagnosed that **dialogue** was a fundamental instrument of the PVE. **The lack** of discussions and relationships, whether formal or informal, between the different parties involved in the violence, and among them and communities, is often **the root cause of conflicts and their persistence**. It is for this reason that dialogue is not a choice or a luxury to the participants, but an essential tool for building peace: "to stop fighting, we need mutual understanding, to understand mutually, we need to listen to each other, and for it to be possible we need dialogue."

**Dialogue** was also seen as **a challenge**, as it requires active listening, sincere humility and mutual respect. To achieve this, it takes into account all the actors or groups of actors affected by a conflict and takes care of all their difficulties. It requires both "know-how" (technical skills) and "interpersonal skills" (commitment and personal skills). The influence of these qualities often involves a change in the way one looks at life and at oneself. When dialogue is inclusive, it can serve as an effective tool for mutual understanding, appeasement, consensus building and **transformation**. It requires honesty, selflessness and a compassionate look on one's neighbour. Certain practices must also be respected such as inclusion, equal consideration of participants, good faith, sincere commitment, open-mindedness, empathetic listening, an innovative and creative spirit and an impartial perception of the common interest.

Of course, **inclusive dialogue** as a key to preventing violence is an **approach that may seem destabilizing**. First, because it really requires personal involvement and empowerment. But also, because it questions, as was the case during the Workshop, the link between the clear expression of the importance of dialogue and the exercise of functions, especially public ones which require restraint. "Should we give up?" "Isn't it just by having such responsibilities that the impact can have the greatest effect?" "Is it not precisely this lack of dialogue that allows for violence to gradually emerge in the society?", asked the participants?

### III- Some experience-sharing examples

In the **Central African Republic**, despite a track record considered by participants to be spotty, **dialogue** has been repeatedly attempted by the public authorities and political actors in the hope that it would lead to a widening of the political field and the construction of an inclusive society. National union governments, political agreements, inclusive dialogues and reconciliation dialogues have followed one another in recent decades. Unfortunately, putsches (failed or successful), mutinies and armed invasions have, each time, jeopardized these efforts. It was not until the Bangui Forum (2015) and the Khartoum Agreements (2019) that a fragile calm arose in the country, at least in its southern part.

The Workshop participants referred extensively to the Bangui Forum in their interventions. With more than 700 people, it had previously given rise to popular consultations in all divisions and sub-divisions of the country. The expectations of the people were thus expressed openly on the four chosen themes: political governance, economic and social development, justice and reconciliation, and finally peace and security. A Republican Pact could be signed on this occasion and, on the sidelines of the forum, 14 armed groups signed the Disarmament Agreement, which served as the basis for the Khartoum talks and the signing of the Political Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of 6 February 2019.

**So, the participants in the Bangui Workshop asked themselves: what conclusion can be drawn from this long list of efforts in search of peace and, at the same time, cyclical violence in the Central African Republic? Should we doubt the usefulness of dialogue?**

First of all, the very fact that **the Bangui Workshop was conducted within the dynamics** of respect for different opinions, experiences and specificities of the women and men present in the meeting room, **was in itself an impressive experience of successful dialogue**, especially since some speakers deliberately took risks in the criticisms they raised.

**The participants then openly reflected on the limits and shortcomings of these peace and dialogue efforts.** It was recognized that the repeated absence of several important actors in the dialogue processes undertaken in CAR, the lack of transparency in the organization and follow-up, and the faltering political will of the authorities, the focus by political actors on the power struggle rather than the recovery of the nation, hindered the implementation of the recommendations adopted.

It was also stressed that the most successful dialogues are those initiated by nationals, provided that the commitments made by all parties and the implementation of the sanctions decided are respected. Adherence to the recommendations of the 2015 Bangui Forum is much broader in this regard than that of the 2019 Khartoum Agreements. Forum participants were deeply convinced that the path to a future strengthening of dialogue seems to be emerging.

The Bangui Workshop also made participants **more aware of the step back from the prevention approach, including, and especially, at a time when violence speaks.** It was a reminder that **patience** is crucial, that efforts are not linked to contingencies, but that they aim at a transformation over time. In this respect, the Workshop gave some people a concrete desire to continue their prevention efforts.

Finally, the work also allowed participants to deepen and compare four experiences of dialogues, conducted in the region and presented by people who took part in their implementation.

The experience of **Burkina Faso**, which today faces strong and daily violence, was described by an expert directly involved: the authorities realized that the quality of State response needed to be improved



by **using dialogue to strengthen the trust between the Defence and Security Forces (DSF) and the populations**. This is not however the easiest thing to do, because this awareness affects not only soldiers and their behaviour, but also security institutions in their standards, organization, and in all their relations with other field actors. This example also pointed out that such DSF efforts are futile if they are not part of a comprehensive political and governmental approach. It was also pointed out that, in the development of **new public policies**, for example specific to the PVE approach or in the field of public security, the involvement of all components of society (civil and political actors, religious and customary leaders, State and non-State actors) was necessary. These proposals were widely discussed and linked by participants to their respective contexts.

**The case of the Far North of Cameroon**, where dialogue was experimented as an educational tool, taking into account the realities of the local environment, was then presented. Dialogue with the Kanuri was initiated by NGOs, not the State, in the form of intra/inter-community focus groups. Organized in eleven localities with more than a hundred participants, people massively rallied these meetings. After presenting the methodology applied during these meetings (context identification, objectives, activities to be carried out), these NGOs, which had a solid knowledge of this population and its culture, gained the trust of the Kanuri community and were able to conduct a truly participatory dialogue. The dialogue revealed that the Kanuri community feared being marginalized during elections and at the moment of the redistribution of the local wealth associated with post-electoral politics. It was underscored that the issue of the reintegration of ex-Boko Haram combatants into communities was of great concern to the Kanuri and that the reintegration process had to be carried out with patience and in constant agreement with the communities concerned, and in particular with their leaders. This dialogue also helped to resolve the Kanuri's grievances against other communities, highlighting, among other things, the risks associated with violence and war expeditions and the ancient ties that united the different ethnic groups in the region. This example has shown **that dialogue processes can be initiated at various levels**, and in this case, at a local level, and thus help to identify causes of misunderstanding and, as a result, act on the causes of conflict.

In **Chad**, an example of the allocation of arable land to vulnerable populations in the Lake region by the Chadian Government with the support of the World Food Programme (WFP) was presented. This is a positive result of dialogues between many different actors. Elsewhere in Chad, several NGOs have offered dialogue processes to people in conflict zones before starting their economic support projects. However, they have to make difficult choices between the many possible intervention areas, leading to criticism, some localities benefitting from their presence (Bol, Liwa and Bagasola, for example) while others are still waiting for them to come (Ngoubou and Kangala, for example).

Finally, in **CAR**, women's efforts within the Muslim community in the PK5 neighbourhood (many of whom participated in the Workshop) showed that because of the dangers they faced in the situation of widespread violence that had characterized this neighbourhood, only an alliance between the government and civil society had allowed them to approach and engage dialogue with young people mired in cycles of violence. This alliance would have been necessary to continue this work of presence and dialogue, as requested by the Bangui Forum of 2015. As this was not the case, and that no State assistance was provided for the reintegration of these young people into economic circuits, these dialogue efforts were almost stopped, had it not been for the perseverance and deep convictions of these women. But how long will that last, they wondered at the Workshop?

#### IV- The role of the State and other actors in the PVE

The contribution of certain entities within society, particularly those that do not benefit from the attributes of public power, is often residual or subsidiary when it comes to implementing a comprehensive PVE effort. The role of public bodies (the State, i.e. the executive branch, central and decentralized administrations and DSF) is often overestimated, in that the powers and their competences can wrongly give the impression that they can act exclusively without involving other actors in their PVE action. In a timely manner, an awareness of **the role of each stakeholder** in the prevention chain is gaining grounds, as demonstrated by the Bangui Workshop, which has highlighted through many examples, the responsibility of all stakeholders involved.

- Despite the limits of which it is fully aware, the **State** remains the main body for collective management and coordination of actions for peace, security and development. It has the means to maintain social cohesion, to foster a peaceful living together and to respect the rule of law. However, its sovereign status does not grant it an exclusive privilege in the conduct of PVE initiatives. On the contrary, it must play the unifying and mobilizing role of other stakeholders (including the private sector), a role that promotes the design and implementation of joint actions. **Justice actors** hold a special place in the PVE constellation. Their prerogatives, which they cannot share with other actors in society, must be put at the service of citizens for the protection of their person and property. If they are unable to fulfil their mandate, they create a situation of legal and security vacuum which requires citizens to turn to other solutions to protect themselves, such as the creation of militias, or the integration of armed groups that offer them protection and sometimes an opportunity for revenge. This situation was mentioned several times in the Workshop discussions, which dealt with the impasses in which people in conflict zones too often find themselves in CAR, Cameroon and the DR Congo.
- The Workshop recognized **that DSF** (Defence and Security Forces) remain at the forefront of the PVE. In addition to their participation in operational defence or attack actions, they play an important role in the relationship that people have with them and with violence. Participants were unanimous in recognizing that if they decided to focus on **human security** (i.e. putting human beings at the centre of their policy, training and behaviour on the ground) rather than on the only lethal force at their disposal, to be aware of respect for human rights and to respond to the immediate needs of the people through concerted civil-military actions, they would quickly gain a strong popular anchorage based on the bonds of trust that would be established in this way. Several participants were surprised that this approach, which seemed so obvious to them, had not yet really caught the attention of military commanders, even though they face recurrent difficulties in all countries of the sub-region. Dialogue with the populations and with all the people in charge and institutions concerned was recognized as essential for the improvement of the role of protector enshrined in the mandate of the DSF.
- **Politicians** were not forgotten during the Workshop. Many of them were present and were questioned about the responsibility of political decision-makers, elected officials and members of political parties, in the implementation of PVE measures by the government and the DSF, as well as in the control of their implementation. Compromise, the use of administrations and DSF for their benefit, and a lack of will to stop violent conflicts (some politicians benefit from them) were presented and denounced. Political actors have a considerable responsibility, both positive and negative, in the voting of laws and budgets, in monitoring their implementation, or in

mobilizing their constituents to engage in the reduction of violence or the refusal to participate. This is a fundamental aspect of managing a country's violence and it was repeatedly noted that the political actors were mostly and unfortunately not up to the task and far from the seriousness that was expected of them.

- In the field of prevention, **CSOs** (civil society organizations) play an indispensable role. First, thanks to their presence in the field and their knowledge of the environment in which they operate, they have access to the most vulnerable populations, those often confronted with the most extreme violence. In this way, they also have access to first-hand information that allows them, if they wish, to intervene with government, community and military officials on the effects of this violence. They can also assist or supplement the State when it is unable to respond to the demands of the population. Finally, they are well placed to help mentor victims of violent extremism, helping them to reintegrate socially, psychologically and economically. Many of them, in all countries in the region, use the basic instruments of the PVE, such as dialogue, attentive listening and negotiation, as a means of curbing re-emerging violence.
- Based on their scientific independency and methodology, **researchers** can document the reality of violent extremism, its causes, its evolution, its interactions with populations and other components of society, such as governments, DSF and other armed groups. They use field data collection, population perception surveys and direct testimonies from people close to or even members of violent extremist groups. The aim of the researchers' work is to make violent extremism understandable and identify approaches and solutions adapted to each crisis situation. The results of their work can thus help, in their decisions, the main actors responsible for designing and implementing all the responses to violent extremism.
- Violent extremism is a global concern. Although its reality is different between regions and within each State, it also has a transnational reality. This situation calls for the implementation of concerted action mechanisms at the international and regional level. **International organizations** contribute to this PVE effort in many ways, particularly by facilitating the development of global and regional strategies and action plans for the prevention of and fight against violent extremism and terrorism. Thus, at the regional level, and in the field of PVE, the strategy of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, that of the ECCAS, the action plan to support member states of the ECCAS, the regional strategy to fight terrorism and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa, were developed with the help of international organisations. The same applies for several texts adopted at the national level. Despite this cooperation, these texts are most often ignored for lack of active participation in their development of all the national stakeholders concerned and for lack of real political will of the leaders.
- Whether regional or international, **foreign forces** can be of great help to States in regions engaged in the fight against violent extremist groups. In addition to being a show of solidarity, the expertise, quality of training and equipment generally available to foreign contingents often allow African States to gain the advantage in the combat and/or territorial control even if it is only partial. The Workshop participants, however, did not fail to point out the problems that these forces can cause: repressive and abusively security logic largely dominates these partnerships and the interventions of these forces are sometimes littered with scandals (rapes, looting, human rights violations) that question the relevance of their presence. Finally, the

loyalty of these forces is generally directed towards the countries that send them and can often be at odds with the interests of the countries that receive them. It was found that the PVE was not at the centre of their priorities and that an effort to explain and disseminate was as necessary to them as to the national DSF.

## **V- PVE Schemes: Real-life Experiences**

In **CAR**, recommendations made in the Forums to bring peace and stability have led to the creation of new bodies that are directly and indirectly involved in the PVE. This was the case for the High Authority for Good Governance, the High Council for Human Rights, the Economic and Social Council, the Senate, the Ministry for Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation attached to the Presidency, the Technical Support Secretariat and the Technical Sector Committee for the Security Sector Reform and, finally, **the National Coordinating Committee of the National Strategy to Prevent Radicalization and Violent Extremism (NSPREV)**. This committee is responsible for the implementation of the National PVE Strategy.

Adopted in July 2018, the PVE strategy and plan of action reflect the willingness of the Central African authorities to tackle the deep drivers of extreme violence. As a result of the participatory development approach advocated in many segments of Central African society, the strategy addresses the PVE through nine key areas (early warning system, community resilience, justice and the rule of law, environment, communication, territorial administration and governance, internal and external security, education and coordination and integration). Its objective is to enable key prevention actors, such as political actors, DSF, justice and civil society, to jointly address the various policies implemented by the government and to create the necessary community and regional links. This is a coherent PVE environment. However, the Workshop noted how partial and approximate its implementation still was, and how the instruments it purports to animate were still limited. In particular, it was strongly stressed that **inclusive dialogue**, which had made the Bangui Forum a success in 2015 and which the Workshop stressed the importance in all stages of the implementation of the PVE, had gradually been abandoned to give way to a lack of trust and even a climate of mistrust between key players. This complaint often came up in the debates on the part of those who felt that they had been side-lined or not sufficiently equipped to participate properly. In this context, the need to strengthen formal or informal interactions and frameworks for dialogue between the DSF and other actors was raised. Similarly, the lack of coherence suffered by the strategy between the logics of intervention of public actors (senior executives, elected officials) who define political and institutional frameworks, give strategic directions, determine the resources allocated to the design, accompany it and the practical application of the plan of action of PVE, was stressed. Finally, the implementation of the strategy requires **resources** that are still sorely lacking in CAR. Given the lack of alternative financing mechanisms, it is, for the time being, highly unlikely that this strategy will be able to achieve the desired objectives.

Participants from Chad and Cameroon also reported on the efforts of their respective countries to establish national PVE schemes.

With regard to **Chad**, a representative of the central administration explained that a National Strategy to Prevent the Radicalization and Violent Extremism and a legal and institutional framework capable of responding to violent extremism in accordance with fundamental human rights principles had been developed with the support of international partners. The government is also committed to strengthening the professionalism of its army and its proximity to the people. It is also involved in the reconstruction

of areas attacked by Boko Haram and has implemented a policy of assistance to ex-combatants, which should encourage defections within this armed group.

In **Cameroon**, it was explained, the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education had first set up a centre to fight violent extremism and promote peace. Then, although the country has not yet formally adopted a national PVE strategy, a number of preventive measures have been put in place. One of the most recent measures was the adoption of a code on decentralised local authorities (December 2019) to speed up the decentralisation process and thus facilitate the resolution of local people's problems. Previously, a process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration was instituted at the national level. An original example was given of the results that led to the socialization and return to normal life of some fifty returnees of Boko Haram, thanks to the Governor of the Far North region; these later were managed by a process involving the assistance of various doctors, including psychologists and psychiatrists, alongside traditional authorities and parents.

All of these measures were actively included in the workshop debates. It was noted that the reception of ex-combatants was met with strong resistance within their communities and that the rights of victims were not sufficiently recognized in Cameroonian legislation. There was also criticism of the 2014 law crack down on terrorism. Several participants pointed to the intensive militarization that this law caused in the Far North and the abuses in terms of restrictions to fundamental freedom it led to.

## **VI- Synergies needed between the State and the population for the PVE approach**

The Bangui Workshop highlighted popular response to violent extremism, but also reaffirmed that the links between the State and citizens are the bedrock of society. Indeed, in many cases, it is the populations who organized themselves to deal with the violence inflicted by extremist groups. In CAR, but also in the Far North of Cameroon, or Burkina Faso, for example, people have set up vigilance committees or local security committees. In some localities, customary courts were successfully updated by the population using the palaver tree model frequent in surrounding areas, where formal judicial authority was no longer able to resolve conflicts within communities. In Mayo-Sava, for example, farmers and herders who have continued to cultivate the land and graze their herds rely on information provided by the vigilance committees to ensure their safety and escape attacks from armed groups.

These models for protection or internal regulation of populations have raised some fundamental questions, which have been the subject of discussions: how do they relate to the authority of the State in terms of protection and security? In the long term, how will these role substitutions be managed? How does the emergence of such popular protection mechanisms combine with existing tensions within the communities from which the men and women who constitute violent extremist groups also emanate? Such questions illustrate how, **in the absence of trusting relations between the State and citizens, avatars that are not always useful for the prevention of violence and peace can arise.**

It is therefore necessary to take up **the basic question: how can public governance prevent the emergence of conditions that lead to violence?**

It is essential **that relations between the population and the State** are guided by the concern to guarantee the public interest, the protection of rights and the improvement of the living conditions of citizens. The State is the heart of the system, since it is the custodian of social regulation and its administrators are at the service of all citizens (hence the notion of "public service"). Drawing conclusions from the origins of violent extremism and, in this case, governance deficits, exclusion, lack of dialogue and of a genuine social contract between the State and citizens, the Workshop participants

stressed the leading role of State action, for implementing **a form of public governance based on dialogue with citizens**. Such governance can be tested by organising national consultations to define and/or implement common prevention actions. In these circumstances, **the permanent networking of these actors** and the **creation of bridges** where relations are not naturally established, therefore become **indispensable complements to dialogue**. To move forward on this path, we must also work tirelessly to ameliorate civil-military relations.

As far as CAR is concerned, participants also called for equal and participatory citizenship for all, without which there is no healthy and continuous State governance, no peaceful and egalitarian inter-community and interpersonal relations. They also rejected impunity and its so-called acquired rights and upheld the supremacy of justice and law, even in the absence/lack of legal coercion. Finally, they also called for the implementation of a process of inter-community and interpersonal dialogues with the VE protagonists that can serve in identifying solutions to the way out of the crisis.

## **VII- Example: The PVE experience of women and young people in CAR**

The virtues of dialogue between all components of society as an instrument of the PVE are particularly well understood and experienced by **youths and women's groups or associations**.

With regards to the former, the contribution presented to the Workshop by the **National Youth Council** in CAR was particularly expressive. Some of their members had travelled to Bambari in 2015, breaking all bans, to organize a sport and cultural celebration for the benefit of local youths. After a meeting with the Commander of the Seleka rebel group controlling the area, young people enlisted as soldiers were allowed to take part in the demonstration. It also allowed some young refugees in the bush to partake. This event, already exceptional in itself, was used by the CNJ to conduct informal investigations amidst protests, in order to better understand the reasons why some young people joined the rebels, and to raise awareness on the harms of violence. The findings of their work were then presented to administrative authorities, civil society and development partners. They allowed them to adapt their views and strategies on the reasons why young people rallied to armed groups.

**Women**, on the other hand, often played an important preventive role in the soft power approach linked to dialogue. Their proximity to the actors of violence (because they are relatives, husbands, children), their concerns often linked to the search for appeasement and because they are those who feed the family on a daily basis, place them in a particular position. For example, **many peace initiatives through dialogue** have been led by Central African women over the past decade. Whether organized in associations or in a personal capacity, many of them have benefited from training in dialogue techniques, mediation and negotiation. The African Union's FemWise Africa Network, and other NGOs, have been particularly active in various communities. **The women leaders of the PK5** in Bangui, for example, succeeded in convincing some actors of the violence to put an end to their abuses against the people. Even today, they are active in the neighbourhood and are helping to ease the tensions that are unfortunately still very frequent. **The Women Leaders for Peace**, on their part, have repeatedly met with the Head of State, the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the Head of MINUSCA, or the Chief of the Civil Police, to share with them their visions and solutions during the successive phases of violence. Women in religious organizations and parliamentary women have also regularly carried out peace initiatives at the local or national level.

But the women participants in the Bangui Workshop, who testified passionately about these commitments, also stressed how difficult it is for them, in Central Africa as elsewhere, **to find a place** in the political debate when it concerns security issues, formal mediation or dialogue processes or simply

access to high public responsibilities. They also deplored the fact that their initiatives to prevent violence, whether they take them at the local level or within their communities, are rarely supported, in the long run, by the authorities. This lack of political will in supporting these initiatives and the lack of resources available to them by the public authorities often lead to the weakening of these dynamics and the extension or resumption of violence.

### **VIII- Example: The role of the media in PVE in CAR**

The role and strength of the media in dialogue and PVE approaches are well known. The Bangui Workshop highlighted this by showing, following a presentation on these issues, that the radio media in particular promote the resonance of listeners' opinions and the participation of the population in public debates through the organisation of roundtables and talk shows; in particular, they give women and young people a voice they don't have in everyday life. Through such spaces, the media contribute to the PVE approach by developing a better understanding of realities, an expression mindful of viewpoints and experiences and by creating a collective space that reduces the feeling of exclusion that can become a factor of violence. To do this, it is important that a clear ethics are fully respected, both by media professionals and by broadcast participants.

It is mindful of this that Radio Ndeke Luka, a project of the Hirondelle Foundation to promote dialogue, conducts its local radio activities in the Central African Republic. To ensure that it covers as many social issues as possible and attracts as many listeners as possible, it offers a rich monthly programme, including several dozen programmes in different languages, for different audiences (children, family, women) and on different themes of daily or social life (dialogue of cultures and religions, the nation, past time, etc.)

The presentation of this radio at the Workshop brought participants to underline the elements that they thought were important for a radio station to contribute effectively to conflict prevention:

- Supporting people in understanding the issues at stake in informed decision-making;
- Fighting misunderstandings, "fake news" and unverified preconceived ideas that promote rejection of the other and conflict;
- Creating conditions for dialogue processes;
- Verification of information, multiplication of sources, strict distinction between facts and comments;
- Awareness of the social function, close to the audience concerned, of the proposed programmes;
- Application of charters and codes based on ethics: impartiality, independence, honesty, diversity and dignity;
- Anchoring actions within local communities and capacity of journalists to be in their proximity.

### **IX- Conclusions and Proposals**

The general objective of the 4<sup>th</sup> Regional Workshop was to get its participants from the Central Africa regions to effectively integrate violence prevention instruments into daily policies, strategies, programmes and practices aimed at reducing violent extremism. While extending the work initiated since 2017 in the sub-region, this meeting in Bangui was aimed at responding to the demands expressed by both the Central African authorities and the Central African participants in the previous stages of this initiative of the Regional Conversations for the PVE. The aim was both to bring this initiative closer to

the Central African realities and to create a sub-regional space conducive to an exchange between participants from Central African Republic, Cameroon and Chad.

The Bangui Workshop highlighted the opportunities that arise from the appropriation of this approach and the use of inclusive dialogue as a prevention tool. But it was not just a framework for analysis, far from it. It was a **concrete demonstration of the effectiveness of dialogue as a living instrument of the PVE in Central Africa**, both through the serene space offered for exchanges and through its working methodology. The latter, balancing expert presentations, speeches by political and civil leaders, and intense debates in working groups and in plenary, contributed to the success of the Workshop in terms of the understanding that participants gained from the need for dialogue as a founding element of the living together.

The Workshop concluded that **awareness-raising for a more systematic appropriation of dialogue as a prevention tool should be continued and broadened** and that the actors involved in the PVE should actively pursue their efforts, and continue to benefit, if possible, from dialogue spaces such as the one offered by this regional workshop. These special moments go a long way in defining inclusive and effective solutions to protect societies that are victims of violent extremism and to mobilize the political will to deal peacefully with this violence.

They must not remain without follow-up.

## **PROPOSALS**

### **➤ To the initiators of the Bangui Workshop**

- Continue animating this interface for national and regional exchange and dialogue between the key actors of the PVE;
- Promote synergies of action between research centres by involving each time new centres active on the continent or outside during regional meetings;
- Provide technical support to national and regional efforts (capacity building, policy development process and action plans) of administrative authorities, DSFs, political actors (parliamentarians, local elected officials in particular) as well as of civil society, by engaging in particular with States and sub-regional organizations that express the need.
- Beyond the focus on the Lake Chad Basin and Central Africa, it is up to the organizers of the Workshop to link this dynamic to the more global one of the Regional Conversations for the PVE, coordinated by the Swiss FDFA, in order to ensure mutual fertilization of efforts while also considering needs at the sub-national level (in CAR, Cameroon, Chad, DRC).

### **➤ At national level**

- Consolidate national, sub-national, as well as cross-border consultation frameworks, with a multi-stakeholder composition, stimulating or strengthening the taking into account of the PVE approach;
- Establish or strengthen spaces for consultation promoting synergy and complementarity between DSF and political actors, while respecting the prerogatives and responsibilities of each, as well as with civil society;
- Strengthen the Army-Nation link to restore / consolidate the confidence necessary for the PVE.



- Ensure the active participation of women, young people and the media in the management of community cohesion, PVE programs and security in general;
- Prepare and equip the media to produce productions on dialogue and the PVE (training / coaching, equipment, logistics);
- Support the initiatives of local actors, local authorities, civil society, traditional and religious leaders, young people;
- Promote civic education and citizenship education and create activities of peaceful cohabitation in schools and communities;
- Ensure, in CAR, the popularization as well as their appropriation in Sango and French, of political agreements and legal texts relating to conflict resolution;
- Accentuate the presence of justice actors in inclusive dialogue to prevent VE.

### ➤ **At regional level**

- Integrate and harmonize the regional normative and operational approaches and frameworks for the PVE
- Explore the possibilities of inter-sector networking (politics, security and society) at the level of the sub-region in order to harmonize approaches in terms of PVE;
- Reactivate the joint commissions and include in them a human security and violence prevention agenda;
- Institutionalize periodic meetings between cultural and traditional cross-border authorities;
- Ensure the continuation of a regional framework for exchanges such as that proposed by the Bangui Workshop.

## **About the organizers**

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

Since its creation in 2013, the African Centre for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES), based in Yaoundé (Cameroon), has set the mission of building and engaging African expertise in favour of peace and development of the continent.

Within CEIDES, the Human Security Pole affirms its competence in the field of the prevention of violent extremism, but also in areas such as peace consolidation, the conduct of international negotiations, civilian peace intervention, conflict analysis and management, transitional justice.

In the dynamics of the Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) in the Sahel-Sahara (see below, HSD / FDFA of Switzerland), CEIDES, the focal point of this initiative in the Lake Chad basin and in Central Africa, organized, jointly with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DSH / DFAE) of Switzerland, and with the support of the governments of Cameroon and CAR, a series of four meetings on the PVE. The first was held in Yaounde in November 2017, the second in Maroua in July 2018, the third in Yaounde in March 2019 and the fourth in Bangui in December 2019.

CEIDES also provided support for the organization in Yaoundé, in August 2019, of the first Executive Course for the PVE in the countries of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), launched by the African Centre of 'Studies and Research on Terrorism of the African Union (CAERT-UA) and the Swiss HSD / FDFA.

[www.ceides.org](http://www.ceides.org)

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

Following the adoption of the United Nations Plan of Actions for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (2016), the Swiss FDFA made this theme a priority, and in April 2016 adopted a Foreign Policy Plan of Action. for the prevention of violent extremism.

The Human Security Division of the Swiss FDFA (HSD / FDFA) as a centre of expertise, implements Switzerland's political priorities in the areas of peace and human security; In particular, it undertakes a whole series of advocacy activities in favour of this prevention approach centered on the causes of violence and the alternatives that can be provided, and it mobilizes its experts to carry out activities with its partners in the field. In particular, it launched, with several other partners, the initiative of the **Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Sahel-Sahara** ; of its twenty meetings to date, key ones were held in Dakar (2016), N'Djamena (2017) and Algiers (2018). To date, this space for dialogue has brought together more than a thousand personalities from various professional backgrounds from North, West and Central Africa. 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 dimension). The objective is altogether to offer a space for exchange and dialogue on the prevention approach, to strengthen the links between different actors, to highlight and strengthen positive initiatives representing concrete alternatives to VE which are supported by actors from these regions, and to help build the capacities of these actors. The Competence Centre of the FDFA serves both as coordinator of this initiative and brings its expertise to the animation of its spaces for dialogue.

[www.dfae.admin.ch](http://www.dfae.admin.ch)

■ Synthesis of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regional Conversations for the prevention of violent extremism in the Sahel-Sahara, Dakar (2016)

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■ Synthesis of the 2nd Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Sahel-Sahara, N'Djamena (2017)

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■ Synthesis of the 3rd Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Sahel-Sahara, Algiers (2018)

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■ The 1st Regional Workshop Report for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa and in the Lake Chad Basin, Yaounde, Cameroon, 27-28 November 2017

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■ The Participatory Dialogue Report for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Far North of Cameroon and its Surroundings, Maroua, Cameroon, 24-25 July 2018

[http://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/final-report22\\_10\\_2018-.pdf](http://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/final-report22_10_2018-.pdf)

■ The 3rd Regional Workshop Report for the sensitization and capacity building for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa: Engaging civil and institutional actors in Cameroon, Chad and CAR, Yaounde, Cameroon, 26-28 March 2019 [https://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Report-VE-Central-Africa-v-24\\_09\\_2019.pdf.pdf](https://www.ceides.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Report-VE-Central-Africa-v-24_09_2019.pdf.pdf)