



THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

2020 ~~~ 2024

GENERAL AND MEDIA INQUIRIES:

info@nctc.gov.mv

ADDRESS:

NATIONAL COUNTER TERRORISM CENTRE

BANDAARA KOSHI, AMEERU AHMED MAGU,

MALE', MALDIVES

PHONE: +960 3314670 HOTLINE: 1615

www.nctc.gov.mv

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FOREWORD

The Maldives has been, and for the most part, still is, a peace-loving, tolerant nation. However, the religious and political goals of a few have resulted in the introduction of alien ideologies that promote terrorism and extremism, challenging community cohesion and our harmonious way of life, the very heart of our national identity.

Since 2012, we have seen several young Maldivians with immense potential yet radicalized through various means and recruited by terrorist groups, travelling abroad as Foreign Terrorist Fighters to join terrorist organizations engaged in civil wars miles away from home. The vast majority of Maldivians including top religious scholars agree that, the agendas of these organizations are antithetical to the interests of the long-suffering civilians of these countries.

Therefore, my administration will not allow these individuals to succeed in their nefarious undertakings, which threaten the socio-economic progress of our nation.

While comprehensive measures are being taken to prevent violent extremism and counter terrorism, the threat we face has also been evolving. Our greatest weapon against this threat is our collective belief that violence is never the answer. However, this needs to be compounded with practical measures. My administration will continue to enforce our “Zero Tolerance Policy on Violent Extremism and Terrorism”, to guarantee an environment hostile to terror.

This National Action Plan is a critical document in that it outlines the ways in which the Maldives will attempt to

counter violent extremism over the next 5 years. The Plan will provide guidance and support to relevant government institutions and civil society organizations, as they embark on this noble mission to keep our nation safe and secure.

I urge all stakeholders to play their part in implementing the National Action Plan, with a view to allowing peace, prosperity and stability to prevail on our shores.

IBRAHIM MOHAMED SOLIH
PRESIDENT

REMARKS

BY MINISTER OF DEFENCE

As the Minister of Defence, I see it as my primary duty to ensure that there is a climate of peace, safety and security in the country.

This National Action Plan sets out how the Maldives will attempt to counter the sinister scourge of terrorism through preventing and countering violent extremism over the next 5 years, by a well-considered combination of security and prevention measures that build on the central theme of social cohesion. This will involve all elements of government and the broader society through the engagement of civil society organizations and religious leaders. In this way, the Republic of the Maldives will continue to be a tolerant and peaceful country. In order to achieve this end, the following are to be achieved:

1 Creating a more resilient, connected, and less vulnerable Maldivian youth community through peer, psychosocial, and community support.

2 Improving care for young people so they can thrive in an environment where they feel comfortable and engaged.

3 Enhancing education to improve skills around social cohesion, critical thinking, communication and online literacy.

4 Strengthening engagement with shared national and religious values to reduce the effect of malign external influences.

5 Ensuring that groups or individuals that isolate themselves from mainstream society are engaged through education and employment.

I believe that the whole of government and the whole of society approach outlined in the National Action Plan are an excellent way forward in tackling this problem. Together with all stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, I am confident we can revitalize and strengthen the centuries-old culture of peace, tolerance and stability on these beautiful islands.

I would also like to express my profound gratitude to UNDP Maldives, for their continued support to the National Counter Terrorism Centre in formulating this Plan, and in our efforts to make a real difference in the lives of the Maldivian people.

UZA. MARIYA DIDI
MINISTER OF DEFENCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preventing and countering violent extremism is a priority for the Maldives. Although the country has not seen deadly attacks of the type endured by its neighbours, there are real risks of occurrence and thus the threat of violence must be dealt with to prevent harm to people and property as well as the economy of the country. The government of the Maldives is committed to programmes to reduce these risks through a combination of security and preventative measures that build on a central theme of social cohesion. Top priorities in prevention include creating better lives for young men and women addressing different issues that will contribute towards reduction of extremism and to reduce the incidence of hate-speech and threats. This will involve all elements of government and the broader society through the engagement of civil society organisations religious leaders and faith communities. In this way, the Republic of the Maldives will journey towards being a tolerant and peaceful Islamic nation.

This National Action Plan lays out the ways in which the Maldives will attempt to prevent violent extremism over the next five years. The Government of Maldives defines extremism as ideologies that radically and violently oppose and advocate against the spirit of the Maldivian Constitution, laws and regulations and social policies, in word and action. These include any ideology that deviates from the local culture, heritage, societal norms and customs aimed at fostering intolerance and violent actions. Any action or declaration taken by any individual or organization to obliterate/damage public property and label citizens as non-muslim and encourages theft of their property is also viewed as extremism. The Government of Maldives defines Radicalisation as the process by which people encouraged and led to participate in violent actions against individuals and property.

Maldives has seen the existence of cells/individuals with extreme views resulting in recruitment of Maldivians domestically into such cells and/or to join terrorist groups in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan etc., rare incidents of violence and vandalism linked to religious extremism as well as the existence of a social media environment where radicalized groups and individuals have expressed extreme views. Maldives is committed to combatting and reducing the risks of such factors by improving the engagement of people in society across the country (with special focus on at-risk youth), creating an environment in which moderate, peaceful practice of Islam that is the tradition of the country thrives, ensuring effective government coordination of security and other policy initiatives and supporting an effective repatriation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters and their families into their communities.



KEY AREAS INCLUDE

Policy-supported consensus dialogue (spearheaded by Office of President, MNDF, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Fiq Academy, Ministry of Education and known scholars) on approaches to addressing violent extremism – whole of Government/people consultations at national and atoll/island levels.

Developing key materials and messages through developing a Communications Strategy, reviewing key religious documents, education curriculum, sermons and pastoral/public engagement. Continuous reflection on how this relates to Islam, a more tolerant religious and social approach as well as supporting a wider understanding of the negative effects of participating in violent extremism domestically or internationally. Hate speech in all its forms must be addressed and approaches to combat the use of social media to spread radical and intolerant views developed and used, as well as key positive, religious and social messages of tolerance must be communicated. The result must see improved critical thinking, accessible religious teaching and thoughtful engagement with social media to reduce the risks of radicalization. Individuals must be able to recognize signs of radicalization while also having knowledge of how to counsel and support people away from potential radicalization.

The Maldives is a Muslim nation and Islam is central to its identity, government and society, established on Islamic principle of tolerance and compassion and strives to be will remain engaged with the world at large and welcoming to its many visitors. Ensuring that the risks of extremism are kept to a minimum is a responsibility of all of the government and all of the people of the Maldives.

The NAP recognizes that poverty and the lack of education are not the sole or even key drivers of extremism – many of those who have carried out violence around the world

Emphasis on the well-being of young men and women as well as ensuring access to better opportunities for education, social engagement and employment must be enshrined in policies and budgets, and young people actively involved in implementation and monitoring/evaluation.

Improving approaches in drug rehabilitation, prison and reintegration centres with strong emphasis on reducing their populations and improving conditions to ensure they are not breeding grounds for radical ideologies.

Reform of the judicial, policing and correctional systems in a manner that allows for the reduction of crime and in particular gang activities.

civic engagement,

Addressing issues of gender, particularly the role of women in radicalization and their experiences of extremism and their impact on deradicalisation.

Development of a process of evaluation and policy development to ensure the government remains able to address any threats.

have come from privileged backgrounds but that issues of fairness, inclusion in society and the ability of young women and men to find a means of redemption if they are distanced from their families or communities, or fail to meet their society's expectations or their personal targets in education or their professions. Likewise, it is critical to ensure that extremist influences are not allowed to insert themselves into a tolerant society through education, social media and the media. People of all ages must be equipped with adequate skills and knowledge to become resilient and effective participants in their society.

INTRODUCTION

The Maldives has mostly been spared the scourge of deadly terrorism although it has seen a rise in extremist hate speech and intimidation, radicalization of individuals and families and their departure for Syria and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the government is determined to ensure the continued peace and prosperity of the country by acting against violent extremism. The strategic aim is that the Maldives will continue to strive towards being a moderate, progressive, tolerant and peaceful Islamic country. This will be achieved by a “whole of society” approach that unites the government, the security forces, the communities, civil society and others in a comprehensive manner to prevent and counter violent extremism. There is no place in the country for violence, hate speech or intimidation.

The National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism laid out this approach in 2017 with the aim of bringing all branches of government and society together to ensure peace across the islands. The Maldives is a Muslim nation and although it has no groups actively committing violence domestically, extremists from elsewhere have drawn its citizens into terrorism and conflict abroad. The aim of this National Action Plan is to operationalize the national P/CVE strategy to address both the push and pull factors that have led people to violent extremism. It combines security approaches with those that address the social issues of identity, mental health, normalization of violence and exclusion and exclusion that lie behind extremism.

The ways in which people are drawn into violence are complicated and individual; it is rare for a clear pattern to emerge that explains their behavior in the Maldivian context. Lack of education or economic achievement do not predict any likelihood of becoming violent. However, exclusion from society and a belief that it is impossible to redeem oneself once a person has failed in some way seem to contribute to the sense of alienation that precedes a move towards extremism.

The plan is to address both the wider issues that might lead to radicalisation and to provide the means to identify and prevent individuals moving towards religious or political violence. At the core of the plan is the reinforcement of Maldivian values of moderation, tolerance, compassion, peace and respect for the dignity of others. Addressing the problems of social media and ensuring that hate speech is minimized are part of the plan.

THE MALDIVES HAS BEEN FORTUNATE IN NOT SEEING EXTENSIVE VIOLENCE BUT FACES SOME RISKS:

The return of Maldivian fighters and families from conflict zones and other relevant regions might lead to the transfer or use of military skills or new efforts at radicalization and recruitment.

Domestic extremism has risen, often alongside the culture of gangs and substance abuse.

Hate speech, particularly on social media, has created a climate of intimidation and also an environment that can drive radicalization efforts.

Violent organizations outside the country might draw more people into radical views through social media and other means, encouraging violence in the country or for more people to join extremist groups abroad.

A group might use the country as a place to carry out an attack on outside interests such as resorts or embassies.

This plan defines radicalisation as the process in which individuals and groups come to support violence as a legitimate political tool to be used against those they see as members of the “out-group”. Violent extremism is used here to mean the actual use of violence. Radicalisation has taken place in all countries throughout history and has been linked to all religions and many other ideologies. It requires the formation of in-group and out-group identities and the creation of a sense that the in-group is under threat and can only survive through the adoption of violence.

RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE MALDIVES

The process by which people come to accept violence as a solution to their perceived problems is complex and individual. Prosperous, successful people with few apparent social problems come to see violence as a legitimate choice. But many of those drawn into this world have suffered setbacks and trauma in life and not found ways to get back on to a satisfactory path. Government policies must ensure that Maldivians do not fall out of the system in a way that leaves them to engage with violent ideologies and organizations.

The evidence base for understanding radicalisation is limited and the numbers involved are often small. From what we do know from research in the Maldives, various “push” and “pull” factors may have led people towards radicalisation or violent extremism.

WAYS IN WHICH PEOPLE ARE PUSHED INTO RADICALISATION INCLUDE:

Erosion of traditional and moderate Islamic values of compassion and care;

Breakdown among three protagonists—the individual, the community, and the institutions.

A reduction in community identity that has come with large-scale migration to Malé, people living in short-term rentals and busy parents being unable to engage in community activities;

A lowering of parental engagement with children, particularly in Malé where urban, economic and social pressures are most intense;

Disengagement and marginalization from civic life can leave children and youth without a sense of dignity, agency and ambition;

Gangs, prison overcrowding, and substance abuse appear to heighten vulnerability and these demographics represent ready platforms for radicalisation for already vulnerable individuals;

The immense difficulties of returning to a more socially acceptable pathway if a person somehow drops out of the mainstream. Getting back on the path after being jailed, joining a gang, receiving drug treatment or dropping out of education is a massive challenge that seems to have led some to try to find their idea of redemption in violent extremism.

ON THE PULL SIDE, FACTORS PRESSING YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN IN THE DIRECTION OF RADICALISATION INCLUDE:

Religious scholars and preachers providing absolute answers to issues that are debatable in Islam without contextualisation. This leads to interpretations among young women and men that rationalises violence through the frame of obligatory religious responsibility.

Limited qualified teachers for religious education and the reluctance of many teachers to address difficult questions. This can lead many vulnerable and impressionable people to seek answers on the Internet.

The 'redemption' narrative in which joining violent groups are seen as a pathway to absolute salvation and sense of purpose where by criminals and gang members are recruited to violent groups using these narratives.

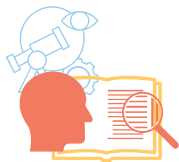
Increasing normalization of violence and intolerance through online depictions and polarizing, intolerant, and hateful rhetoric emphasizing an 'us and them' narrative.

Disruption of intergenerational communication and means of consultation.

RESPONSES

PRINCIPLES

THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN AND ALL POLICIES THAT COME UNDER IT WILL FOLLOW THESE PRINCIPLES:



Actions to prevent violent extremism should be based on research, informed by behavioural science and evidence.



Actions to prevent violent extremism to be reviewed by young women and men.



Policies will work to support collaboration among the three protagonists—the individual, the community, and the institutions through a “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approach to ensure effectiveness, inclusion and coordination.



They will enable and empower communities to resist radicalisation.



They will ensure human rights, gender equality, the dignity of the person, the rule of law and the right to privacy are maintained.

AIMS

THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN HAS THE FOLLOWING AIMS:



A more resilient, connected, and less vulnerable Maldivian young women and men through peer, psychosocial, community and institution support.



Improved care for young women and men so they can thrive in an environment in which they feel comfortable and engaged.



Support desire of young women and men to be agent of change in their community and have ability to practice culture of care and service.



Enhanced education to improve skills around social cohesion, citizen engagement, critical thinking, communication and on-line literacy.



A stronger engagement with shared national understanding of a tolerant religion and culture to reduce the effect of malign external influences.

IT AIMS TO ADDRESS VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES:

Reducing the prison population, improving prison conditions and ensuring segregation of violent and non-violent prisoners in a way to lower risks of radicalisation.

Improving religious education by increasing the amount of qualified teachers and by including some of the key issues and critical thinking in the curriculum.

Reducing the targeting of vulnerable young women and men through early interventions to prevent gang membership or substance abuse, while encouraging ways for young women and men to return to employment or education.

Promote culture of volunteerism and service in community to promote culture of care and compassion and allow young women and men to be active citizen in all aspects of society.

Ensuring that groups or individuals that remove themselves from mainstream society are engaged through civic engagement dialogue, counselling, education and employment to reduce risks of radicalisation.

RETURN THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN RADICALISED TO MAINSTREAM SOCIETY:

Targeted interventions to ensure that those who might return from joining extremist organizations abroad are not able to radicalise others or carry out violent actions.

Reduce the effects of those who have been radicalised on communities and to control the use of social media for radicalisation.

Carefully monitor communities as former radicalized individuals are re-introduced.

IMPLEMENTATION

KEY ELEMENTS

The National Counter Terrorism Center and the Counter-Radicalisation Committee will lead the government's response to the problem. The National Action Plan will involve a mix of responses from key government departments and will build, wherever possible, on existing programs and institutions. It is vital that all programs engage communities and create a sense of ownership rather than stigmatizing sections of society. A key factor for success is the involvement and training of credible interlocutors for vulnerable groups, be they counsellors, sheikhs or peers. Being able to relate to the personal and psychological needs of people at risk is vital in terms of both prevention and rehabilitation.

The NAP aims to bring together all groups in society including civil society organisations (CSOs) including women's group, youth organisation and religious actors, and the private sector. CSOs and the private sector will aim to reach parts of society that may be either suspicious of government actors or resistant to their ideas. The private sector has an important role in training and employment, both of which can be vital in getting people back into society and providing sustainable solutions to problems in their lives.

Ministries and government institutions will focus on activities that already form part of their work and will be represented in the NCTC and CRC. This plan lays out key responsibilities for ministries and the government institutions as a "whole-of-government" effort will be needed to provide security and to address underlying issues of social disengagement. In most cases these actions by the government do not need to have any PVE/CVE label, in many cases they are expansions or improvements on existing work. Each Ministry will function through its own mandate and will share reports on actions regularly to the NCTC so that it can identify gaps in programming and monitor success.

GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND OTHERS SHOULD ALL BE AWARE OF SEVERAL KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN THE WORK:

Programs should be developed based on research and be informed by behavioural science and evidence and should involve communities in their design. Continuous learning and honest evaluations and periodic reviews are essential to success.

There should be careful attention to the different needs of women and girls as well as men and boys. In some cases, women are victims of extremism, in others they are active and important players in fundraising, ideological indoctrination and radicalisation. Thus, gender is a key issue in extremism with related issues of masculinity and control.

It is essential to do no harm. Heavy-handed or poorly designed approaches can worsen the risk of violence. It is vital to consider the risk that actions may intensify violence by being perceived as threatening or stigmatizing.

Programs must engage from the start at the lowest possible level, include local government, and be well integrated into communities.

Civil society should be engaged at the earliest possible moment. It can be a vital partner to build support, reach disengaged communities and assuage suspicions. It can also be a key implementer of projects.

Consider the principles of youth engagement in the NAP: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

THESE ARE ENDURING RESPONSIBILITIES OF MINISTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS WITH THE FOLLOWING AREAS PRIORITIZED FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION:

Base-line research and planning on CVE/PVE activities.

Evaluation and reviews of current and ongoing CVE/PVE activities.

Coordination among government departments, led by the NCTC, to develop longer-term plans.

Evaluation of laws and court processes on extremism.

Activities related to the return of Maldivians who have joined extremist groups abroad.

Engagement with civil society organisations on the implementation of CVE/PVE efforts.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

CSOs should work alongside the government in addressing issues such as justice, youth empowerment, human rights and gender equality.

Religious CSOs should ensure that they do not encourage hardening of boundaries between in-groups and out-groups that can lead to extremism but should promote tolerance and human rights.

In almost all areas, from education to drug treatment and crime reduction, CSOs have a role, particularly in delivering direct programs to vulnerable groups such as former drug users.

