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## Women's Education: Promoting Development, Countering Radicalism

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Chairman Ed Royce, Ranking Member Eliot Engel, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today about such a critical and timely issue.

As the leaders of the House and Senate Intelligence committees reported several months ago, despite the death of Osama bin Laden and drone strikes aimed at destroying Al Qaeda central, we have actually *lost* ground in the ongoing battle with global terrorism. In fact, the United States is not any safer than it was at the outset of 2011.<sup>1</sup> Despite the \$17.25 billion<sup>2</sup> of US taxpayer dollars spent in fiscal year 2012 on counter terrorism initiatives; and, over a decade of war in two countries, we still have not diminished the appeal of terror recruiters who prey on the disenfranchised and vulnerable both here in the US and abroad. This is particularly alarming, considering that approximately 1,200 American and European Muslims have traveled to Syria to fight and could later refocus their energies on carrying out attacks against the U.S. and Europe.<sup>3</sup>

Some experts rightly argue that the pursuit and apprehension of terrorists is a different functional problem than the prevention of new recruits,<sup>4</sup> which then requires a different set of solutions to the threat. The goal of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), as opposed to the capture or kill focus of counter terrorism, has led to a whole body of social science research that provides a sophisticated analytic framework to understand the dynamics of radicalization.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Seher, "Terrorists are Gaining Ground, Intelligence Committee Heads Say," *CNN*, December 1, 2013

<sup>2</sup> Drew Desilver, "US Spends Over \$16 Billion Annually on Counter Terrorism," *Pew Research*, September 11, 2013.  
<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/11/u-s-spends-over-16-billion-annually-on-counter-terrorism/>

<sup>3</sup> Eric Schmitt, "Qaeda Militants Seek Syria Base, US Officials Say," *New York Times*, March 25, 2014,

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/world/middleeast/qaeda-militants-seek-syria-base-us-officials-say.html?hp&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/world/middleeast/qaeda-militants-seek-syria-base-us-officials-say.html?hp&_r=0)

<sup>4</sup> Georgia Holmer, "Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective," *USIP Special Report* 336, September 2013.

<http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR336-Countering%20Violent%20Extremism-A%20Peacebuilding%20Perspective.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

Researchers agree that the motivations for getting involved in extremist violence is highly individualized and can depend on a variety of factors.<sup>6</sup>

In the counter-radicalization training my organization, the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE), provides to law enforcement, we describe these risk factors in a cluster model similar to that used by the Department of Homeland Security; however, it varies slightly based on our own research and programmatic experience. The clusters are: deviant ideologies, political grievances, psychological disorders, sociological motivators, and economic factors. These factors, when combined, provide a dangerous and powerful framework. They highlight why, given two people who are exposed to the same conditions (and even come from the same family), one may step toward involvement in terrorism and the other may not.

Although we cannot predict who will be radicalized, we can try to mitigate the factors that make a man, or a woman, vulnerable in the first place. This is the space where community-based programming is so critical because prevention programs must be tailored to the needs of the local population.

#### **“SOFT” RADICALIZATION AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN**

Unfortunately, the risk of radicalization is not exclusive to men. Our research has uncovered an alarming trend we describe as the soft radicalization of women. In regions throughout South and Southeast Asia, the US and some parts of Europe, women are being indoctrinated into a very austere and intolerant interpretation of religion, which encourages a bifurcated world view hostile to non-believers and discourages women from working outside the home. It is perpetuated through a small cell structure similar to other extremist recruiters and is often undetected by intelligence services because it does not actively promote violence.

This indoctrination leads some women to be not only sympathizers and supporters of radical ideologies – but also perpetrators of terror.<sup>7</sup> According to a recent report by the OSCE Secretariat on women and countering violent extremism (CVE), women have perpetuated enough attacks and are being continually recruited for further plots, that it warrants designing effective “gender-sensitive and human rights-compliant preventive actions”.<sup>8</sup>

Several reasons are cited for women’s radicalization and involvement in terrorist acts, including both *individual* and *social factors*. Although motivations are complex, such factors include: avenging the death of relatives, the promise of a better life for their children, unmet needs and unresolved grievances, the need for companionship, and even feminism.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes, a sense

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Rafia Barakat and Liat Shetret, “The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors,” *Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation Police Brief*, April 2013. [http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/13Apr11\\_Women-and-Terrorism-Prevention\\_Final.pdf](http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/13Apr11_Women-and-Terrorism-Prevention_Final.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Women and Terrorist Radicalization, *OSCE Secretariat – OSCE ODIHR Expert Roundtables Final Report*, Vienna, February 2013. <http://polis.osce.org/library/f/4061/3772/OSCE-AUT-RPT-4061-EN-3772>

<sup>9</sup> Saba Noor and Daniela Hussein, “Women Radicalization - An Empirical Study,” *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)*, April 2010, pg.2.

of personal victimization leads women to get involved in terrorism. For example, the Chechen Black Widows included many women who were widowed or brutalized by the Russian Army while personal grievances led some of these women to suicide terrorism as well.<sup>10</sup>

The threat of radicalization among female converts is a particularly worrisome phenomenon. Some of these women may have been radicalized as a result of mounting pressure from their partners.<sup>11</sup> This includes the cases of Michigan-born Muslim convert Nicole Lynn Mansfield who became the first American to die in the Syrian conflict while siding with Syrian rebels; and, the Belgian convert Muriel Degauque who died in a suicide bombing against a US convey south of Baghdad in 2005.

One of the most notorious cases of a female terrorist, possibly radicalized by a spouse, is Samantha Lewthwaite, also known as the “White Widow.” Lewthwaite was married to Jermaine Lindsay, also a convert, and a suicide bomber of the London 7/7 attacks which killed 26 people. She is believed to be one of the masterminds behind the recent Watergate Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya.<sup>12</sup> She has also allegedly indoctrinated her children with violent ideologies and helped train all-female terror squads to carry out attacks.

In addition to direct support and execution of terrorist attacks, women are playing a supporting role by raising funds for violent extremist activities across the world. In 2009, Colleen La Rose, known as “Jihad Jane,” was charged with conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists and for planning to murder Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks. La Rose, who was radicalized after she met Al Qaeda operatives online, had established an online network of donors to provide material support to terrorists.

## **WOMEN ARE CRITICAL ACTORS IN COMMUNITY-BASED CVE SOLUTIONS**

While further research is needed into the roles that women play as perpetrators of terrorism, and particularly what motivates them, it is recognized that women can play a critical role in preventing and countering radicalization. In particular, given women’s central role in families and in communities, they are uniquely positioned to intervene in the radicalization of their children since they are most likely to spot changes in their children’s behavior, but may not have the confidence or access to police to share these concerns.<sup>13</sup>

Recognizing the potential of women as changemakers, several organizations around the world have empowered women to address a broad range of issues from poverty alleviation and

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<sup>10</sup> Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Individual and Group Mechanisms of Radicalization,” *Topical Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA): Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorism Threats*, January 2010.

<http://www.brynmawr.edu/psychology/documents/McCauleyMoskalenko.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Abigail R. Esmán, “The Growing Terror Threat From Radical Women Converts,” *Special to IPT News*, October 17, 2013.

<http://www.investigativeproject.org/4190/the-growing-terror-threat-from-radical-women>

<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Evans, Paul Bentley and Becky Evans, “Kenya Mall Attack Has Samantha Lewthwaite British White Widow Killed Nairobi Siege”, *The Daily Mail*, 24 September 2013. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2429784/Kenya-mall-attack-Has-Samantha-Lewthwaite-British-White-Widow-killed-Nairobi-siege.html#ixzz2xC21sx4Q>

<sup>13</sup> “Women and Preventing Violent Extremism: The U.S. and U.K. Experiences” *Center for Human Rights and Global Justice* Briefing Paper, 2012. <http://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Women-and-Violent-Extremism-The-US-and-UK-Experiences.pdf>

conflict resolution, to countering violent extremism. CARE, the international humanitarian organization fighting global poverty for almost seven decades, believes that “when you empower a girl or a woman, she becomes a catalyst for positive change whose success benefits everyone around her...”<sup>14</sup> CARE’s work in 86 countries around the world, supporting over 900 poverty-fighting development and emergency projects, is informed by this premise. Development and advocacy organizations such as Women Thrive similarly work to foster positive change in communities by empowering women through education, economic opportunities, and food security programs.<sup>15</sup>

In the field of human security, SAVE (Sisters Against Violent Extremism) has created “mothers schools”, which brings together mothers from around the world determined to create a united front against violent extremism.<sup>16</sup> Founded by Dr. Edith Schlaffer, SAVE provides women with the tools for critical debate, which challenges extremist thinking and sensitizes mothers of adolescents, so they can play a more active role in the prevention of radicalization both at home and in their communities.

Finally, several initiatives have also been spearheaded by Muslim women to empower women in their communities. For example, the Peaceful Families Project, an international organization dedicated to ending domestic violence in Muslim families, facilitates awareness workshops to educate Muslim leaders about the problem.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA) organizes conferences that network influential Muslim women from around the world to address contemporary challenges in society. ASMA has also formed the Global Muslim Women’s Shura Council to address sensitive issues such as domestic violence and violent extremism.<sup>18</sup>

## **RAISING WOMEN’S VOICES AGAINST VIOLENT NARRATIVES THROUGH EDUCATION**

Despite their demonstrated potential, the capacity of women in the peacebuilding field remains underdeveloped. Increasing women’s access to secular *and* religious education will be a critical factor in amplifying their voices against radical narratives. As one journalist put it, girls’ schools are “just about the best long-term counterterrorism investment available.”<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, women face a number of obstacles in attaining access to quality education. It can be inadequate facilities for women, a shortage of female teachers, conservative social or cultural norms, or targeted violence from radical Islamists that prevents girls from going to school. Not surprisingly, literacy rates in countries that are contending with violent extremism are also low. In Afghanistan for example, less than 13% of women are literate.<sup>20</sup> In Pakistan,

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<sup>14</sup> “Mission and Vision,” CARE, <http://www.care.org/about/mission-vision> [accessed March 29, 2014]

<sup>15</sup> “Issues,” *Women Thrive*, [http://womenthrive.org/issues\\_](http://womenthrive.org/issues_) [accessed March 29, 2014]

<sup>16</sup> *Save: Sisters Against Violent Extremism*, <http://www.women-without-borders.org/save> [Accessed March 29, 2014]

<sup>17</sup> “About,” *Peaceful Families Project*, <http://www.peacefulfamilies.org/about-pfp/> [accessed March 29, 2014]

<sup>18</sup> “About Us,” *The Global Muslim Women’s Shura Council*, <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/about/shuracouncil/>

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Kristoff, “Pakistan and Times Sq.,” *The New York Times*, May 12, 2010  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/13/opinion/13kristof.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/13/opinion/13kristof.html?_r=0)

<sup>20</sup> “Literacy,” *CIA World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html>

38% of girls are literate, but they are twice as likely as boys to drop out, lowering female literacy rates in some areas to a mere 8%.<sup>21</sup>

Access to quality religious education remains equally elusive for many women in regions at-risk of violent extremism. In Pakistani rural society, where females are often barred from the public sphere, girls will only get a limited religious education at home<sup>22</sup> that focuses on rote memorization of religious texts. In the absence of critical thinking skills and exposure to pluralistic religious interpretations, women may be prone to manipulation and radicalization by those who use a more austere interpretation of the faith.<sup>23</sup> As a result, there are generations of women who are inadvertently radicalized and pass on those perspectives to their children and other family members.

The susceptibility of women to radical religious indoctrination demonstrates the importance of mainstream religious training of women as an often overlooked preventative strategy in countering violent extremist narratives. In Morocco, the Mursheeda program does just this by empowering women to counsel others in family and religious matters after participating in a rigorous 45-week training which includes courses in psychology, law, history, communication and religion. The Mursheeda program was established in 2006, and in 2009, the State Department hailed it as a "pioneering" effort in Morocco's approach to combat violent interpretations of Islam.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to expanding access for women and girls to basic secular education and mainstream religious education, there needs to be curricula within these programs, which undercuts the bifurcated world view presented by extremists who perpetuate a culture of hatred and misconceptions of the "other." In fact, the implementation of cross-cultural education in tackling violent extremism is gaining global attention. In a December 2013 address to the United Nations, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair emphasized the importance of cross cultural education in defeating radical narratives, especially as a more cost-effective solution than counter terrorism operations.<sup>25</sup> As discussed below, some female activists in Pakistan have already begun implementing such a solution.

## **COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN**

Over the past four years, WORDE has conducted fieldwork in over 75 cities and villages across Afghanistan and Pakistan to explore innovative community-based solutions to violence, including those focused on the role of women in this field. The lessons learned from this region

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<sup>21</sup> "Why Education and Why Pakistan," *Developments in Literacy (DIL)*, <http://www.dil.org/why-education-and-why-pakistan/> [accessed March 29, 2014]

<sup>22</sup> Saba Noor and Daniela Hussein, "Women Radicalization - An Empirical Study," *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)*, April 2010.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Robin Shulman, "Morocco's New Guiding Force," *The Washington Post*, May 30, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/29/AR2009052903182.html>

<sup>25</sup> Claudette Yazbek, "Global Attention Turns to Education for Countering Extremism," *Al Arabiya News*, 5 December 2013. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/analysis/2013/12/05/Countering-extremism-through-education-the-21st-century-s-security-issue.html>

are also applicable to other Muslim majority countries struggling with religious radicalism and political insecurity.

### ***Afghanistan***

In Afghanistan, the US and the international community have provided over \$35 billion in non-security related aid<sup>26</sup> that is part of the most expensive reconstruction effort in our country's history.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, our investments have produced mixed results. Although a greater percentage of children – particularly girls – attend school, other social development indicators remain low. Corruption is still widespread across the government, key human rights remain unprotected, and terrorism continues to plague the 76% of the population residing outside urban centers.<sup>28</sup>

There is no denying that after the US troop withdrawal, budget allocations for reconstruction or development in Afghanistan will decrease dramatically; however, the threat of violent extremism thriving in this region will remain our country's greatest national security threat. Beyond 2014, the US and the international community will need to find economical and effective ways of containing the growth and spread of militancy in the region, as well as protecting the significant investments we have already made in the country. Diversifying our engagements with civil society --to include additional women's groups-- should be a vital part of creating a low-cost, effective national security strategy in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's civil society actors are a critical component in fostering a sustainable grassroots peace and reconciliation movement and preventing violent extremists from returning to power.<sup>29</sup> To date, however, Afghan peace negotiations have been widely criticized for underutilizing local thought leaders and activists who have credibility at the grassroots level.

These civil society actors, including women NGO leaders and activists, can counter radicalism at the grassroots level by inoculating their communities with a mainstream religious education that protects them against the indoctrination of the terrorists. They also advance the cause of women in secular education, health, and promoting non-violence generally. Some programs that focused on women include:<sup>30</sup>

- The Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), an Afghan women-led NGO founded in 1995 by Dr. Sakina Yacoobi, provides teacher training to Afghan women, supports education for boys and girls, and provides health education to women and children. Today, AIL

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<sup>26</sup> Arshad Mohammed and Kiyoshi Takenaka, "Donors Offer \$16 Billion Afghan Aid at Tokyo Conference," *Reuters*, July 8, 2012, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/07/08/uk-afghanistan-clinton-idUKBRE86602120120708>

<sup>27</sup> Ken Ballen, "Hopes are Dim for Afghanistan," *CNN*, November 25, 2013

<sup>28</sup> "Urban Population (% of Total)," *World Bank*, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS> [accessed March 29, 2014]

<sup>29</sup> Matt Waldman, *Community Peace-building in Afghanistan*. Kabul: Oxfam International, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> See, Hedieh Mirahmadi, Mehreen Farooq, Waleed Ziad, "Afghanistan 2014 and Beyond: The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding and Countering Violent Extremism," *WORDE Report*, February 2014.

supports 80 underground home schools for 3,000 girls in Afghanistan. Its Learning Centers for Afghan women is a concept now replicated by many organizations throughout Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup>

- In Kabul, the Khaniqa Pahlawan, a historical center for the study of culture and spirituality, supports a neighboring women's madrasa that has approximately 700 students. The women's madrasa also functions as an alternative space for solving women's problems particularly for internal family disputes, and many of the teachers serve as confidantes and mentors to the young girls.<sup>32</sup> Nearby, the Masjid-e Muhammad Mustafa (unlike many other mosques in the region) has a prayer space for women, hosting over hundred women for Friday prayers, and up to a thousand during Ramadan. The space was created to encourage more women to learn mainstream Islamic beliefs.<sup>33</sup>
- In addition, some religious scholars are working to incorporate women into existing religious institutions. The popular Mufti Shamsur Rahman Feraton, who regularly appears on television, recently established a Dar ul-Ifta, which provides religious opinions and guidance to a broad range of people from businessmen to policymakers, seeking advice on Islamic jurisprudence. He has also has trained 12 women as religious scholars to provide guidance to Afghan women on a wide range of topics including family issues.<sup>34</sup>
- Other organizations such as the Noor Educational and Development Organization (NECDO) have worked with local Sunni and Shia religious scholars to develop culturally sensitive training manuals on women's rights in such areas as education, property ownership, inheritance, marriage rights, and social participation.<sup>35</sup>
- In Kandahar, during a heavy period of violence in 2010, thousands of women congregated at a local shrine to speak out against the proliferation of violence. The shrine caretaker provided the women with a loudspeaker to urge warring Taliban and pro-state factions to lay down their weapons. The campaign was credited for generating public awareness about national reconciliation. Due to the success of this campaign, similar initiatives were organized and supported by the UN across the country.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "About Us", *Afghanistan Institute of Learning*, <http://www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org/dr-sakena-yacoobi-bio.html> [accessed March 29, 2014]

<sup>32</sup> See, Hediéh Mirahmadi, Mehreen Farooq, Waleed Ziad, "Afghanistan 2014 and Beyond: The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding and Countering Violent Extremism," *WORDE Report*, February 2014.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

<sup>36</sup> Rangina Hamidi, "Advancing Women's Civil Society Organizations in Security Sector Reform," (Public Event at the US Institute of Peace), April 10, 2013.

## **Pakistan**

The persistence of violent extremism in Pakistan and the deterioration of US-Pakistan relations signal the need for a major paradigm shift in our engagement strategy with Pakistan. Ultimately, a strategic partnership marked by renewed investment in Pakistan's civil society, focused on addressing issues of mutual concern such as peace and stability, can both rebuild trust and usher in a new, more sustainable chapter in US-Pakistan relations.

The desire of Pakistanis to eliminate violent extremism is visible throughout the country. Despite frequent terrorist attacks, civil society organizations across Pakistan have organized public rallies, demonstrations, art projects, newspaper articles, television and radio programs—all geared towards generating public awareness about the dangers of extremism. Through capacity-building, technical assistance, and material support, the US can help Pakistani activists to further counter extremism in their communities. This strategy will require the US to move beyond a transactional relationship with civilian and military officials, to one that invests in developing Pakistan's civil society, especially women.

Unlike Afghanistan, in Pakistan women have a more active role in civil society and have more opportunities to participate in community led peacebuilding efforts. Some impressive efforts led by women include:<sup>37</sup>

- In the tribal frontier, the women's organization PAIMAN established the "Let's Live in Peace Project" in which women and youth are taught mediation and conflict transformation skills. According to the founder, Mossarat Qadeem, teaching women these values provides them the capacity to influence their husbands and sons to disengage from militant organizations.<sup>38</sup> Over the past 20 years, Ms. Qadeem has set up centers for conflict prevention and peace building that train university students in local communities, that has reached over 35,000 youths and 2,000 women.
- Bushra Hyder, the Director of the Qadims Lumier School and College in Peshawar has designed and implemented a peace education curriculum that introduces students to cultural and religious diversity and is designed to inculcate compassion and tolerance. Her students have formed a group called "Peace Angels" that organizes hospital field trips to meet with victims of terrorism. According to Ms. Hyder, the program helps students understand that violence cannot solve conflict.<sup>39</sup>
- Dr. Amineh Hoti, recently established the Center for Dialogue and Action at Foreman Christian College in Lahore, where she is developing Pakistan's first inter-faith curriculum. At a time when sectarian conflict is increasing in Pakistan, the objective of

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<sup>37</sup> See, Hedieh Mirahmadi, Mehreen Farooq, Waleed Ziad "Traditional Muslim Networks: Pakistan's Untapped Resource in the Fight Against Terrorism," *WORDE Report*, October 2012.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

the program is to provide training and resources for universities to educate Pakistan's youth on the importance of pluralism, social harmony and respecting the "other."<sup>40</sup>

- Sabiha Shaheen is the Executive Director of Bargad, a youth led organization working for youth development in Pakistan. Bargad has a vast volunteer base with over 54 universities participating. In 2013, their program conducted in conjunction with the US Institute of Peace, "Tackling Youth Extremism in Pakistan", provided youth training, media design and promotion of pro-peace youth policies to curb political support of extremism and intolerance. Bargad also mobilizes students by sponsoring events on youth radicalization at campuses nationwide.<sup>41</sup>
- Amn-O-Nisa, Pakistan Women's Coalition Against Extremism, was launched in October 2011 to address instability and violence in Pakistan. Each of its members possesses considerable experience in law, advocacy and governance. Included in its ranks are several members of the aforementioned PAIMAN, freelance consultants such as Huma Chughtai (who teaches men, women, youth, and students about conflict resolution), and Sameena Imtiaz, Executive Director of Peace Education and Development (PEAD) Foundation, which leads training courses for youth groups, teachers, clergy, and community leaders to promote tolerance and nonviolence.<sup>42</sup>
- There are a number of secular educational organizations dedicated to providing quality education to Pakistan's youth as well. For example, the Citizens Foundation (TCF) is responsible for a variety of educational programs that provide affordable primary and secondary private education to low-income students in Pakistan's urban slums and rural areas, with a focus on girls. Their model focuses on attracting and retaining female students and employs female teachers, keeping in line with local conservative social mores. Across Pakistan, TCF's 910 schools have helped to shift attitudes toward female education.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, a discussion of women's efforts to counter extremism in Pakistan would be incomplete without including Malala Yousafzai's fight for girls' rights to education and defeating terrorism. Her campaign for girls' education began in 2007 but garnered significant international support after she nearly died in 2012 from a Taliban attack. Today, her battle continues through the Malala Fund, an organization that partners with local groups to bring education to girls.<sup>44</sup> Her legacy will hopefully also be continued through H.R. 3583: The Malala Yousafzai Scholarship

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<sup>40</sup> "FCC Opens New Centre for Dialogue and Action," *Foreman Christian College*, <http://www.fccollege.edu.pk/fcc-opens-new-centre-for-dialogue-and-action> [accessed March 30, 2014]

<sup>41</sup> "Projects," *BARGAD*, <http://www.bargad.org.pk/detail-project.asp?projID=19> [accessed March 31, 2014]

<sup>42</sup> "Against All Odds in Pakistan: Women Combatting Radicalization," *Meridian International*, <http://www.meridian.org/meridian/news/item/696-against-all-odds-in-pakistan-women-combatting-radicalization> [accessed March 29, 2014]

<sup>43</sup> "Social Entrepreneurs," *Skoll Foundation*, <http://www.skollfoundation.org/entrepreneur/mushtaq-chhapra/> [accessed March 31, 2014]

<sup>44</sup> <http://malalafund.org/>

Act, which is a wonderful way of increasing access to education for underprivileged girls in Pakistan.

## **ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY FOR PEACEBUILDING**

Throughout the world, civil society actors play a critical role in peacebuilding where the rule of law is absent or ineffective. In particular, where government is corrupt, incapable or unstable; the burden of peacebuilding and countering violent extremism (CVE) often falls on non-governmental actors. Today, in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, it is the civil society actors who are leading effective CVE initiatives to refute radical narratives and promote peacebuilding endeavors. As such, they are well positioned to become partners for the US and the international community in defeating terrorism.

A very encouraging development is the recent announcement of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, specifically focused on resourcing community based projects that build resiliency against violent extremist agendas. The creators of the fund recognize that long-term success in the fight against terrorism rests with the local communities' ability to address the local drivers of radicalization to violence.<sup>45</sup>

The Global Fund represents a critical step in providing tangible resources to programs that will form the backbone of any long term strategy of reducing radicalization through education, development, and creating economic opportunities, especially for women.<sup>46</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following is a list of recommendations from activists in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but they are important principles for any CVE-focused development and education initiatives.<sup>47</sup>

### **Consistently Involve Women in Peace Processes**

To date, civil society activists, particularly women, are only marginally included in major peacebuilding and national reconciliation conferences. Greater efforts should be made to invite female regional activists, especially those outside of urban centers. These community leaders are an essential part of creating local buy-in for any peacebuilding efforts especially in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan where the central government's reach is either limited or considered corrupt.

### **Prioritize Funding for Training and Skills-building Programs for Female Activists**

The US should prioritize funding for building the capacity of women-led civil society organizations (CSO's) that work in the field of education, peacebuilding, and nonviolence.

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<sup>45</sup> "Creating a Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience," *Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of the Spokesperson (Fact Sheet)*, February 21, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/02/221903.htm>

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

<sup>47</sup> These are the most common needs that CSOs communicated to us throughout our research. See, Hedieh Mirahmadi, Mehreen Farooq, Waleed Ziad, "Afghanistan 2014 and Beyond: The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding and Countering Violent Extremism," *WORDE Report*, February 2014.

Training in skills such as non-profit management, fiscal responsibility, civic engagement, coalition building, communications training, and social media skills are consistently requested by activists on the ground. Special effort should be made to make the training available for women-led grassroots and/or un-registered organizations outside of main city centers.

### **Improving Grant Allocation Processes to Include Women's Groups**

It is important to expand the base of grant recipients from US funding sources so more organizations are empowered to effect change in their communities. The current grant amount for many of the requests for proposals at USAID or the State Department is larger than most CSOs can absorb so they lose out on funding opportunities. This can be resolved by requiring the larger grant recipients to provide at least several smaller grants to local organizations.

### **Fund Exchanges of Women Activists who have Experience in CVE**

The US government can use its power as a facilitator and convener to host regular exchanges of female activists from countries facing political instability and violent extremism so they can share experiences and learn from one another's best practices. For example, the women in Kandahar who organized a peace rally can empower women in Yemen with real life examples of how to do the same in their country. It is important to take the local successes and give them a global reach.

### **Empower the Next Generation of Female Leaders**

Although young female activists may have the passion and determination to lead counter-extremism programs, they need substantial training in social mobilization, civic engagement, and leadership development to reach their full potential.

### **Cultivate Relationships with Women in the Diaspora**

Women activists in the US, who come from countries facing violent extremism, have an immense potential to enhance the strength and growth of civil society abroad.<sup>48</sup> The USG should engage these activists in frequent roundtables to inform policy and development initiatives that are targeted at these countries. The State Department's US-Pakistan Women's Council and the US- Afghanistan Women's Council are excellent forums which should be replicated with other diaspora communities.

### **Establish Consistent Benchmarks for Identifying Local Partners**

More refined screening processes will be required to properly vet local partners. Several international organizations, for example, noted that due to logistical limitations they are not able to perform background checks on partners to verify that they are not associated with violent extremism. As we engage more partners for peacebuilding initiatives, it is vital that we develop a set of benchmarks for collaboration. Specifically, we should expect local partners to share our values in promoting social cohesion and pluralism, respecting religious freedom, and advocating non-violent solutions to conflict.

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<sup>48</sup> "US-EU Expert CVE Meeting on Pakistan and Pakistani Diaspora Communities," Brussels, January 24-25, 2012.

## **Conclusion**

While increasing access to quality secular education can create better jobs for women and reduce some of the economic drivers of radicalization, educated women also play a pivotal role in inoculating their children, and eventually their communities, against the radical narratives used to recruit followers.

By empowering more women leaders in the field of cross cultural education, peace building, and preventing radicalization, we create the public space necessary for them to be at the forefront of preventing violence in their communities.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify here today and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.