SETTING THE SCENE FOR PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SOUTH EAST AND SOUTH ASIA:

A WAY FORWARD FOR WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN INDONESIA AND BANGLADESH

Terrorism and violent extremism as well as efforts to counter their threat, are still widely considered to be male domains. This is despite evidence which shows women and girls are directly and indirectly engaged in, and/or harmed by acts of terrorism and violent extremism and targeted for recruitment by terrorist and violent extremist groups; as well as being key stakeholders in efforts to prevent and counter their threat.

These gaps in women's engagement in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and counter-terrorism (CT) highlight opportunities for gender-sensitive policies, legal commitments and programmes to enhance their effectiveness.

To explore the synergies between P/CVE and CT opportunities for women's engagement in South East and South Asia, this paper uses the case studies of Indonesia and Bangladesh to provide a snapshot of how women can be supported to play a stronger role in P/CVE and CT, including through bringing together the P/CVE agenda with the Women, Peace and Security agenda (WPS) in the Asia Pacific region.

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THE STATE OF PLAY:
Gaps in recognizing women's role in P/CVE and CT in Bangladesh and Indonesia

In Bangladesh, while national-level development policies provide for women's economic empowerment as a means to contribute to P/CVE and CT efforts, there is little explicit mention in national-level policies of the role that women can play. There is, in fact, barely any gender-specific provisions other than brief mention of women and girls as victims of human trafficking, which can finance terrorist activities. Recognition of the gender dynamics of terrorism and violent extremism and the various ways in which women can and do contribute to efforts to counter this threat, needs to find expression in official policy and legislation.

Likewise, in Indonesia there are few gender-specific provisions in security policy that concern P/CVE and CT, even where such provisions resonate with provisions that are included and would lead to a more comprehensive approach to dealing with the threats addressed. For instance, where the 2015 Defence White Paper mentions terrorism, it refers to radicalization and poverty as reasons why terrorism has increased over the last three decades. Given economically empowering women is an effective way of bringing communities out of poverty, an awareness of the gender dynamics of P/CVE and CT and a reflection of such in relevant policy and legislation could have a significant positive effect, not least by directing resources and attention.

Both Bangladesh and Indonesia face challenges posed by those who have joined terrorist groups abroad and then return. However, policy and frameworks do not engage with the gender dynamics of this issue, failing to address questions on how to deradicalize, disengage and reintegrate women, men and children, and failing to be attentive to gender and other differences. What this means is that **there is currently no explicit government, or indeed inter-governmental framework or institutional mechanisms for recognizing and supporting the role of women in P/CVE and CT in either country or the wider region.**

There are also gaps in terms of structures established and processes developed to prevent and combat terrorism and violent extremism. Establishing such structures could otherwise enable gender perspectives to be mainstreamed across efforts to mitigate the threats posed and ensure women are engaged and assuming leadership roles in such efforts. For instance, the 17-member National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention, which was established in 2009 in Bangladesh, could be expanded to include the Ministry for Women and Children Affairs. Likewise, in Indonesia, commendable efforts to promote a more collaborative approach between the Government and CSOs to P/CVE could be accelerated, building upon lessons learned from the development of the NAP on Women, Peace and Security.

Additionally, there are also gaps in respect of gender-responsive P/CVE and CT programs outside government interventions. Those programs developed, delivered or supported by NGOs, CSOs and donor organizations are often ad hoc, piecemeal and uncoordinated. They are often initiated at the grassroots level which helps to ensure context-specific needs are attended to, but does often mean that information and lessons learned are rarely shared, particularly beyond the specific locality.

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WOMEN LEADING P/CVE AND CT EFFORTS:
Opportunities in Bangladesh and Indonesia

A structure or network that enables NGOs, CSOs and donor organizations to exchange information on their programs and activities would enable best practice to be shared, as well as identify priorities, help avoid duplication and address gaps. Such a mechanism could also pave the way towards capacity building CSOs. Coordinated and consolidated activities are also likely to generate greater impact and greater visibility, and a better enabling environment for increased tolerance, inclusion and equality. Where there is increased knowledge of a number of activities aimed at mainstreaming gender perspectives and engaging women in efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism, there is likely to be greater knowledge, understanding and acceptance of such efforts across many communities, which can only help facilitate efforts to promote gender equality and build safer communities.

While significant gaps that have been identified with respect to the gender-sensitivity of existing P/CVE policies and programs, there are also clear opportunities to address these gaps. Efforts have been made in recent years by various stakeholders in both Bangladesh and Indonesia to empower and engage women in recognition of the role that women can play in building safe and resilient communities. There have also been notable efforts in both Bangladesh and Indonesia to mainstream gender perspectives into P/CVE and CT efforts. In Bangladesh, this has included the government prioritizing women's economic empowerment, which has a tangible impact on their security (as recognized in the Bangladesh NWDP). In Indonesia, this has included a holistic approach to P/CVE and CT as well as dialogue between CSOs and select Ministries on aligning the WPS and P/CVE-CT agendas. Simultaneously, there have been discussions between key stakeholders on developing a CVE NAP, led by the National Agency for Combating Terrorism (BNPT), which is supported by UN Women and is anticipated to be gender responsive. In Indonesia, there have also been efforts in the education sector to synergize WPS and P/CVE agendas and thereby promote both national and community security and women's empowerment. An ASEAN Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security could not only pave the way towards addressing various threats to women's security, including as direct and indirect results of terrorism and violent extremism, but it could also help mobilize and support women's participation and leadership in P/CVE and CT efforts (True 2017). Support for such an Action Plan needs to be generated and could build upon the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Sloan, 2017).

There is also potential in drawing together the WPS and P/CVE-CT agendas, and learning the lessons of empowering women from conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. It is broadly acknowledged that women's participation in peace and security processes, their social, economic and political empowerment as well as gender equality and the protection and promotion of women's rights are associated with more peaceful and stable societies; not only do insecure environments undermine women's human rights, but protection of their rights and promotion of equality can help build safer and more resilient societies. Peacebuilding policy, scholarship and, increasingly, practice, recognizes these links and the broader relationship between security and development. Moreover, the WPS agenda recognizes the need for women to participate in efforts to prevent conflict and build peace, if such efforts are to be successful and their

results sustainable. It is at last being more widely acknowledged that women have skills, resources and insights as well as different experiences of conflict and different perspectives when it comes to security, which must inform any peacebuilding endeavour. By drawing from these insights, P/CVE and CT can be more effective as well as contribute more broadly to social cohesion and security. Moreover, endeavouring to promote gender equality and empowerment, and women's security and human rights, has obvious benefits beyond the security and resilience of communities. In this regard, the WPS and P/CVE & CT agendas could be potentially mutually supportive. Indeed, there are unnecessary silos and much duplication of effort between those engaged in P/CVE and CT and those engaged in efforts to prevent, resolve and recover from armed conflict (Fink, Barakat and Shetret, 2013). Greater coordination and collaboration of efforts would not only be beneficial in operational terms but would also be more cost-effective and enable the sharing of knowledge and experience between those engaged in P/CVE & CT and those engaged in conflict prevention and recovery.

RECOMMENDATIONS **Building gender-responsive P/CVE and CT efforts**

1.	Expand on national-level development policies which economically empower women and, thereby, contribute to P/CVE and CT
2.	Invest in programming that engages with women's organizations to build social cohesion, tolerance and security
3.	Promote dialogue with women and women's organizations in order to promote women's engagement and leadership in P/CVE and CT
4.	Draw together WPS and P/CVE and CT agendas, for their mutual benefit, mitigating potential risks by prioritizing gender equality and the agency of women
5.	Ensure governmental structures and processes engage women, women's organizations, and ministries responsible for women's affairs, as well as mainstream gender perspectives throughout their activities
6.	Support development of an ASEAN Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, addressing threats to women's security and help mobilize and support women's participation and leadership in P/CVE and CT

1.   This analysis was produced by a team from the Monash University Gender, Peace and Security Centre led by Director, Professor Jacqui True.