



National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

National Counter Terrorism Centre
Male' Republic of Maldives



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Preface

The National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism is an important landmark document in the national efforts undertaken by Maldives to prevent and counter the threat of violent extremism. As outlined in the *State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, Maldives views the threat of violent extremism with grave concern, and has pledged to take swift action against anyone participating in, propagating, supporting or enabling violent extremism through any means.

Maldives has been diligently working to prevent and counter the menace of violent extremism, especially since 2014. This strategy establishes an important link between the programs undertaken in the past and those under implementation at present; and provides strategic guidance to frame future efforts and programs.

The State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism provides policy guidance for this strategy. This strategy is designed to complement and work in tandem with the *National Counter Terrorism Strategy*, which is currently under review prior to publication. Violent extremist ideologies very often accompany terrorism, provide motivation and justification for these heinous acts and enable recruitment activities. While the *National Counter Terrorism Strategy* primarily focuses on denying and deterring acts of terrorism, this strategy is aimed at preventing, resisting and countering the spread of violent extremism.

This strategy is the product of an inter-agency collaborative process, and is reflective of the spirit of inter-agency cooperation and cohesion, which is integral to the success of this important national endeavor. This strategy aims to go beyond inter-governmental partners, and engage Maldives' international partners, local communities and civil society organizations through a 'whole-of-society' approach.



Foreword by Minister of Defence and National Security



Terrorism is an issue with a long and contentious history. Acts of terror have been waged for various ideological, socio-economic and geo-political reasons. Today, terrorism is a global threat. The Maldives is not immune to these threats. Violent extremism emerged as a pressing issue in the contemporary security environment. It has infiltrated into our society endangering our religious unity and societal harmony. It continues to pose fundamental threats to national security.

The Maldives has a zero-tolerance policy on terrorism and violent extremism. His Excellency President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Qayoom has made remarkable progress in addressing terrorism and violent extremism in the Maldives. He has established policies and the legal mechanism to combat terrorism and violent extremism. The ratification of the Anti-Terrorism Act, the introduction of the State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism and the establishment of the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) are unprecedented landmark achievements by his administration. On behalf of the NCTC, I offer my sincere appreciation and gratitude to President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Qayoom on these great initiatives.

The National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism has been formulated by NCTC after careful deliberations, scrutiny and lengthy discussions. I commend Director General of NCTC, Brigadier General Zakariyya Mansoor, the staff of NCTC and the members of the inter-agency working group for their invaluable contribution of their experience and expertise in formulating this strategy.

I sincerely hope that the stakeholders are committed in implementing this strategy and to work diligently in this important national endeavour.

Adam Shareef Umar

Introduction

Violent extremism presents significant challenges to national and international security. Violent extremism is a global phenomenon, which encompasses many diverse ideologies, drivers and motivators. Violent extremist ideologies support and empower terrorism by creating conditions and environments conducive for

The Maldives will have a zero-tolerance policy on terrorism and violent extremism. Further, the Maldives pledges to take swift measures against anyone committing an act or acts of terrorism, or financing, joining, encouraging or providing any manner of assistance or support to, terrorists and violent extremists.

-State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism-

recruitment and indoctrination. In addition, such ideologies also serve to erode social cohesion, degrade fundamental human rights and civil liberties, disrupt economic activities and impinge negatively on the rule of law.

In the context of the Maldives, the phenomenon of violent extremism is driven by a diverse array of political, social and religious factors. The problem of violent religious extremism is especially acute for the Maldives given that the extremist ideology observed in the Maldives at present is largely associated with distortions and misrepresentations of Islamic religious ideology, spread by extremist and terrorist groups such as *Islamic State (IS)* and *Al-Qaida* and their affiliates. Maldives is a 100% Muslim country, and Islam is an integral part of the Maldivian cultural bedrock and national identity. Hence, such religious extremist ideologies have the potential to create deep societal divide and disrupt the peace and harmony of the entire country.

Maldives unequivocally condemns all acts of terrorism and violent extremism. *The State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism* states that Maldives will have a zero-tolerance policy on terrorism and violent extremism. In addition to increasing counter terrorism and preventive law enforcement capabilities, the policy directs the national efforts towards community-based prevention and awareness, as well as increased interaction and information sharing with international security partners. Maldives recognizes the

need to engage the ‘*whole-of-society*’ in a national effort to identify and understand the dynamics of the violent extremism movement, prevent individuals from becoming radicalized, and enable and empower families, communities and the authorities to stage timely and effective interventions.

NCTC, created as part of Maldives’ holistic response to terrorism and violent extremism, is mandated with coordinating the national effort against terrorism and violent extremism. To accomplish this, NCTC actively engages with inter-governmental partners, community leaders, academic institutes and Maldives’ international security partners. The focus of NCTC is on formulating and implementing programs to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) through enabling and empowering various stakeholders.

The *National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism* lays down the strategic vision and the guiding principle of this national effort. The document highlights the cross-cutting broad domains and strategic focus areas within which the subsequent national P/CVE Action Plans will be developed . This strategy also elaborates the ways and means through which this strategy will be operationalized and gives emphasis to creating partnerships and collaborations for implementation.

Strategic Vision

Maldives will remain a moderate, progressive, tolerant and peaceful Muslim country.

Mission

Prevent and counter violent extremism in the Maldives through national and international collaboration.

Guiding Principles

The *State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism* lays down the principles which guide the national efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE):

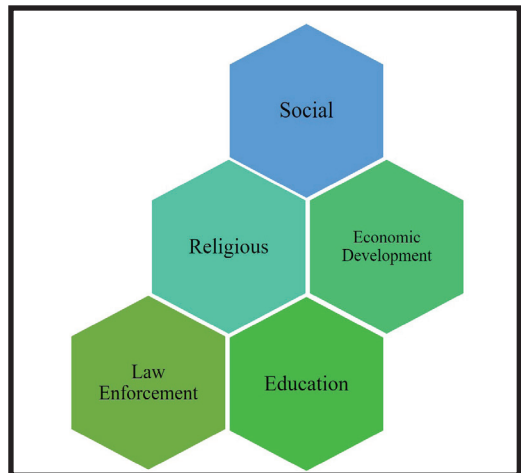
- 1 P/CVE programs and action plans must be supported by evidence-based and analytical research
- 2 Work through a ‘whole-of-society’ and ‘whole-of-government’ approach to promote inclusivity, reduce redundancy and duplication of effort
- 3 Enable and empower communities to resist and counter the spread of violent extremist ideologies
- 4 Uphold and maintain rule of law, human rights, right to privacy, individual liberty and dignity of self

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Domains

The *National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism*, and subsequent action plans and specific programs developed in support of this strategy encompasses activities across five interconnected domains. These domains have been formulated based on past experiences, international good practices and the lessons learnt from various social intervention programs. It has been recognized that P/CVE efforts should not be confined only to the law enforcement domain. Instead, it should be based on a multi-disciplinary approach. This is intended to prevent, resist and counter extremist ideologies, dissuade individuals and groups from embracing such ideologies, redirect such individuals and groups towards productive social engagements, and enable and empower local communities to detect and resist such ideologies. It should be borne in mind that no domain is superior to the others, and solutions can only be achieved through effective and successful implementation of cross-cutting programs across all domains.

The domains are:-

1. Social
2. Religious
3. Education
4. Economic Development
5. Law Enforcement



The multi-sectoral domains establishes the broad areas within which P/CVE activities will be undertaken in the Maldives.

Social Domain

Spread of violent extremist ideologies create deep divisions and rifts within the community, undermine social cohesion and negatively impact national solidarity and identity. As part of the national P/CVE efforts, emphasis should be given to revive, promote and preserve the unique Maldivian culture and heritage. Attention must also be focused on fostering civic responsibilities and good citizenship, creating resilient communities, enhancing patriotism and promoting social cohesion. Efforts must be made to enable and empower community leaders, especially women and youth leaders, and implement activities and programs by closely collaborating with and working through the community stakeholders.

Religious Domain

P/CVE efforts undertaken in the Maldives must focus on addressing the misrepresentations and distortions of Islamic teachings and ideals used by extremist organizations. Preserving the religious unity and upholding the moderate and progressive Islamic identity of Maldives must be central. Emphasis should be placed on promoting moderate Islamic teachings, and incorporating them into the national discourse. Religious civil society organizations and scholars must be engaged to counter the narratives used by extremist entities. Religious messages that promote tolerance, inclusivity and social harmony must be brought to the forefront.

Education Domain

Resisting and countering violent extremism is very much centred in the ideological domain. The education domain encompasses the efforts undertaken to understand the violent extremist phenomenon. P/CVE efforts in the Maldives must be backed by evidence-based research and focused intelligence into understanding the dynamics of the phenomenon. It also encompasses the efforts taken to prevent and counter the spread of extremist ideologies through education and creating awareness. In addition,

critical thinking is vital to resist such ideologies and must be incorporated into the educational methodology. Educators and school administrators must be equipped with the right resources to identify indicators and behavior associated with extremist ideologies within the school environment. As part of the education domain, effort must be undertaken to promote inclusive and tolerant views by incorporating it into the national curriculum, and expanding co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Economic Development Domain

Economic development and increasing prosperity is an integral part of any socioeconomic policy. The economic development domain includes all activities, projects and programs carried out to promote economic growth, create employment, diversify and strengthen the economic base of the country and reduce economic disparity. Efforts must be undertaken to identify the developmental and infrastructure needs of the communities, address under-served areas and promote equitable development. The aim of this domain is to address real or perceived grievances and increase engagements with communities through programs and projects which create economic benefits for the community. Emphasis must also be placed on promoting women and youth entrepreneurship.

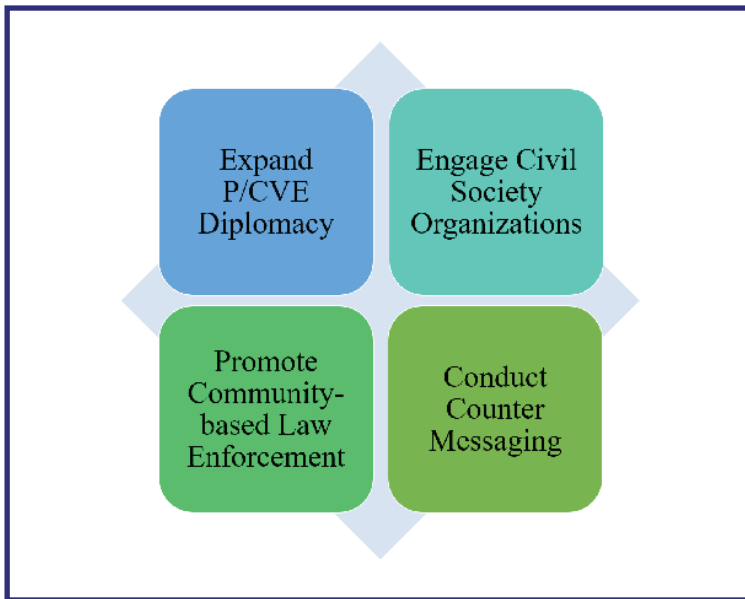
Law Enforcement Domain

Law Enforcement domain includes all activities pursued to uphold and maintain rule of law, detect activities of violent extremists, collect intelligence and information on the violent extremism dynamics and operations undertaken to disrupt and prevent recruitment activities. This domain also includes community-based preventive law enforcement and intervention efforts. Extremist ideologies very often manifest as unlawful activities, and it is paramount that these are identified and addressed as soon as possible. Another aspect of this domain would be to formulate mechanisms and capacities within security and law enforcement agencies to specifically address Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) and Returnees, including family members.

Strategic Focus Areas

Strategic Focus Areas identify key priorities that NCTC, working in collaboration with the stakeholders, will pursue. The priorities are drawn based on the current context and specific policy directions. The strategic focus areas will complement and assist the activities and programs within the domains. The focus areas articulated as part of this strategy are:

1. Expand P/CVE Diplomacy
2. Engage Civil Society Organizations
3. Promote Community-based Law Enforcement
4. Conduct Counter Messaging



The strategic focus areas are priority areas based on the current threat dynamics and environment. NCTC, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, will pursue specific actions to address these areas.

Expand P/CVE Diplomacy

NCTC will seek to expand and strengthen multilateral and bilateral engagements with international security partners specifically focused on P/CVE activities and programs. NCTC will also work to strengthen existing intelligence and information sharing mechanism, as well as mutual agreements to facilitate legal assistance. NCTC will also strive to position Maldives as a viable platform to facilitate regional and international collaboration on P/CVE and related issues through hosting and facilitating regional and international P/CVE events.

Promote Community-based Law Enforcement

NCTC will work with law enforcement agencies and stakeholders to formulate community-based intervention and preventive law enforcement mechanisms. Law enforcement agencies will work to empower communities to identify the indicators of violent extremism, establish reporting mechanisms and foster closer relations with the communities.

Engage Civil Society Organizations

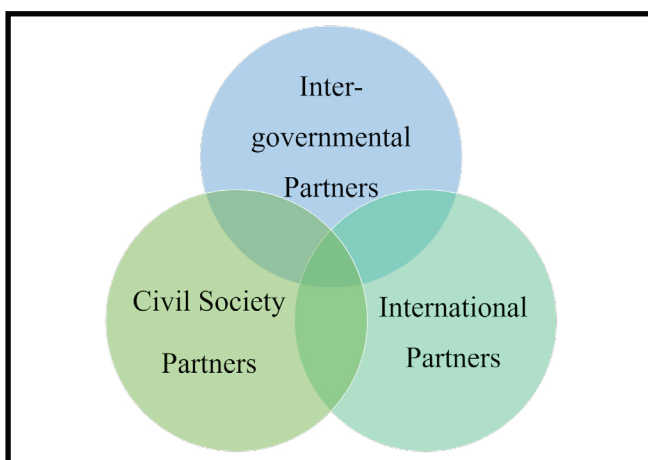
NCTC will seek to engage civil society organizations in the national P/CVE efforts, and enlist their support to conduct activities and programs across the P/CVE domains. NCTC will also work to foster positive social activism, and promote productive social campaigns as a means of creating alternative narratives and activities.

Conduct Counter Messaging

NCTC will initiate a national strategic communication campaign to prevent and counter the spread of violent extremist ideologies. Based on an analytical understanding of the extremist narrative and methodology, this campaign will incorporate the religious and educational domains, and will be targeted at identified vulnerable demographic segments and communities.

Partnerships for Implementation

NCTC will work to establish relations with governmental, civil society and international partners in support of implementing this strategy. NCTC recognizes that involving multi-sectoral stakeholders is important due to the dynamic nature of the phenomenon. In addition, successful implementation of the strategy within the domains require the support and active participation, not only of inter-agency partners, but the communities and the civil society, and in many instances, international collaborators.



The National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism aims to include all relevant ‘whole-of-society’ stakeholders, including inter-governmental, civil society and international partners.

As specified in the *State Policy on Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, NCTC will act as the national lead agency and pursue the implementation of this strategy. Subsequently, the National Plan of Action for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (National P/CVE Action Plan) will be formulated by NCTC in consultation with relevant stakeholders. NCTC will also review and refine the strategy as necessary, and work to ensure that it remains relevant to the threat dynamics and context.



NATIONAL COUNTER TERRORISM CENTRE

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