Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism
The Way Forward
Senior Officials Segment-Thursday 7 April 2016
Session II: "Addressing the Drivers of Violent Extremism"
11:00-13:00
Panelist: Amb. Amr Ramadan (5-7 minutes)
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Mr. Moderator,

I wish to thank the Swiss Government and the United Nations for inviting me to participate in this timely conference and to speak at this panel. And I would be speaking on my personal capacity.

At the beginning, let me indicate that it would be of utmost importance to define clearly the phenomenon described as 'Violent Extremism' before we embark on any measures or strategies to address it globally and at the level of the United Nations, in order to ensure that the remedy is the right one. The SG in his proposed Plan concluded that the definition of "violent extremism" is the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law. He further recommended that each Member State develop its own national action plan to prevent violent extremism. Unfortunately, the continuation of the discussion and elaboration of strategies without either an agreed definition, definition in the literature or even a clear understanding of what is covered under such a notion poses serious shortcomings.

The Secretary General in his Plan describes violent extremism as 'a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief '. Then he goes on to say that 'nevertheless, in recent years, terrorist groups such as ISIL, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram have shaped our image of violent extremism and the debate on how to address this threat. Thus, we are talking about Terrorism that the World has been suffering from since the 1980's or

even before. An issue that was subject to General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and the U.N. Counter Terrorism Strategy adopted ten years ago.

In the Middle East, like anywhere in the World by the way, we are familiar with terms of description to levels of how one person can go to the extreme in his thinking like extremism, radicalism and fundamentalism (a term that Margaret Thatcher, for example, frequently used to describe the values of the conservative party in the U.K.). However, the world has witnessed the proliferation in many societies of extremist ideologies that promoted terrorism with a view to either achieving political goals or destructing others and disrupting the functioning of societies.

As for the new term introduced lately; that is violent extremism, it seems to combine the extreme thinking with material violent acts, which actually brings it to terrorism. Creating an additional terminology where categorization and listing of different armed groups can be made between list (A) and list (B) in a non-objective manner as we have seen recently in the case of fighting groups in Syria, is a politicization of a very serious problem we have.

To suggest that the introduction of the notion of violent extremism takes a more comprehensive approach which encompasses not only essential security-based counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive measures, neglects the fact that the U.N. Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted unanimously by the GA by its resolution 60/288, in fact addresses explicitly prevention in one of its four pillars.

One has also to keep in mind that the World has reached a stage where Freedom of Religion or Belief and Freedom of Expression became

recognized rights. But certainly, these rights are not absolute and have their limitations to ensure the proper functioning of different societies. In addressing violent extremism, we need to make sure that we do not encroach on freedom of belief and we should also ensure the full respect of human rights while fighting such a phenomenon.

These uncertainties associated with the term violent extremism are the reason behind the GA deciding last February to take more time in considering the Secretary-General's Proposed Action Plan.

Having said so, let me focus now on what I believe might constitute drivers or an underlying factors for people to resort to violence or terrorism. These reasons can be traced in various domains, be they political, economic, social or cultural. The Report or Plan by the SG lay down 5 main drivers namely; Lack of socioeconomic opportunities - Marginalization and discrimination- Poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law- Prolonged and unresolved conflicts- Radicalization in prisons.

I would agree with both socioeconomic opportunities and prolonged and unresolved conflicts as well as long-time grievances as we have seen in Palestine, especially Gaza, and elsewhere, but I won't agree with the other 3.

And I would highlight that economic opportunities are not the sole responsibility of governments as indicated in the proposed plan but rather a global community collective responsibility to ensure an enabling environment to economic opportunities for all, including job creation, fair trade and international cooperation to address poverty and extreme poverty.

To suggest that marginalization and discrimination of one group of a society can drive it to embrace violent extremism requires further evidence. Same to poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law. Examples to showcase or prove such co-relationships yet to

be developed. Foreign Fighters emanating from Europe are a case in point here. I note that emphasis has been put under such a suggested driver to the emerging concept of Prevention, especially with regard to preventing armed conflict, atrocities, disasters, and the recent uncovering of the Rights upfront Initiative.

As for radicalization in prisons as a driver, I won't really need to refute that, as many of those servicing court sentences have entered prisons for the first time due to their violent material acts, not *vis versa.*

Meanwhile, there are other main drivers to violent extremism or terrorism that were not identified in the SG Plan of Action such as (1) foreign domination and occupation that deny peoples the opportunity to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination, (2) racism and xenophobia, (3) defamation of religion, and (4) absence of prospects for the future.

Of other underlying factors of violent extremism that have not been dealt with in depth, and is certainly the most prominent causes of violent extremism, is foreign occupation as well as other forms of foreign domination and hegemony. Role of foreign intervention and meddling too.

In this context, I believe that racism, xenophobia and defamation of religion especially in developed countries have not been thoroughly examined as direct causes of violent extremism, despite such acts being criminalized worldwide. The mutually reinforcing relationship between them needs to be further examined. Such discriminatory trends have assumed in many cases an "official" dimension, reflected in some legislations, administrative directives and political rhetoric by high-level government officials and politicians. We have witnessed as well political parties whose ideologies have been based on those abhorrent ideas. It is equally alarming that those discriminatory trends targeted Arabs and Moslems in particular.   I thank you.