



CEIDES



Centre africain d'Etudes Internationales Diplomatiques Economiques et Stratégiques

Regional Seminar for the prevention of violent extremism in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin

Yaounde, 27 and 28 November 2017

Final report



UNOCA/UNOWAS



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Table of contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| I. Background, rationale and scope of the regional seminar | 2 |
| II. Summary of proceedings..... | 5 |
| II. A Prevention of violent extremism: Concepts and challenges..... | 5 |
| <i>i. Clarification of concepts</i> | <i>5</i> |
| <i>ii. Challenges faced in the prevention of violent extremism</i> | <i>6</i> |
| II.B Diagnosis of the reality and risks of violent extremism in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin..... | 6 |
| <i>i. Mapping out violent extremism in the region.....</i> | <i>6</i> |
| <i>ii. The link between violent extremism and pre-existing conflicts</i> | <i>7</i> |
| <i>iii. Actors of extremist violence</i> | <i>7</i> |
| <i>iv. Forms of extremist violence.....</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>v. The concrete causes of extremist violence.....</i> | <i>8</i> |
| II. C Act: How can actors act individually or collectively to prevent violent extremism (successful prevention experiences)? | 9 |
| <i>i. Who are the actors of prevention?</i> | <i>9</i> |
| <i>ii. How do they interact?</i> | <i>11</i> |
| <i>iii. Which prevention approaches: the place of inclusive dialogue and violent extremists?</i> | <i>12</i> |
| <i>iv. Which prevention communication action or which violence-prevention narrative in the media, especially community and online media?</i> | <i>13</i> |
| <i>v. What is Cameroon's experience in PVE?.....</i> | <i>14</i> |
| II. D Structuring prevention: Laying the groundwork for national action plans for the prevention of violent extremism and launching regional initiatives for the prevention of violent extremism in Central Africa | 14 |
| <i>i. Situation of the drafting of national and regional action plans for the prevention of violent extremism</i> | <i>15</i> |
| <i>ii. Discussions on strategies and national and regional action plans for the prevention of violent extremism</i> | <i>15</i> |
| III Principal Lessons learnt, proposals and recommendations..... | 17 |
| IV Outlook..... | 22 |
| Annexe..... | 24 |

I. Background, rationale and scope of the regional seminar

For a long time untouched by terrorist movements, Central Africa is today in a situation of extreme insecurity, due to the progression, around the Lake Chad Basin, of an international terrorist group: Boko Haram. Other forms of insecurity sustained by armed groups of all kinds also exist in the region, particularly in the Central African Republic (CAR), and not very far in Libya, Sudan and South Sudan. Violence by these groups has gradually spread beyond their original borders. These excesses represent a decisive factor in the future of the Central African countries given that these armed groups could disrupt the fragile governments in place.

Awareness of the reality of violent extremism has been translated, at the international and national levels, into essential security measures against terrorism. While such measures undoubtedly make it possible to manage violence for the time being, they have proved insufficient over time, when they have not merely fueled the phenomenon. That is why preventive measures that work to address the underlying causes of extremist violence are essential; they are complementary to the former and demonstrate the need to act at an early stage to prevent violent extremism from spreading even further by allowing States to bring concrete solutions to the problems encountered in the areas concerned, by being attentive to the needs and rights of the populations concerned and by providing concrete responses to legitimate demands - so that they do not seek to express themselves through violence.

The prevention approach is in effect founded on the premise that **violence does not come from nowhere**. Poverty, corruption, injustice and oppression nourish resentment. The fragility of a state and the absence of civil liberties are seen as predominant factors in the emergence of political and extremist violence¹. Poor governance, non-fulfillment of basic needs by the state (education, health, and prosperity) and experiences of discrimination and exclusion can be combined under the same banner of fragility, as lack of political participation and the growing repression of people with minority beliefs. Without overestimating the relationship between political violence and economic factors, an overview of research indicates that underemployment and unemployment are among the factors generating violent extremism, in addition to the absence of a future, the feeling of confinement, the desire for adventure.

Faced with such fragilities, the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) appears to be an important and complex task, creating conditions in which no one will be tempted to succumb to violence for political or ideological reasons or to be enlisted by violent extremists for other reasons. Because the prevention of violent extremism requires a global approach to tackle the evil from the roots, it must go beyond a security response.

¹ See for example the edifying UNDP survey on : Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment, UNDP, September 2017 - <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf>

The promotion of preventive approaches is enshrined in the United Nations Secretary General's Plan of Action for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (A / 70/674) of 24 December 2015². In resolution A / RES / 70/291 adopted on 1 July 2016, following the fifth review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2006, the General Assembly recognized the importance of the preventive approach to combating terrorism.

It strictly in this light that the first two editions of the **Regional Conversations for the prevention of violent extremism** were organised in Dakar in June 2016, and in N'Djamena in June 2017³, and inspired the Yaounde Regional seminar. During these meetings, it was acknowledged that the preventive approach is hinged on several pillars:

- The first consists in considering that the prevention of violent extremism can only be effective if it deliberately takes into account the **causes of this violence**. Several recent academic works and daily practice have shown that political and society-based approaches that have proven most fruitful in rolling back violent extremism are all grounded on an in- depth knowledge of both the sociological and political motives for the violence and the place where it is perpetrated, as well as history and the perceptions the inhabitants have of this history.
- The second pillar - and the core of prevention -, is the willingness to accept plural **societies**, diversity of identities, and recognising the **value of tolerance and dialogue**. In the absence of a genuine listening ear, the legitimate claims (be they convergent or divergent) of citizens willing to participate in public life, frustrations arising from inequalities, the absence of opportunities, corruption, the shortcomings of certain political systems, silent responses to the outcry for justice may take an ugly turn and become hatred and violence.
- The third pillar is **the centrality of human beings**, both men and women alike. They form the State, civil society, university, work as civil servants or bakers, police officers or soldiers, peasant or journalists! This reveals the relevance of the notion of **human security** which places the human being at the centre of collective and

² Plan of Action of the United Nations Secretary-General to Prevent Violent Extremism (24 December 2015) http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674. / Plan d'action du Secrétaire général des Nations Unies pour la prévention de l'extrémisme violent (24 décembre 2015) http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674&referer=/english/&Lang=F

It should be noted that the Swiss FDFA has also developed a foreign policy action plan for the prevention of violent extremism:

https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/fr/documents/publications/SchweizerischeAussenpolitik/Aussenpolitisch-AktionsplanPVE160404_FR.pdf / Switzerland's Foreign Policy Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism (April 2016) : <http://www.news.admin.ch/NSBSubscriber/message/attachments/43587.pdf>

³ « Investing in Peace and the Prevention of Violence in West Africa and the Sahel-Sahara: Conversations on the Secretary-General's Plan of Action », organised by International Peace Institute (IPI), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) :

- Dakar, June 2016: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/1609_Investing-in-Peace-FRENCH.pdf / English: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/1609_Investing-in-Peace-ENGLISH.pdf

- N'Djamena, June 2017: <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/IPI-E-RPT-Chad-Meeting-NoteFrench.pdf> / English: <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/IPI-E-RPT-Chad-Meeting-NoteEnglish.pdf>

individual efforts on peace and security, and not an abstract discourse. The central place of the human being in the spiral of violence and the responses provided to protect man are most often distant from the objective of humanity, to the extent that certain people consider the « collateral damages » suffered by the populace as secondary, or consider certain actors of violent extremism as « out of humanity ».

- The fourth pillar – maybe the main teaching and the « trademark » of these Regional Conversations – is broken down as follows: to understand each other, we need to listen to each other, to listen we need to talk to each other; to talk we must meet each other. As such, the Conversations are first and foremost a platform for dialogue and the creation of links between multiple actors. There is need for this dialogue to be sustained and multiplied as far as possible.

It is therefore logical that it was deemed important to continue and intensify the regional conversations, with focus this time around on **Central Africa**.

As such, on 27 and 28 November 2017 in Yaounde, Cameroon, the « **Regional Seminar for the prevention of violent extremism in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin** » was held. It was organised with the support of the government of Cameroon – by the African Centre for International Diplomatic Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES), the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the United Nations Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

This high level meeting held in French and English brought together about sixty representatives of governments, international organisations, civil society, media organs, security and defence forces- public actors, researchers, experts, mostly from Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin area as well as West and Southern Africa.

Opened with keynote addresses from the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Central Africa H.E. François Looney FALL, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for West Africa and the Sahel H.E. Dr. Mohamed IBN CHAMBAS, the Swiss Ambassador to Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea H.E. Petro LAZZERI, and President of the African Centre for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES), Dr. Christian POUT, this seminar was conceived around the following principle : « **a better understanding of the drivers of violent extremism, will lead to an adaptation and refining preventive measures to be taken** ».

The issue of the motivations and paths followed by those who join violent movements was then brought forward. From the findings of various experts and researchers, it was acknowledged that such works were quite scarce and more stimulation was expected in that field. Participants were called upon to share their individual or collective mobilisation experiences in a bid to offer concrete economic, political or social alternatives to the appeal of violent extremism, - given that several such alternatives exist in the region and there was need to bring them to the limelight. The socio-professional

diversity of participants facilitated the presentation of original and complimentary approaches with comparable efficiency. The role of the armed forces, women and youths, and the media were specifically underscored. These discussions demonstrated the obvious need for experience-sharing and implementation through the setting up of regional networks.

II. Summary of proceedings

II. A Prevention of violent extremism: Concepts and challenges

i. Clarification of concepts

It is obvious that risk prevention requires prior understanding of it. However, concepts surrounding the prevention of violent extremism are deficient in specific and universally accepted definitions. The absence of definitions caused participants to acknowledge the urgent need for research in view of conceptualisation in this field. Conceptualisation goes beyond providing simple definitions; it aims **at giving an account of what is real** and spares people the risk of getting lost in unclear imprecision. It is in this perspective that « **a collective willingness** » drifting asymptotically towards the construction of a common sense in the process of clarifying terminology on violent extremism emerged from discussions: **it is from the understanding and attentive listening of the reality and its specificities that the meaning of terms is derives, not from normative or dogmatic considerations.**

Violent extremism has numerous causes and takes several forms. If this « global » and multidimensional nature helps **to avoid confusions** related to assimilating extremism to violence, extremist violence to terrorism and terrorism to a religion (Islam or Muslims), it above all has the advantage of situating prevention above the prism of « all-englobing security », which drastically reduces the prevention component in violent extremism.

Prevention is a set of measures taken to prevent the occurrence of certain risks. It seeks to address the structural causes and aggravating factors which engender violent extremism. Violence prevention requires an understanding of the drivers and goals involved. In this regard, research on the subject is still very scanty and would need serious encouragement. This point was discussed at length by participants, who also underscored the importance **of conducting surveys on the basis of clear empirical data** and understanding violent extremism from the standpoint of actors who practice it. It is the indispensable bedrock for the formulation of policies with proven adaptability.

ii. Challenges faced in the prevention of violent extremism

In Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin, multiple challenges exist:

- Rapid **demographic growth**, which has led to an increase in the number of young people in the total population, with youth unemployment as a corollary. How can the youth be transformed into a positive demographic dividend?
- **Low female empowerment** ;
- Growing **poverty** and uninclusive growth;
- **Governance and democracy deficits** ;
- All manner of **trafficking** (weapons, drugs, human beings, migrants, etc.);
- The shortcomings of **regional integration** ;
- The **little consideration shown those who have proven by their dynamism that it is possible to propose** both political and social projects « which place the society in its rightful place », and to **respond to violence through fair and positive brainstorming and action for all**. To that group, should be added rulers : those who increasingly understand that the implementation of preventive measures requires a comprehensive political will power ;
- The issue of the **defence and security forces (DSF)** as actors of prevention: this is a fundamental angle though scarcely envisaged ;
- **The need for strong advocacy for open and demonstrative commitment, public and government support**, for all brainstorming, efforts and actions geared towards prevention.

II.B Diagnosis of the reality and risks of violent extremism in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin

To understand the reality and causes of violent extremism in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin, participants focused on five principal points: the map of violent extremism in the region, the relationship between violent extremism and pre-existing conflicts, identification of the violence, forms of violence and factors that engender violence.

i. Mapping out violent extremism in the region

Participants distinguished the hot beds and the dormant or hybrid spots of violent extremism. The hot beds of violent extremism exist in the four (4) countries where the Boko

Haram armed group is particularly active; they are: Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger Chad. The CAR has been identified as a dormant or hybrid spot for violent extremism, with active violence perpetrated by domestic groups in addition to the risk of trans-nationalisation in collaboration with other active groups in Libya, Sudan or South Sudan.

In Cameroon, Boko Haram is active in the Mayo-Tsanaga Division, situated along the border with Nigeria, the Logone and Chari Division in the Lake Chad area and the Mayo-Sava Division. In Chad, violence attributed to Boko Haram is perceptible at the border with Niger (Fouli Division), Libya, Nigeria (Kaya Division), Cameroon (Mamdi Division) and the Lake Region (border area between Chad, Niger and Nigeria). In Niger, Boko Haram is multiplying attacks mostly in the N'Guigmi, Mainé and Diffa Divisions, but risks of the spread of the phenomenon seem to exist for instance in the Agadez region. In CAR, the principal violent groups are Séléka and the anti Balaka, which propagate ideological and ethnic doctrines, though finally, violent « extremism » is inseparable and often not easy to differentiate from other socio-political or economic⁴ foundations which have a form hard to distinguish from other forms of violence – to the extent that the appellation « forces of Evil » saves many the pains of delving into aimless categorization attempts. This state of affairs seems to also raise fears of transnational alliances with groups less concerned about the « label » violent actors.

ii. The link between violent extremism and pre-existing conflicts

Violent extremism is closely related to pre-existing conflicts in the region. For instance in Chad, Boko Haram is perceived –by some young adherents - as a continuation of the rebellion which hit the country for several years. In Northern Nigeria, it is considered that the upsurge of the Boko Haram armed movement was largely a reaction to the malfunctions of the State, and its defence and security forces in the region in particular. A link between the Libyan conflict and the risk of escalation of violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin and Central Africa in general was also made mention of by the panelists. The capillarity's of volatile security crisis around Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin had better been explored given that they undoubtedly contribute in degrading the security climate, and a response geared solely towards countering terrorism has potential for aggravation not appeasement of the multiple inter-connected causes of current or future violence.

iii. Actors of extremist violence

Participants identified the Boko Haram armed group as the principal actor of violence in the Central Africa and Lake Chad Basin region. It is nonetheless not the lone actor of violence in the region. We must also take into consideration the different ethnic and social groups which have conflicting relationships among themselves (nomads gang up

⁴ See report of the United Nations Expert's Group on the Central African Republic published on December 2017 - http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/1023 -, it brings to the limelight the economic factors that rouse violence.

against sedentary peoples, farmers gang up against grazers), diverse armed political groups in countries of the sub-region defending their claims through the use of force or related threats, so called « jihadist » groups which take advantage of religion to violate the current norms of society, but equally groups of traffickers who perpetrate a lot of violence and violations of rights. The State has also been placed in the dock: on the one hand, it creates inequalities which fuel violent extremism and on the other hand, its action to counter the terrorist threat is generally poorly oriented. Finally, the transnational dimension of violence and the difficulty for State actors confined to the borders to address it was also raised. The same difficulties were expressed for actors outside the region.

iv. Forms of extremist violence

Extremist violence has varied forms and has evolved over time, especially with the interventions of the Multinational Task Force against Boko Haram. It is first or all physical with assassinations, hostage takings, arrests, armed attacks, and explosions of suicide bombers, kidnappings, raids against military and civilian targets. It is also economic, through looting of cities, villages or camps. It also has a psychological dimension: fear has made a home in the sub-region. It is an expression of the most dangerous form of this violence; the form that is deep-rooted in the mind. Finally, fear is also linked to gender. In effect, women are exposed in double proportion: first, in their capacity as victims of violent extremism, then as privileged targets for forced recruitments and/or under the influence of violent extremists.

v. The concrete causes of extremist violence

Several reasons may cause individuals – young people in particular – to join a terrorist group. Even if research in this area is quite recent, discussions carried out during the seminar, were based on direct activities and observations from practitioners in the region. Proceedings led to the identification of six principal triggers:

- **Psychological reasons:** the hope for change, enthusiasm, the fear of repression, vengeance etc.
- **Education and training:** illiteracy, absence of strong and visible referential values in educational content.
- **Ideological believes:** attractiveness of the narratives propagated, ignorance of religious precepts, multiplication of rigorous religious trends.
- **Socio-economic reasons :** desire for personal enrichment or powers, marginalisation (most recruits have experienced some amount of frustration due to their economic situation : the quest for employment is one of their most pressing needs at the time they join a group), climatic disasters such as drought in the areas affected by violent extremism, absence of prospects for a bright future.

- **Political and governance-related reasons**⁵: weakness or absence of public authorities, acts of violence or alleged abuse of power by the State, corrupt state officials, malfunctions in the legal system, marginalisation of border areas or the peripheries which have over the years been suffering neglect from the State. Recruits also feel a deep sense of resentment for public authorities, they believe the State only has the interest of a small group at heart, and they neither trust the political class nor the State's security machinery. There is also need to consider factors such as the disapproval of the longevity of political leaders, the poor management of political crises, the porous nature of borders of the States in the sub-region, the advent of new means of communication – social media – which favours the propagation of a negative culture, etc.
- **Security reasons**: the need for protection which the State has failed to provide and which can be obtained by belonging to a violent extremist group.

II. C Act: How can actors act individually or collectively to prevent violent extremism (successful prevention experiences)?

i. Who are the actors of prevention?

There are many actors of prevention, but they are often unconscious of the prevention role they play. Their initiatives, when they do exist, are generally not given the place and recognition they deserve, nor the necessary support.

- **The State**: regardless of its shortcomings, it remains a major actor in the area of prevention. « No State no solution » However, the importance of rebuilding confidence between citizens and State representatives as a key prevention strategy was largely underscored. Even though the State plays a dominant role, the said role is not exclusive: it is primordial for it to play the role of federating all convergent and diverse initiatives undertaken by a wide range of socio-economic actors, without seeking to be the lone stakeholder. It also has to be conscious of the importance of investing in this prevention approach without focusing solely on the security response.
- **Politicians**: beyond State representatives, (government, institutions, administrators), political leaders (elected representatives, parties, etc.) also have an important role to

⁵ Check the UNDP report which states that: « However, disaffection with government is highest by significant margins among the Journey to Extremism respondents who were recruited by violent extremist groups across several key indicators. These include: belief that government only looks after the interests of a few; low level of trust in government authorities; and experience, or willingness to report experience, of bribe-paying. Grievances against security actors, as well as politicians, are particularly marked, with an average of 78 percent rating low levels of trust in the police, politicians and military. Those most susceptible to recruitment express a significantly lower degree of confidence in the potential for democratic institutions to deliver progress or meaningful change ». PNUD, Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment, op.cit., p. 5.

play in the prevention approach, given their front-liner role and also serve as relays within the society.

- **Defence and security Forces (DSF):** they play an important role, but are often underestimated in the different aspects of prevention. Front-liners at the war front, they often represent the State in the field. The security of the populace and the feeling of protection the people enjoy depend on their actions. That is why relations between the DSF and the local people are the core of the prevention of violent extremism as well as the protection of the rule of law and resilience building. As proven during the Dakar seminar⁶, the protection mission conferred on the DSF is not limited to reaction (upstream). It also falls in line with an anticipatory approach which guarantees its rapidity and efficacy (downstream). The DSF are most informed of the needs and complaints of the people, as well as messages communicated by violent extremists. They DSF cannot meet their objectives without the support of the people. To this end, the forces have to be trained anew to incorporate the aspect of « human security », in order to put the people at the center of their actions. They nonetheless cannot accomplish their mission single handedly. They need to be fully supported by civilians, political leaders and economic operators. They however also have to better manage their behavior and cooperation with other militia or vigilante and self-defence groups, which objectives and actions have not governed by the same rules as theirs. Finally, their presence on the ground exposes them to risk and also creates opportunities to establish dialogue with armed extremist groups. What therefore are the nature and the objectives of these contact points and how does their role as DSF fit in with the role of other actors?
- **Women:** initiatives for peace and conflict prevention conceived and implemented by women at community, national, regional and continental level are so few, whereas they are actors of both violence and peace. Understanding and supporting their aspirations in a bid to encourage them to play a positive social role and supporting their efforts in the area of prevention, are primordial factors for a prevention strategy. Women play a key role as educators and advisers to their children. They inculcate in their children from tender ages, values of peace and tolerance, sharing, the sense of honesty, not leaving out the culture of hard work. The Salafists and Wahhabites also think that for a good Muslim to emerge there is need for a good wife; this clearly explains the capital role a woman plays in education. They also play social roles within families and communities, and to some extent a political role. As such, the female folk should be at the center of violence prevention strategies. The accomplishment of their prevention role would strongly depend on the correction of the image society has of them. The State has to create social, economic and legal conditions enabling women to fully play the role which is theirs. There is also need to set up a support system for women who have suffered trauma, so that they can

⁶ Regional Seminar on the role of defence and security forces in the prevention of violent extremism organised by the Centre for Advanced Security and Defence Studies (CHED) Senegal and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) from 9-10 October 2017 in Dakar, Senegal.

play a more active prevention role as individuals or as a group of social actors. It is therefore indispensable to give them a chance to express themselves and be part of all initiatives aimed at providing appropriate assistance and protection not for themselves alone, but for their children and families as well. Their involvement in the protection and consolidation of peace is a key factor for success, social and economic change. For instance, a strong initiative has been launched in Cameroon through MediaWomen4Peace, a civil society organisation. In March 2017, it brought together some women who had fled the affected border villages in Northern Cameroon and found refuge in safer cities. After three days of emotion and hope-packed interviews, the women decided to get actively involved in the prevention of violent extremism within an association they decided to name « **le cœur d'une mère** » (the heart of a mother). Regardless of the fact that they do not benefit from any support what so ever in this mission of remolding spirits, they meet weekly to regenerate life.

- **The youth:** they can contribute in prevention given that they are the main targets for recruitment into terrorist groups. They can play a leading role in preaching values of tolerance and peaceful cohabitation within their communities of origin (family, friends, social networks, etc.) For this to be possible, they would need to be fully recognised and assigned responsibilities in the said role.
- **Vigilante groups:** opinions on these actors was characterised by approval of their efforts in certain areas and some criticisms also emanated. These groups help the Defence and Security Forces in their stabilisation mission, but the terms under which they work are generally unclear, and the socio-political consequences of their actions are generally uncertain. This could constitute a risk factor in future. For instance, the recruitment process for untrained people in emergency procedures, excluding morality checks has been identified as one a potentially dangerous venture.
- **Traditional and religious leaders:** they remain major partners of the State in protection of people.
- **Think tanks and research centres:** they play a crucial role in injecting knowledge to clarify complex realities, raise the awareness of politicians and propose recommendations for prevention strategies.
- **The media:** they are a strong instrument for influence and counter-influence; media practitioners should be more conscious and aware of their role in the prevention or violent extremism.

ii. How do they interact?

It must be mentioned that very little synergy exists between the various actors, as each operates in isolation. Participants however opined that, prevention approaches and the

need for greater interaction between stakeholders was beginning to gain ground in the region, though slowly. For instance, the people are educated to alert DSF when they are faced with confusing situations. An interactive prevention approach wherein every actor is conscious of the limits of single-handed actions and the strengths of collective action, would take a while to yield fruit.

iii. Which prevention approaches: the place of inclusive dialogue and violent extremists?

As far as approaches for the prevention of violent extremism are concerned, **dialogue** was identified as being of prime importance. What dialogue are we referring to? Who is to be invited? How is the dialogue to be conducted? Moreover, what content for the dialogue?

It was said that prevention cannot rely solely on the notions of **confidence** and **sharing**. For such confidence and sharing to be established, the place of all stakeholders in a society must be recognised, as well as their legitimate and specific roles. The State is the core of the machinery. It incarnates social regulation and its workers are in effect at the service of all citizens. Dialogue is fundamental for a society, for all our societies, to the extent that the option by actors of violent extremism to challenge it, cannot be resolved without seeking the opinion of all through a shared objective, collective action and a gain for all; Moreover, dialogue possibly represents a genuine opportunity to rebuild certain links broken by malfunctions and egoistic attitudes.

There is therefore need for **dialogue between the State and its citizens**, between the different components of a society, between communities and managers, as well as security forces. Misunderstandings and even antagonisms between the different corps of a sick society can only constitute obstacles to its quest for solutions to the violent deviances of a part of the said society. That said, all forms of inclusive dialogue and their multiplication shall, constitute several small threads, which woven together shall strengthen the societal fabric.

Dialogue is a virtue in itself, even if it cannot solve every problem on its own (given that material needs require concrete solutions). Through dialogue one gets to accept another, listen to his needs and vice versa. Dialogue favours the establishment of common grounds. It then becomes easier to engage in discussion (still) on the substance of problems – and it is therefore incumbent on those present to determine the scope of the discussion. It may involve attempting to better understand the origin of violent extremism, brainstorming together on measures required to “pull the rug out from the under the feet” and even on how to restructure a society which not only generates supreme exclusion (or self-exclusion, as other called it), but which **seeks to include the excluded**.

Some participants also recommended the need to **consider engaging dialogue with the perpetrators of terror**. The State (its representatives, its middlemen) should for instance, find a means of getting in touch with Boko Haram members, and not wait solely for periods when hostages have been taken. They should attempt to decode the real meaning of their claims, analyse and understand their demands on the issue of education, religion etc. They

could also seek to find out if beyond contact the desire for dialogue can emerge. However, we should not be “gentle dreamers”are out of the question: nothing mentioned above is easy to envisage nor to undertake, and nothing guarantees shared willingness to go in this direction. The absence of willingness and maybe know-how in the area of dialogue may be blamed on the State – but it should nonetheless be encouraged in this area and why not assisted by (traditional and community leaders may prove useful in this case.); communities; or violent extremist groups themselves.

iv. Which prevention communication action or which violence-prevention narrative in the media, especially community and online media?

In a media and information landscape characterised by a constant flow of information broadcast by the classical and interactive media, strategic communication becomes a powerful tool for the prevention of violent extremism. In effect, by ensuring **professional processing of information** on violent extremism itself, its causes and consequences, by ensuring the promotion of non-violent communication on social media, journalists and media practioners enable individuals to have an in-depth understanding of violent extremism and develop a critical mind towards the alarming, stereotype, hateful narratives and unverified information which pollute minds especially on internet and social media.

It is in this regard that the media has been recognised by participants as **catalysts for the change hoped for**. However, this resource is often poorly utilised due to many shortcomings noted. It is worth mentioning that the issue of violent extremism has most often been addressed from a strictly politico-military angle (violence), making very little provision for the resilience of the population and the understanding of the causes of violence. The influence of major international media organs in this area has serious consequences. It was also mentioned that some local media have been able to make a strong impact through professionalism in their role as whistleblowers and catalysts in awakening the consciences of affected people (for example the daily « L’œil du Sahel » in Cameroon). This important work nonetheless is most often beneficial only to a restricted number of readers and listeners who have access to such media, and are able to read and form an opinion on the reasons for the crises and its evolution.

Inform, educate, inspire are hence the three areas of action that should catch the attention of media practioners. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the activity of the NGO Equal Access International in the Central African region. These actions seek to increase access to credible and quality information through magazines and interactive programs broadcast on partner community radios.

Local media actors could draw inspiration from this concrete example to guarantee that those living in landlocked areas may have access to information. From this view point, professionals working in the Sahel should be encouraged to constitute networks and include capacity building and production of media content destined for proximity information in local languages, on their agendas. In effect, proximity communication and the development

of content in collaboration with local actors facilitate ownership of the prevention of violent extremism by the local people.

v. What is Cameroon's experience in PVE?

Cameroon, like other countries in Central Africa first embarked on a military response to the issue of extremist violence. In this context, it established a relatively fruitful cooperation with neighbouring countries such as Nigeria and Chad to engage in a legitimate war against Boko Haram. However, these past months, the idea of regional « stabilisation » after military action is gaining grounds, and in this regard, the question of challenges and opportunities in the prevention of violent extremism is expected to take the pride of place. The Lake Chad Commission expects a strategic note of CEIDES, which should intensify brainstorming in line with the first regional conference on the stabilisation of areas affected by Boko Haram (held from 4-5 November 2017 in N'Djamena). During this seminar, the idea of stabilisation and cooperation were identified as the way forward.

It is pleased to observe this evolution which is paving the way for brainstorming and action based not only on the immediate management of violence or its consequences, but equally on its origin. Participants however also underscored the fact that to envisage such an approach, Cameroon, like other States in the region would have to overcome the challenge of correcting certain practices of the forces involved in the legitimate fight against violent extremism, or involved in the management of refugees or displaced persons, in order to have a strong foundation of followers to conduct the for the prevention approach.

II. D Structuring prevention: Laying the groundwork for national action plans for the prevention of violent extremism and launching regional initiatives for the prevention of violent extremism in Central Africa

« I am convinced that the building of open, fair, inclusive and pluralist societies founded on the full respect of human rights and affording economic prospects to all, is the most concrete and most suitable manner of escaping from violent extremism ». In order to translate into actions this assertion of the United Nations Secretary General⁷, a whole gamut of new actions, innovative initiatives, targeted and generalised actions should be set up. This implies that there is need to set up a strategy which coordinates the actions and interactions of actors at national and regional levels, as a solution to the shortcomings and constraints of dispersed and isolated actions. Participants belabored the prevention of violent extremism from this angle. They recalled what is currently being done in the said area, before discussing the needs, the scope and the manner in which strategies and national and regional action plans for the prevention of violent extremism should be drafted.

⁷ See UNDP survey on: Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment, op.cit.

i. Situation of the drafting of national and regional action plans for the prevention of violent extremism

▪ **At national level**

Given that violent extremism has multiple factors, a direct and adequate response should first and foremost be conceived at national level. As such, the role of the State is capital. With the support of other stakeholders, it has to draft a strategy with a matching national action plan in order to institute a framework for the prevention of violent extremism. It was observed at this level that States of the region have strengthened their legislation on the fight against terrorism⁸. However, recent development has proven that a quest for different solutions is underway: without being exhaustive, it was mentioned that Nigeria in November 2017 (while the seminar was going on) adopted a national action plan for the prevention of violent extremism, Chad as well as Niger are working towards it, and the latter, like Nigeria, has extended a hand of fellowship to Boko Haram members willing to leave the group. Sudan in 2017 also adopted a PVE action plan. With regard to Cameroon and other Central African countries, prevention structuring remains a vast work site that should be launched urgently. This structuring faces an overall challenge at the level of its implementation: even though political will power to move in the right direction should be commended; practical challenges and concrete impediments are numerous.

▪ **At regional level**

The African Union has developed a complete arsenal of instruments for the fight against terrorism, but nothing so far on the prevention of violent extremism (besides the OAU Convention on the fight against terrorism from as far back as 1999, no other regional or continental instrument could inspire national strategies).

The regional strategy for the stabilisation of the Lake Chad Basin currently being drafted by the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Union, with the support of different partners, offers a window of opportunity for regional actors to begin taking ownership of the approach on the prevention of violent extremism.

ii. Discussions on strategies and national and regional action plans for the prevention of violent extremism

Discussions conducted in this regard focused on the findings of the empirical survey conducted by the UNDP mentioned above (September 2017). Several political and program-related implications were envisaged:

⁸ Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria now have anti-terrorist legislation. In Chad and in Cameroon, the legislation provides for the pronouncement of a death penalty for anyone guilty of terrorism. However, grey areas in the definition and interpretation of this law posed a problem during its adoption.

❖ Political Implications

- The urgent need to review the conception of security-based legislation and anti-terrorism interventions as well as their implementation, in order to ensure the full respect of human rights and the rule of law, as well as the overall improvement of governance.
- Solutions based on peace-building and development is essential in addressing the dynamics and drivers of violent extremism. Military solutions cannot single-handedly address the issue and would fuel the cycle of violence.
- The prevention approach requires a change of paradigm which should be largely discussed and incorporated, both by State structures as well as other actors. The drafting of national and regional strategies is a process essential for the creation of conditions suitable for change. The drafting of action plans enables the establishment of a substantive scope of interventions as well as an operational framework necessary for the implementation of the strategy. The implementation of a plan of action should recognize and encourage the roles of diverse actors (State, civil society, private sector, etc).
- The need to explain the levels of correlation between Public Development Aid (PDA) and the prevention of violent extremism and resist the temptation of transforming development programs into programs for the prevention of violent extremism.
- The need to create **viable exit strategies** for all those seeking to leave violent extremist groups. The term « **viable** » **implies going beyond reconciliation or forgiveness**, and addressing the fundamental issues that inspire deviance and recourse to violence. Without that, « reinsertion » strategies run the risk of being short-lived and could lead to boomerang effects likely to cause further deceptions and fuel new cycles of violence.

❖ Program-related Implications

- The need to improve results in the area of governance and development in border regions and the peripheries.
- The need to give preference to **local channels**. In the prevention of violent extremism, the Media gains its relevance from the content of its message. Put otherwise, the messenger who conveys good information is also as important as the message itself. And this **messenger should be credible and legitimate** in the eyes of the major audiences; in this case, recruits or potential recruits of violent extremist groups. In effect, according to the UNDP survey mentioned above, 48 % of recruits of violent extremist groups sampled admitted that were aware of initiatives aimed at preventing them from joining those movements at the time of their adhesion but

confirmed to have ignored them out of mistrust for those who presented the information to them.

- The need to focus on the four social components identified as front line actors: **communities, institutions, religious leaders, women and the media**, both in the formulation and the implementation of strategies and action plans for the prevention of violent extremism at national and regional level.
- The need for precaution in considering the **Internet**. On the one hand, the internet does not (yet) serves as a dominant means of recruitment within violent extremist groups. Personal links, direct or indirect remain prevalent. Nonetheless, as access to the internet develops throughout the continent, it is possible that its influence in terms of recruitment capacities has equally risen in these regions. On the other hand, focus on prevention should not be laid on recruitment but on the reasons for recourse to violence. It is therefore insufficient to construe the problem from the prism of the available vectors (that is, internet) or even the message (and propose counter-messages). It is the **credibility of an alternative message which is a determining factor**: if alternative offers sound vague: beautiful words void of key actions, they shall be no match for the attractiveness portrayed by violent extremism.

Finally the issue of the respective roles of States, regional and international organisations as well as partners in the region was discussed.

❖ **Role of regional organisations and partners**

- The need for better understanding and consideration of ongoing initiatives in the area of prevention of violent extremism in diverse States of the region was expressed.
- The need to ensure that the initiatives of sub-regional, regional and international organisations as well as those of other partners do not substitute but support such efforts.
- The need at regional level for a regional advocacy in favour of the prevention approach, support towards capacity building for nations, platforms for experience-sharing or better still common analyses for a transnational phenomenon, its evolution and concerted responses.

III Principal Lessons learnt, proposals and recommendations

About sixty participants from various places met within the framework of the « **Regional Seminar for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin** », with the general objective of **creating progressive dynamics for the effective**

ownership of an approach for the prevention of violent extremism in the Central African Sub-region and the Lake Chad Basin. More specifically, it had to do with:

- Understanding: What is the situation of violent extremism in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin and what are its causes?
- Act: How can stakeholders act individually or collectively to prevent Violent Extremism (successful prevention experiences)?
- Structuring prevention: On what basis can national strategies and action plans for the prevention of violent extremism be drafted? How can a regional initiative for the prevention of violent extremism be launched in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin?

The remarkable quality of speakers and participants, their knowledge of realities of the region and their personal experiences in the area of violence prevention made the two-day seminar a moment of rich discussions giving rise to some significant and enriching knowledge useful for any future projects:

Primo, **the prevention of violent extremism is neither a choice nor an option but a necessity** which emphasises on the urgent need to take action upstream in view of preventing the production and reproduction of violent extremism. This obligation requires the involvement of multiple actors both nationally and internationally. It also imposes the adoption of a coordination strategy for the set of measures aimed at providing remedy to the root causes of violent extremism.

Secundo, **discussing the issue of violent extremism without considering it as a taboo requires the adoption of a double approach: the explanatory and the comprehensive.** The explanatory approach aims at understanding the structural conditions of violent extremism such as: its causes, development, consequences etc. The comprehensive approach takes into account the significance violent extremism gives the system within which it operates, its image of its environment, its place in society, the image it has of itself and of those it combats as well as the mode of governance it proposes.

Tertio, **the perception of causes of extreme violence should not overshadow the following elements** :taking into account the « long » history of the region and the countries concerned, the more or less inclusive nature of institutions which structure political or economic life of the countries in the region, the political projects of leaders, the content of responses government provides to the expectations of the people, the relationship between the Defence and Security Forces combating violent extremism, the image citizens have of the State and the management of the battle they have embarked on, against the extremists.

Quarto, underscoring **the importance of research** as an axis of prevention: In effect, research centres are important instruments in the implementation of a set of coordinated actions in the areas of collection, processing and distribution for strategic use in decision

making. Pertinent resources in reducing uncertainty in strategic decision making, research centres should be given the consideration they deserve.

Quinto, the « **need to play collectively and win as a team** » : It is with a growing number of actors from the national and international community, government, defence and security forces, the civil society, academia, the media etc that initiatives to prevent violence, strengthen the resilience of citizens, build mutual support in the quest for alternatives to violence shall be efficacious.

Sexto, an **invitation not to succumb to fear** : the fear of an « alleged » enemy often described by the media as a strange, unpredictable, faceless and lawless being etc ; a being who should be treated with violence in order to implement the old antiphon which states « **no negotiation with terrorists** » be they our brothers, our fathers, or our daughters.

On the basis of these teachings, the following **recommendations** were formulated:

❖ **Recommendations on the importance of research**

- Mobilise the support of researchers and experts to curb deficiency in studies based on empirical methods of prevention on violent extremism ; in order to find, interpret, make accessible, strategic information to the right decision makers at the right time ;
- Accompany and support initiatives taken in the area by research centres and think tanks, in order to understand the root causes of violent extremism and propose appropriate alternatives ;
- Capitalise on the results of research already conducted ;
- Initiate a scientific survey on the role of women in violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram ;
- Rely on think tanks to contribute in structuring discussions on the PVE by proposing methodological frameworks that are increasingly adapted to the objectives set within the framework of the dialogue between the different stakeholders.

❖ **Recommendations on governance and the role of the State**

- Take advantage of the approach on the prevention of violence in order to promote a shared diagnosis of the problem, promote dialogue and strength the social contract ;
- Invest in modes of operation at different levels of the State (national, regional, local) enabling citizens to take effective part in decision-making affecting him. The idea pushed for in this regard is that of an inclusive management of the affairs of the city; a key factor in the consolidation of « peaceful cohabitation » ;

- Restore the authority of the State in far-off, marginalised or abandoned areas by focusing on the paradigm of the usefulness of the State as a vector for the establishment of new relations between the State, communities and citizens ;
- Establish the framework and basis for open dialogue involving all stakeholders: government, defence and security forces, civil society, violent extremist groups, etc. ;
- Promote and federate public, private or corporate initiatives contributing towards the collective construction of peace and a sense of belonging to the nation as an alternative to violent extremism ;
- Ensure that the State oversees the educational system, be it lay or Ceramic systems, in order to control the content of school curricula, by attaching specific importance to the introduction of values of peace, non-violence, tolerance towards diversity, democracy and citizenship in the lessons taught ;
- Commit to the respect of the fair and equitable distribution of wealth ;
- Set up economic and financial policies aimed at nurturing, attracting and maintaining economic activities on the national territory - condition sine qua non for the creation of decent jobs and boosting the resilience of young people.

❖ **Recommendations towards women, young people and communities**

Women are called to a:

- Ensure their pro-active involvement in the prevention of violent extremism ;
- Be conscious of the growing importance of their role in the spread of messages on peace. Capitalise on the love they receive and show recognition towards their environment ;
- Assert unambiguously their attachment to build their capacities in resilience against violent extremism.

On account of their privileged position in both production and reproduction of violent extremism – without the support of the youth, extremist armed groups cannot meet their objectives; the youth à invited to get actively involved in the drafting and implementation of strategies likely to:

- Favour their socio-professional insertion ;
- Promote non-violent communication on social media and within their respective communities (families, friends, religious and ethnic communities etc) ;
- Pay special attention to measures aimed at strengthening their resilience against violent extremism ;

Communities and civil society should envisage:

- Boost their efforts in rebuilding and consolidating « peaceful cohabitation » as a social link between all components of the society ;
- Promote dialogue-friendly behaviors and denounce attitudes contrary to values accepted or wished for by all (culture of peace, rule of law, good governance, development etc) ;
- Invest in educating and training individuals on the stakes of an effective ownership of the violent extremism prevention approach both at local, national and regional levels ;

❖ **Recommendations towards defence and security forces**

- Engage resolutely in « winning hearts and minds » through a strategy aimed at creating, developing and maintaining their notoriety, image and reputation in the minds of the people. It is by establishing and maintaining fruitful and sustainable relations that the defence and security forces would preserve their social acceptance in the eyes of the populace. This is an important area in the prevention of violent extremism ;
- Ensure the scrupulous respect of human rights by strongly condemning acts of « extreme cruelty » committed by the DSF ;
- Adapt their mission to the prevention of violent extremism.

❖ **Recommendations towards the media**

- Build the capacities of media professionals on violent extremism prevention ;
- Instill an understanding of the real causes of violent extremism in such a manner as not to fall into the trap of Manichaeism and encourage the public to adhere to the principles of inclusion. Use proximity media (community radios) , modern tools (internet, social media) and traditional methods (story telling) of communication to propagate a message different from that spread by extremists ;
- Ensure the production and broadcast, in local languages, of programs promoting peace, non-violence and tolerance. Programs which contribute in diagnosing the problem of violent extremism and propose adequate solutions to it ;

❖ **Recommendations at regional level for the prevention of violent extremism**

- Set up a framework and a regional information and communication strategy for prevention of violent extremism in Central Africa ;

- Merge knowledge, experiences and products where possible ;
- Rouse stronger attachment for the prevention approach by promoting platforms for multiple-actor inclusive dialogues and regional dialogues ;
- Mobilise the support of regional organisations and/or partners in view of strengthening national frameworks for the prevention of violent extremism ;
- Promote and support capacity building for actors concerned in the prevention of violent extremism at regional level ;
- Promote and support initiatives or regional frameworks for collaboration in the area of research to consolidate understanding of violent extremism and possible prevention methods to be strengthened, also taking into account the transnational dimension of the phenomenon.

IV Outlook

This seminar which came up as a follow up to the efforts undertaken during regional Conversations in Dakar and N'Djamena led to a real consensus on the importance of an approach for the prevention of violent extremism. It has overall, met the need for refreshing and sharing ideas on the prevention approach and experiences ; it has also led to a better understanding of the concept of « prevention », measuring the importance of « collective game » and acknowledging the need of adopting national and regional prevention plans through inclusive processes. It provided participants tools for conscious decision-making in all situations, and how to anticipate, optimise time, energy and resources on the basis of credible hypothesis. It also taught them how to avoid bearing useless risks and how to enjoy greater freedom in action.

Accordingly, a clear message, especially from the Chadians, Cameroonians and Central Africans was extended to the organisers, reminding them not to leave behind those attending the Conversations for the time.

As such, it was therefore logically decided that this work be pursued as actively as possible in order to support and harness the numerous projects and initiatives mentioned. A structured, platform for dialogue, destined to boost new efficient and inclusive initiatives for the promotion of peace and stability was also advocated. The organisers of the seminar shall on their part attempt to satisfy these demands to the best of their ability, while inviting all stakeholders to get actively committed at any level whatsoever, in order to translate into action this effort to prevent violence.

Outcomes of this seminar as captured in this final report shall be disseminated and shall help to nourish ideas, favour experience-sharing and participation during subsequent regional conversations on the prevention of violent extremism. In the same vein, they shall be made available on the PVE online platform launched in January 2017 by the Swiss FDFA and the GCPS (<https://pveplatform.forumbee.com>) and on the CEIDES website (www.ceides.org).

Annex

Photos



Speech SRSG UNOCA



Interview of the SRSG UNOWAS



First plenary session



Speech of the Swiss Ambassador to the Republic of Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea



Breakout session in groups



Plenary Session