

***UNDP Launch of
Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for
Recruitment***

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Africa has put its lost decades behind and made significant strides on the social, political and economic front since the turn of the century. The continent has since seen rapid democratic transitions, leading to more responsive and accountable governments. Steady economic growth and macroeconomic stability have resurged. The private sector has flourished in agriculture, telecommunications, finance, retail trade, housing and construction. New technologies are spreading rapidly across the continent, especially in the areas of information and communication. Africa has been reducing extreme poverty since 1999, with expanded social policies also improving health and education services – including those targeting women and girls. Nevertheless, with all the enthusiasm there is sober recognition of unfinished challenges that are impeding the continent to reach its full potential of building “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa”.

In spite of impressive development gains made, regional analysis reveals that the continent will require transformational change to achieve its shared commitments made under Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As we enter the age of global turbulence, Africa is faced with multiple, pressing and inter-related challenges at the regional and sub-regional levels. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the continent experienced a 16 percent increase in forced displacement since the beginning of 2016¹; there were over 700,000 newly

¹ UNHCR, ‘Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2015’, UNHCR, 2016.

recognized refugees from South Sudan alone, with the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, Eritrea, and Nigeria all experiencing heightened levels of forced displacement, often as a result of conflict and violence. Since 2011 the world has seen an upsurge in armed conflict and violence, and the year 2014 was reportedly the deadliest for Africa in terms of fatalities from political violence since 1999. And, in spite of efforts to implement UN Security Council Resolution (UNSC) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, women and children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict.

The “right to better life” is under assault in many parts of the world, including in Africa. One of the key drivers of this upsurge of violence is the growth of violent extremism. **Violent extremism is stunting economy growth and threatening to reverse hard won development gains, since the start of the new millennium.**

The report on “*Journey to extremism in Africa*” that we are launching here today in Copenhagen, has as ambition to empower and guide us all in addressing the scourges of violent extremism.

Our involvement, as UNDP, in preventing violent extremism, is dictated by three main reasons:

- **First, we have seen radicalism seriously stunt growth and development in Africa, after a brilliant economic renewal since the start of the millennium.**
- **Second, we have observed that the responses to violent extremism, so far, have been heavily tilted towards military and security operations; and with limited effectiveness.**
- **Third, we, like all other development practitioners have seen our interventions lacking of perspicacity, due to an absence of a cohesive frame work, to guide our responses.**

Through our UNDP Africa Regional Programme on “*Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism, through a development approach*”, which we launched two years ago, we **embarked on an enquiry into the economics and**

the political economy of violent extremism in Africa, not only to understand the root causes of such a perverse phenomenon, but also to frame a structured model, grounded on empiricism, to guide policy and programmatic responses and gauge their effectiveness and impact.

The “*Journey to Extremism*” is an integral part of the UNDP Africa Regional Programme. As you will see in the presentation that will follow, the report illustrates a series of findings with the central message being that “**where there is injustice and desperation, violent extremism ideologies present themselves as a challenge to the *status quo* and a form of escape**”. This is then a validation of Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu’s assertion that “*external circumstances such as poverty and a sense of grievance and injustice can fill people with resentment and despair to the point of desperation.*”

The report also debunks some myths. It shows that although religion may feature prominently in the factors that pull people to join violent extremist groups, the level of religious literacy is very low, almost nonexistent, amongst those most vulnerable to recruitment. This finding challenges the rising Islamophobia rhetoric that has intensified in the search for effective responses to violent extremism. It shows that fostering greater understanding of religion, may be a key resource for preventing violent extremism. This resonates loudly with Nobel laureate Ely Wiesel’s contention that “*Education is the way to eliminate terrorism*”; but he meant education *largo-sensu*, including developing and communicating a potent counter-narrative to the extremism rhetoric; and de-constructing the teaching of evil ideologies.

The report illustrates that where the social contract is weak, where citizens’ confidence in government and institutions is limited, where relations within and between communities are fractured, then the resilience to violent extremism is low. This calls for setting up a form of governance that is inclusive and participatory, particularly, and I underline, at the community level and at the periphery and borders areas, which very often are ungoverned spaces neglected in terms of development investments.

The greatest innovation of this report, is to provide, for the first time, an algorithm depicting the trajectory of a potential or likely violent extremist, using an econometric model and descriptive analysis, grounded on surveys with real

actors, and on empirical data, with a probability attached to each step of that journey, and with a determination of the possible point of bifurcation, “the Tipping Point”. We have then a solid framework to guide responses.

In presenting the results of this study, we will also share the “*Stories of Survivors to violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa*”. They are quite telling. They seek to shed light on, and amplify the voices of those who often suffer in silence. Theirs are **stories of resilience, perseverance and the triumph of humanity, as they are rebuilding their lives**. The survivors' diverse religious, ethnic and national backgrounds highlight that Violent Extremism is a shared burden, and one that humanity, as a whole, must respond to. Their stories also inspire the policy recommendations of this report. Here, let me thank Malin Fezehai, she has been phenomenal in producing such an anthology of masterpieces!

The “*Journey to Extremism Study*”, along with its attendant report on the “*Story of Survivors*” provide guidance on the set of policies and programmes that could address the scourge of violent extremism. They include: delivering on global human rights commitments, reinvigorating state legitimacy through improved governance and accountability, connecting PVE with peacebuilding and sustainable development frameworks, coordinating national, regional and global responses to violent extremism, strengthening the vertical and horizontal social contract, investing massively on education and youth employment, and ensuring that macroeconomic policies, the national budget, public expenditures and official development aid (ODA) are PVE- sensitive.

In the report, we further develop these policies and programme responses. It is our ambition to elaborate them into implementable action points. I invite you all to join us in the next journey... Defeating the allure and growth of Violent Extremism armed with the right policies and programmes.

I thank you.