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On June 24 and 25, 2018, the third Regional Conversations on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Sahel-Sahara took place in Algiers, Algeria. This event was co-organized by IPI, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), and the African Union's African Centre for the Study and Research of Terrorism (ACSRT), with support from the government of Algeria. The Algiers conversations followed up on discussions held in Dakar in June 2016 and N'Djamena in June 2017 and built upon a precursor seminar held in Tunis in November 2015.

Substantive preparations for the Algiers meeting were made by a committee made up of representatives from each partner organization. This summary report was written by Aïssata Athie of IPI, on behalf of the partner organizations and with their support. The report reflects the rapporteur's interpretation of the conversations and is not necessarily representative of the opinions of all participants.

IPI would like to acknowledge its generous donors and partners, whose support and collaboration make publications such as this possible. In particular, IPI would like to thank the Swiss Confederation.

# Investing in Peace and the Prevention of Violence in the Sahel-Sahara: Third Regional Conversations

SEPTEMBER 2018

## Introduction

Regional security responses to violent extremism in the Sahel-Sahara are necessary, but have been limited in their scope and efficacy. This is in part because they have historically addressed the symptoms of violence rather than the holistic range of factors that incite and foster it. Violence and violent extremism are complex phenomena that vary from one region to another and demand contextually specific solutions. In order to transform the conditions deemed conducive to violent extremism, regional players at every level must commit to serious investment in peacebuilding and peaceful coexistence.

The ongoing need for a forum for exchanging ideas and developing multilateral approaches to violence prevention in the Sahel-Sahara motivated the International Peace Institute (IPI), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), and the African Union's African Centre for the Study and Research of Terrorism (ACSRT) to organize the third round of Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, with support from the government of Algeria. This meeting was officially opened by the Algerian minister of foreign affairs and brought together more than seventy experts and practitioners from North, West, and Central Africa: representatives of governments and defense and security forces; political, religious, and traditional authorities; members of civil society; representatives of the media and cultural institutions; and representatives of regional and international organizations and partners. Participants agreed that violent extremism is on the rise, a reality that should motivate those in power to find effective solutions.

The Regional Conversations were introduced in 2016 in conjunction with the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism launched by the secretary-general of the United Nations. The plan called for "a comprehensive approach, to include not only essential security-based measures to combat terrorism, but also systematic prevention measures that directly address the causes of violent extremism."<sup>1</sup> Prioritizing a regional focus and diverse participant perspectives, with an emphasis on dialogue, this initiative provides a forum for discussing the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) and connects actors from varied backgrounds and initiatives representing concrete, programmatic alternatives to violent extremism.

The Algiers conversations began with an analysis of factors driving violent

<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, *Plan of Action of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism*, UN Doc. A/70/674, December 24, 2015.

extremism. Participants then addressed factors that contribute to resilience and positive peace. Finally, they shared violence-prevention measures taken by different regional actors in order to “turn the tide” and exit the cycle of violence. The conversations were guided by the need to produce concrete recommendations by and for practitioners in the region, based on themes identified during previous conversations: state-society relations; political participation; inclusive dialogue as a transformative tool; cross-border socioeconomic and political dynamics; the role of media in prevention efforts; the contribution of defense and security forces; and the potential for culture, education, and citizenship to be used as tools for prevention.

## The Need for a Multi-dimensional, Inclusive, Dialogue-Based Solution

Security responses to violent extremism in the Sahel-Sahara, though sometimes necessary, have limitations; this transnational threat requires a holistic and comprehensive solution that goes beyond military action. A multidimensional approach is necessary in view of the different factors that incite violent extremism. Religion, often viewed as the primary factor, is just one element among many. Other factors that should be considered in order to understand and respond to root causes are political, social, and economic injustice; impunity; desire for revenge; community insecurity; poverty; unemployment (especially among young people); poor governance; corruption; marginalization and feelings of exclusion; identity crises; violent regime changes; and resurgence of prior poorly resolved conflicts.

The erosion of public institutions has affected society’s capacity to deal with violence. Corruption, poor governance, and lack of transparency cast doubt on the legitimacy of the state and its institutions. For example, citizens lose trust in their justice system if it is difficult to access and perceived as biased. Instead of investing in institutions capable of addressing the root of the problem, governments often concentrate resources in the security sector to respond to short-term threats.

The family, as an institution, is also struggling to defend itself against indoctrination and recruitment of young people. While participants generally

agreed that the family should be teaching societal values and functioning as an early-warning system, some mentioned an “abdication of parental responsibility” and a lack of oversight and supervision. Participants expressed concerns that parents often have to pull their children from school, feel helpless to provide them resources or hope for a bright future, or actively encourage them to join violent causes.

Participants likewise noted the loss of traditional customs and practices that have long defended against the rhetoric of hatred and violence. This has, in some cases, led to communities losing their social and political influence. What is more, nomadic groups and displacement exacerbated by climate change in the Sahel-Sahara have prompted the emergence of tensions between communities. This is especially the case in the central regions of Mali and Niger, where conflicts between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers have multiplied. These inter-community tensions are exploited by militias, armed groups, and states to exert control; some people say, “The terrorists aren’t terrorizing us; our own government and the militias are.” Participants recommended encouraging conflict resolution through peaceful, community-level dialogue and the involvement of traditional leaders.

The persistent and deepening gap between rich and poor can also lead citizens to reject the state and its institutions. This is particularly true during periods of political transition or in cross-border areas far from administrative centers and capitals, where the state struggles to maintain a presence and populations have difficulty accessing basic services (especially security services). When the state fails to ensure the population’s security or curb its own armed forces’ abuses, violent extremist groups can present themselves as alternatives and gain support by promising or providing security, justice, social services, or economic stability. In Libya, for example, violent extremist groups used the fall of Muammar Qaddafi’s regime to create and multiply cross-border alliances.

In the face of these diverse challenges, participants emphasized the urgent need for a multi-dimensional response that involves all sectors of society. Recognizing that state structures and actions are necessary but insufficient, the whole of society—political actors, opinion leaders, defense

and security forces, educators, women, youth, families, religious and traditional leaders, communities, media, civil society, cultural leaders, and researchers—must be involved as key actors in PVE. Such a response should be presided over by a firm, visible, and inclusive national government.

Finally, participants re-emphasized the need for dialogue in changing the approach to PVE. Dialogue can happen within families, schools, and institutions; between political and military actors; among communities and their administrators and protectors; and perhaps even with violent extremists. Likewise, organized fora, where people can share experiences and issues in a spirit of coexistence, are essential.

## The Role of Local Civil Society in PVE

The Algiers conversations paid attention to the role of local civil society and its relation to the state. Civil society includes not only formal organizations but also community leaders, villages and other groupings of local populations, youth or women's groups, and socio-professional associations, all of which can help ensure that development strategies and prevention projects are adapted to local contexts rather than the agendas of outside agendas. Participants discussed cases in which national budget priorities have been overly influenced by international donors. They also raised the example of Mali's *Conférence d'entente nationale* (Conference for National Understanding), whose recommendation to negotiate with extremists was abandoned, in part because of outside pressure.

Participants also spoke about the political inclusion of women and youth, especially at the local level, as an important component of PVE. This can be achieved, for example, by lowering the minimum age of candidates for political positions and instituting quotas for representation in political offices; providing capacity-building opportunities for those groups; or eliminating financial barriers to participation (campaign costs, transportation, etc.), which are particularly prohibitive for those in rural areas. Some Algerian officials shared their experience partnering with UN Women to provide training for women parliamentary candidates. In Tunisia, the national action plan

to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 generated a dialogue between the government and civil society; this resulted in the adoption of a framework law to protect women and support women's participation in the military, politics, and the economy. In Algeria and Morocco, "mourchidates" (Muslim women preachers and religious assistants) work alongside their counterparts who are men to spread Islam's messages of tolerance not only in mosques, but also in families, youth homes, hospitals, and schools.

## The Media as Tool for PVE

In this age of twenty-four-hour news and omnipresent social media, the media—including community radio stations, print and online publications, social networks, and audiovisual broadcasts—can reach actors at all levels, from politicians to local communities. The growing use of media and social networks by violent extremist groups to spread propaganda and conduct recruitment highlights the need for media to take an active role in PVE. Recognizing that impartial, objective media coverage is paramount, participants in the conversations emphasized the need to prevent violent extremist groups from using the media as a propaganda tool. Though questions of freedom of expression were raised, participants determined that this freedom cannot be absolute when used to deliberately incite hatred and violence.

The media can inform, educate, and raise awareness. Media professionals should research and report on the realities experienced by communities affected by non-state armed actors. Initiatives in Tunisia, Mali, and elsewhere have produced web videos of young people testifying about local problems, violence, and other challenges. Participants also discussed how the media can promote good governance of the Internet and recognize "fake news," a tool that can be used to recruit youth. Finally, the media can dedicate publication space or airtime to promote existing successful prevention initiatives, increasing the visibility of those projects and giving their facilitators a more public voice.

Media contributions to PVE, like those outlined above, are particularly important at the local level. Specifically, participants mentioned community

radio stations that are geographically, linguistically, and contextually inclusive. Examples of this include broadcasting political cafés (as in Tunisia), making podcasts of discussions between political actors and civil society activists, and broadcasting positive religious messages in order to provide alternatives to the rhetoric of extremist groups (as in the Sahel and Nigeria). Some initiatives also bring media coverage to yet-unreached rural areas.

The need for journalists to be trained on PVE strategies and different types of extremism—not just religious but also ethnic, nationalist, and misogynist, all of which threaten social cohesion and are potential sources of violence—was a theme throughout the conversations. Trainings can offer, among other things, strategies for avoiding the use of terms that may have mixed meanings.

Finally, participants reiterated that it is important to take into account not only traditional media, but also the influence of social networks. They discussed the complex role that online social connection can play in recruitment, as well as strategies to mitigate the potential for such abuse.

Participants recommended that a pilot committee be created in the context of this initiative to formulate a strategy for the production and broadcast of PVE content, raise awareness and train media professionals to this end, and create a best practices guide. A regional forum for journalists for peace in the Sahel-Sahara could also be created to disseminate positive stories, serve as a portal for pro-peace content, raise awareness among the media, conduct advocacy initiatives aimed at political leaders, and serve as a database of contacts and expert resources. In view of the transnational and global character of violent extremism, participants recognized that the media's contribution to prevention efforts will also require involving international media outlets and the international community on the importance of these fora.

## Defense and Security Forces' Contributions to PVE

Defense and security forces are at the forefront of battling violent extremism, and their contribution to prevention efforts is essential to any holistic approach.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, military responses are too often used because political leaders lack the will to commit to preventive action or long-term solutions to conflict. The resulting counterterrorism operations often involve ill treatment, violence, arbitrary arrest, torture, extortion, and summary execution, and perpetrators are rarely held accountable. When such actions are disproportionate to the threat, do not respect international law, or are abusive toward the population, they can push people to join or seek protection with violent extremist groups. In northern Nigeria's Borno state, state military abuses are cited as the number-one reason individuals join in the ranks of Boko Haram. Furthermore, defense and security forces are not always equipped to confront violent extremist groups, and they often operate without the necessary structures in place to direct the chain of command, leading them to overstay or overstep their mandate.

Participants agreed upon the need to specially instruct and build the capacities of defense and security forces in addressing violent extremism, as this differs from the conventional warfare for which they are trained. New military doctrine must address unconventional warfare carried out by non-state armed groups. Training is necessary at every rank level and should explicitly address the causes of violent extremism and its complex and evolving nature. These trainings should take a human security approach, including content on professional ethics and promoting human rights and international humanitarian law. Finally, making armies inclusive is especially important in

<sup>2</sup> The contribution of DFS to prevention has already been raised in the context of the previous regional conversations and during a satellite seminar held in 2017 in Dakar. The Algiers conversations extended this work and focused on formulating concrete recommendations for DSF in the area of prevention. Centre for Advanced Studies in Defense and Security (CHEDS) and Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) of Switzerland, "Séminaire régional: Forces de défense et de sécurité dans la prévention de l'extrémisme violent en Afrique," Dakar, Senegal, October 9–10, 2017, available at [www.cheds.gouv.sn/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/BAT\\_RAPPORT-2017.pdf](http://www.cheds.gouv.sn/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/BAT_RAPPORT-2017.pdf).

cases of identity-related violence (political, tribal, territorial, etc.), as these divides can also exist in state security services.

Experience demonstrates that the success or failure of military interventions depends in large part on interactions with and participation by the civilian population. To build and strengthen citizens' trust, it is vital that armed forces not be perceived as a threat to the population or as perpetrators of violence against it. They can build mutual trust through awareness-raising programs and fora for dialogue with communities. Defense and security forces should not engage with civilian populations only when they require information; this does not build trust and can endanger those populations. To this end, officers whose primary activity is facilitation of civilian-military relations should be instated.

In order to restore trust, armed forces also need to have a consistent presence. Civilians are often unwilling to cooperate with armed forces because they fear reprisal by non-state armed groups. Local militias sometimes emerge to compensate for insufficient military protection. Militias—often built around community, tribal, or ethnic lines—can exacerbate violence by manipulating social divisions. Also, the eventual need to either integrate or disintegrate self-defense militias creates a political dilemma; participants recommended documenting, analyzing, and distributing existing knowledge on this subject.

State militaries can also improve communication on military operations and outcomes. Participants in the conversations noted that a lack of communication—due to negligence or concerns for confidentiality—can cement feelings of distrust, particularly when defense and security forces are already abusive. Harnessing the media and social networks (e.g., Twitter) to this end could be useful; for example, publicizing proceedings or sanctions against members of these forces who commit human rights violations and putting an end to institutional denial of abuse can disincentivize extremist violence.

In the current context, military forces often take on the duties of the police because actual police forces lack the capacities and resources to fulfill their role. Thus, it is also important to build local police capacities and rebuild local communities' trust in them. In principle, police forces' proximity

to communities should allow them to be more representative, and thus more inclusive, than state militaries. As an example, the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was cited as successfully providing for territorial police and local security advisory committees that involved both armed forces and local civilians.

Participants also identified that, alongside governments and civil society organizations, defense and security forces can aid in the reintegration and rehabilitation of former members of violent extremist groups. Operation Safe Corridor, for example, is a program run by thirteen Nigerian governmental agencies plus the national army, and aims to de-radicalize, rehabilitate, and reintegrate former Boko Haram members identified as "low-risk." This is achieved through psychological treatment (by psychologists and religious leaders) and economic support (professional training). Activities are also conducted to engage in dialogue with families of ex-combatants.

However, reintegrating ex-combatants into civilian communities poses a challenge due to the scarcity of resources dedicated to forgiveness and justice as well as the fact that many of the communities in question have suffered Boko Haram attacks. Ex-combatants' wives and partners also face social stigma, which may discourage them from sharing their experiences. Participants suggested appointing designated gender officers to facilitate greater accountability and representation of women in the police and military.

Defense and security forces are often the first point of contact for surrendering or captured extremists, and thus are in a position to glean firsthand information not only on the enemy's strategies or modus operandi, but also on the journeys of those who left to fight and have now returned. This information could be used to demystify (and subsequently discourage) the attraction of violence for other potential recruits. Some rare testimonies to this effect were given at the Algiers event, which led participants to seriously consider this largely unexplored dimension of prevention as well as the potential for dialogue with those still fighting in the ranks of extremist groups ("these are our sons we're talking about," noted one of the participants). The early stages of such dialogues have occurred—often in the context of humanitarian operations—but the

state needs to articulate broader policies, facilitate implementation, and expand dialogue to communities of origin.

Finally, a consensus emerged that this work requires broad cooperation. Defense and security forces face significant pressure from political actors as well as the general public to rapidly improve security. Such pressure, especially without investment in other, longer-term responses (political, social, and economic), could be incredibly damaging and exacerbate existing tensions.

## Education, Culture, and Citizenship as Tools for PVE

Participants also highlighted education, culture, and citizenship as potential points of entry for PVE. Childhood was recognized as the ideal time to introduce tolerance, a sense of national citizenship and equality, and respect for diversity, inclusion, and dialogue. States in the region were advised to introduce curricula addressing these values and providing an alternative to the rhetoric of violent extremism, as Mauritania has recently done. Participants also noted the importance of including local traditions and customs in curricula in order to preserve and transmit national history, as well as to promote these practices as defenses against violence.

Beyond the classroom, participants highlighted the need to promote the principles of peaceful coexistence in all social spaces, starting with the family, but also in recreational facilities, neighborhood meeting spaces, places of worship, and marketplaces. States must also invest in youth policies and support private initiatives targeting youth, such as youth homes, community radio stations, or sports infrastructure. These provide places or tools to foster social interaction and creativity. Promoting volunteerism through programs such as scouting—a youth movement based on solidarity, mutual aid, and respect for others—may also be useful.

Similarly, cultural and artistic expression can promote peace and transmit positive values. When a television series, documentary, song, film, play, or street performance underscores the importance of “unity in diversity,” it delegitimizes discourse based in difference. Participants lauded a Moroccan

NGO that regularly performs a play that depicts the reintegration of former members of violent extremist groups. The performance is followed by a discussion between former group members and the audience. Additionally, working-class and underprivileged neighborhoods are often recruiting grounds for violent extremist groups due to lack of opportunities. In both Morocco and Tunisia, cultural centers have been opened in such neighborhoods; these centers provide activities such as music, sports, and theater and encourage youth to achieve their potential as future citizen-leaders in their communities and countries.

Religious leaders and scholars can also offer alternative messages to those of violent extremist groups. Participants at Algiers proposed the creation of an academy of religious leaders and scholars in the Sahel-Sahara region that could provide alternative religious discourse. Finally, the discussions touched on women’s roles within the family, as women were cited as the “cornerstone of the family structure.” If women are aware of PVE strategies, chances are their children will be as well. Women can likewise play an important role in reintegrating ex-combatants; an initiative in Cameroon, for example, engages mothers in reintegrating former members of Boko Haram and preventing further recruitment.

## Furthering Regional Cooperation and Integration

In view of the transnational and global character of violent extremism, the Algiers conversations emphasized the urgent need for a coordinated and integrated regional response. Although military and security responses are being developed on a regional level—such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force or the Multinational Joint Task Force—regional prevention strategies and actions have progressed slowly and lack cohesion. Participants called upon regional organizations and their partners to implement coordinated political, economic, developmental, and humanitarian responses. Such responses have been attempted (such as the Sahel Ministerial Platform for Strategy Coordination), but they have not yet been effective, and harmonization of the many regional laws, strate-

gies, and programs is essential. Actions like the Tunisian National Counterterrorism Commission's ongoing development of an international network of such commissions to share experiences and identify best practices were praised.

## Conclusion

Over the course of three Regional Conversations, participants have raised consistent themes. This may indicate that solutions currently being pursued are insufficient or ineffective. However, there is a growing recognition of the need to invest in PVE and peacebuilding, and new preventive approaches are emerging. A paradigm shift in prevention of violent extremism in the Sahel-Sahara is increasingly necessary in light of the challenges posed by reintegration of ex-combatants. If the factors that incentivized violence still exist in their communities upon their return, they are unlikely to be successfully reintegrated or to dissuade future recruitment. Likewise, if the goal is to end violent extremism in the long term, purely military responses will not suffice. Dialogue is necessary to build trust and the foundations of peaceful coexistence. To this end, several priorities were highlighted at the third regional conversations:

**1. Incorporate prevention initiatives into a holistic and pragmatic approach focused on concrete results.** This will require developing fora for dialogue to promote discussions among stakeholders (public institutions, political

leaders, youth, women, civil society, media, defense and security forces, educational and cultural actors, religious and traditional leaders, etc.). This dialogue must include—where possible—members of violent extremist groups and ex-combatants.

**2. Encourage local ownership of initiatives and strengthen successful existing prevention initiatives.** The state's role in implementing preventive public policies is of vital importance, particularly in both rural and urban marginalized areas. These policies should strengthen state-society relations and consolidate "peaceful coexistence."<sup>3</sup> Inclusion of local actors is indispensable to building and maintaining sustainable peace; the same is true of effective PVE.

**3. Coordinate and integrate regional responses.** Lack of cohesion and integration on a regional level significantly limits the efficacy of prevention initiatives. Authorities should prioritize a cooperative approach to national and regional strategies to prevent violent extremism.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, "The creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to violent extremism."<sup>4</sup> At the end of the third Regional Conversations, participants shared this conclusion and expressed their commitment to implement these recommendations.

<sup>3</sup> An Algerian initiative adopted by the UN General Assembly in January 2018 that aims to promote tolerance, peace, and inclusion was cited as an example: UN General Assembly Resolution 72/130 (January 15, 2018), UN Doc. A/RES/72/130.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Journey to Extremism in Africa," 2017, available at [www.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf).

## Agenda

Sunday, June 24, 2018

8:45–9:30 **Opening remarks**

Mohamed Ibn Chambas, *Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)*

Muriel Berset Kohen, *Ambassador of Switzerland to Algeria*

Youssef Mahmoud, *Senior Adviser, International Peace Institute (IPI)*

Larry Gbevlo-Lartey, *Special Representative in Charge of Counter-terrorism Cooperation and Director of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), African Union*

9:30–9:45 **Launch of work**

Abdelkader Messahel, *Minister of Foreign Affairs, Algeria*

11:00–12:30 **First plenary session**

**Investing in peace and prevention of violence: What are the opportunities and challenges?**

*This session will seek to revisit the main conclusions and the spirit of the regional conversations on the prevention of violent extremism launched in Dakar, and to pursue and deepen the reflection initiated on preventive approaches based on political participation, the improvement of state-citizen/governing-governed relations, and inclusive dialogue in post-conflict societies in order to avoid new cycles of violence. In particular, the question of dynamics among socio-political actors will be raised.*

**President**

Larry Gbevlo-Lartey, *Special Representative in Charge of Counter-terrorism Cooperation and Director of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), African Union*

**Panelists**

Neila Feki, *Vice President, National Counterterrorism Commission (Tunisia)*

Muhammad Nuruddeen Lemu, *Director of Research and Training, Dawah Institute of Nigeria, and Assistant General Secretary of the Islamic Education Trust (IET), Minna (Nigeria)*

Mohamed Anacko, *President, Agadez Regional Council (Niger)*

Ahmad Mohamed Zaied, *Member, National Council for Liberties and Human Rights (Libya)*

Mhand Berkouk, *Professor, International expert in political and security issues (Algeria)*

12:30–1:30 **Lunch**

1:30–3:00 **Second plenary session**

**Concrete signs of violent extremism in the Sahel-Sahara: What is the diagnosis of regional, national, and local actors?**

*This session will seek to continue sharing experiences on how states, citizens, and organizations from the region perceive and define the issue of violent extremism in the Sahel-Sahara. Local researchers and/or research centers will present their work conducted in various countries in the region on socioeconomic, political, and cross-border dynamics that can contribute to violence as a starting point for the conversations.*

**President**

El Haouès Riache, *Ambassador, Counsellor for Counterterrorism, Office of the Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Algeria)*

**Panelists**

Lori-Anne Thérroux-Bénoni, *Director, Dakar Office, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) (Senegal)*

Rear Admiral (r) Kamel Akrouf, *National Security Advisor, Presidency of the Republic (Tunisia)*

Aliyu Gebi, *Senior Special Adviser to the Minister of Interior (Nigeria)*

Mustapha Saïdj, *Lecturer, Head of the National School of Political Science (Algeria)*

Omezzine Khélifa, *Executive Director, Mobdiun—Young Global Leaders (Tunisia)*

3:00–6:00

**Thematic working groups**

**Exchanges on successful experiences of prevention in the Sahel-Sahara (in Central Africa, North Africa, and West Africa)**

*Four separate working groups (each with a designated rapporteur) will discuss the prevention of violent extremism in the Sahel-Sahara region by looking at factors associated with peaceful and resilient societies, with a particular focus on state-citizen/governing-governed relations, which once strengthened can form a bulwark against the outbreak and spread of violence (rather than looking only at factors that drive and sustain violent acts). Participants are encouraged to give concrete examples of how states, citizens, communities, and organizations can prevent violent extremism in this specific area. Answers that have been provided or are needed at the transnational level will also be discussed.*

**Group 1: How can we identify and strengthen factors associated with peace that immunize communities against violent extremism? How can the potential of consultative structures, in particular those led by women and youth, be unleashed?**

**President**

Gatta GALI N'Gothe, *Member of Parliament, Head of Parliamentary Opposition, National Assembly (Chad)*

**Rapporteur**

Omezzine Khélifa, *Executive Director, Mobdiun—Young Global Leaders (Tunisia)*

**Group 2: How can media coverage contribute to prevention?**

**President**

Kouider Zerrouk, *Chief of Communications and Public Information UNOWAS*

**Rapporteur**

Pauline Bend, *Head of Niger Program, Fondation Hirondelle (Niger)*

**Group 3: How can defense and security forces contribute to prevention efforts?****President**

Pierre Buyoya, *African Union High Representative for Mali and the Sahel and Head of MISAHHEL, African Union*

**Rapporteur**

Festus Aubyn, *Researcher, Faculty of Academic Affairs and Research (FAAR) at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) (Ghana)*

**Group 4: Culture, citizenship, education: what contribution can these have for the prevention of violent extremism?****President**

Hafidha Benchehida, *Senator, Conseil de la Nation (Algeria)*

**Rapporteur**

Christian Pout, *President, African Center of International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES) (Cameroon)*

Monday, June 25, 2018

9:00–10:00 Working group discussions continue

10:15–11:45 Third plenary session

**Presentation of the results of the working groups****Moderator**

Youssef Mahmoud, *Senior Adviser, International Peace Institute (IPI)*

11:45–1:30 Lunch with the screening of the documentary *Voices of Kasserine*

Preceded by a presentation by Romain Darbellay on behalf of Olfa Lamloum, *Director, International Alert (Tunisia)*

1:30–3:00 Fourth plenary session

**Toward a regional approach to the prevention of violent extremism**

*Based on the conclusions of the four working groups and the inputs from the plenaries, participants will consider ways in which citizens, states, and their regional and international partners can most effectively work toward preventing violent extremism, including through a cross-*

*border regional approach that would take into account the challenges and opportunities of the transnational context. The objective will be to make recommendations that can be implemented by practitioners from the region, both within states and through regional and subregional groupings, in some cases with support from the UN and its partners, including for existing or new mechanisms, processes, and initiatives at the local, national, and regional levels.*

**President**

Eric Overvest, *Resident Representative and Resident Coordinator of the United Nations Programme for Development (UNDP) in Algeria*

**Panelists**

Pierre Buyoya, *African Union High Representative for Mali and the Sahel and Head of MISAHHEL, African Union*

Ibrahima Dia, *Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MINUSMA (Mali)*  
Zainab Kotoko, *Coordinator, Sahel Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL)*

Yvan Guichaoua, *Lecturer in International Conflict Analysis, Brussels School of International Studies, University of Kent (France)*

Giordano Segneri, *Peace and Development Advisor, Office of the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Tunisia (Tunisia)*

3:30–4:15

**Conclusion and closing remarks**

El Haouès Riache, *Ambassador, Counsellor for Counterterrorism, Office of the Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Algeria)*

Mohamed Ibn Chambas, *Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)*

Stéphane Rey, *Head, Human Security (Peace/Mediation), and Deputy Head, Human Security Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) (Switzerland)*

Jake Sherman, *Director, Brian Urquhart Center for Peace Operations, International Peace Institute (IPI)*

Idriss Lallali, *Deputy Director of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), African Union*

## Participants

**Aboubacar Abdoulaye Ali**

President, Nord Tillabéri Council of Herders,  
Niger

**Col. Othmane Adjali**

Focal Point on Prevention and the Fight against  
Terrorism and Violent Extremism, ACSRT,  
Algeria

**Beatrice T. Agyarkoh**

Senior Events Coordinator, IPI, United States

**Rear Admiral Kamel Akrouf**

National Security Advisor, Presidency of the  
Republic, Tunisia

**Mohamed Anacko**

President, Regional Council of Agadez, Niger

**Aïssata Athie**

Program Assistant, IPI, United States

**Festus Kofi Aubyn**

Researcher, Kofi Annan International  
Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), Ghana

**Michael Ayari**

Senior Analyst, International Crisis Group,  
Tunisie

**Dougoukolo Alpha Oumar Ba-Konaré**

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## The Regional Conversations Initiative

The Regional Conversations on the Prevention of Violent Extremism were launched in 2016 by IPI, UNOWAS, and the Swiss FDFA. The first conversations took place in Dakar (Senegal) in June 2016, the second in N'Djamena (Chad) in June 2017. Various other thematic or sub-regional meetings have also taken place in Dakar, Yaoundé (Cameroon), Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), and Maroua (Cameroon), with summary roundtables in New York, Geneva, and Dakar. On these different occasions, other partner organizations also participated: the Center for Advanced Studies in Defense and Security (CHEDS) in Senegal, the African Center for International Diplomatic, Economic, and Strategic Studies (CEIDES), the Conseil de l'Entente, the Dakar Office of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), and the African Union's African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT).

The conversations have brought together nearly 500 figures from diverse professional backgrounds in North Africa, West Africa, the Sahel, and Central Africa, as well as several outside experts and regional or international organizations active in these regions. Purposely informal in nature, these conversations have allowed participants to address the sensitive and complex dimensions of the prevention approach to extreme violence (including the political dimension) in an open forum and atmosphere. The objective has been to offer a forum for discussion and dialogue on the prevention approach, to build ties between actors from different backgrounds, and to highlight and strengthen positive initiatives conducted by actors in these regions that represent concrete alternatives to violent extremism.







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