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# Participative dialogue for the prevention of violent extremism in the Far North Cameroon and its periphery

Maroua, Cameroun, 24-25 July 2018

## **Final report**

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## Abstract

Following the regional seminar on the prevention of Violent extremism, held in Yaoundé in November 2017, which launched the "Central Africa Cluster" of the initiative of "Regional Conversations for the prevention of violent extremism", initiated in 2016 in Dakar, the African Center for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES), based in Yaoundé and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAE), organized, with the support of the Government of Cameroon, a **"Participative dialogue for the prevention of violent extremism in the far north of Cameroon and its periphery", on the 24 and 25 July 2018 in Maroua.**

The meeting at Maroua therefore aimed at bringing these conversations closer to the actors of a region which is affected daily by violent extremism, in order to initiate a dynamic of exchange at the local level and to strengthen and federate the initiatives of Existing prevention. The main focus was to **stimulate the emergence of a dialogue on the "reasons" of this violence, and "how" each actor can contribute to the prevention of violent extremism and the emergence of a narrative different from the violence affecting the Far North of Cameroon and its periphery.**

For two days, the sixty participants exchanged animated discussions on **the causes of violent extremism in the Lake Chad region, the various forms this violence has taken over the past decade, the solutions both at the security and civilians levels, and the developments that it could take in the future according to the strategies that are and will be opposed to it, including that of contacting, or even negotiating with some components of the Boko movement Haram.**

From the point of view of the actors who are immersed in this reality on a daily basis, It accounts from this meeting that we are **far from escaping the spiral of violence**, despite the efforts made at the military level. On the one hand, violence continues on a daily basis. **There is still no treatment that addresses the identified causes of this violence.** On the other hand, the authorities, the communities and the various actors are at a loss for some complex issues. In particular, there are certain points on which applied research could particularly bring significant added value.

**The inclusive dialogue proposed by the meeting was an innovative model for participants.** While there was some reserve at the beginning, the participating actors finally ended up speaking freely and open to the most sensitive questions. This inclusive dialogue initiative was unheard of in the region and everybody expressed the desire to perpetrate it, particularly with capacity-building seminars.

## I. Background, rationale and scope of the seminar

### A. Background

For almost five years now, Cameroon and the Lake Chad Basin countries have been facing unprecedented security challenges resulting from violent extremism which, by opportunism, has been religiously colored, especially as Islamic. By the end of the 2000s, the movement carrying this violent extremism, Boko Haram (Arab-Hausa term meaning "the modern school is illegal"), stopped defining itself as a jihadist, revolutionary and fundamentalist movement, which defends a strict political and social Islam and which considers as adversary any theory opposite to its ideology. The movement then recruits its supporters in low-emancipated intellectual environments, taking advantage of the socio-economic situations that make some people vulnerable.

In the border areas (between Cameroon, Nigeria and Chad), the spread of Boko Haram was fast due in particular to the cultural homogeneity of the population living there. In the early 2010s, the movement becomes a real threat for the States which began to undergo attacks on their territories. All the Northeastern part of Nigeria is in the hot waters. The Far North of Cameroon is also attacked. Chad and Niger are also targeted. In 2014, these states are really starting to organize a joint action of military response. A multinational force (FMM) is put in place including Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger and Chad. The African and international community is mobilized. A number of actors such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom and China, which have strategic interests in the endangered areas, provide support in particular in war material, intelligence services and through the supervision of the troops.

This military counter-offensive provokes a reversal of the balance of forces that constraints Boko Haram to move from an offensive to a defensive strategy. However, this situation of "relative peace" is accompanied by new security threats marked by the seal of urgency with regards to their ability to feed hatred, the foundation on which is built, nurtured and reproduced extremist violence.

### B. Rationale

If we want to get out of the spiral of violence, two alternatives must necessarily be taken into consideration.

First, the military response is fraught with many constraints - a decline in many markets, a change in trading habits, a ban on human mobility, indiscipline or outlawed behaviour by some members of the soldiers' defense forces that result in bullying, rackets, human rights violations etc. that increase social discontent, reinforce the springs of exclusion, break the image and reputation of state institutions among the populations, further weaken the State-citizen / governor-governed relations and allow the persistence of the underlying factors to conflict. **It is therefore urgent to ensure that immediate responses do not, in their turn, reinforce this spiral of violence.**

Secondly, neither the military and security response, nor the urgent humanitarian and short-term reconstruction responses, are intended and adequate to **address the causes of violence - whether political, social, cultural or economic.**

At the international level, this awareness has resulted to promoting a complementary approach to the security response: the preventive approach embodied in the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (A/70/674) of 24 December 2015<sup>1</sup>. This plan of action is backed by the global anti-terrorism strategy, which is built on four pillars: the elimination of conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, the prevention and fight against terrorism, the consolidation of anti-terrorism capabilities and the fight against terrorism, the strengthening of United Nations action, respect for human rights and the rule of law as a fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism.

The first three editions of the **Regional Conversations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism** held in Dakar in June 2016, in N'Djamena in June 2017 and in Alger in June 2018<sup>2</sup>, as well as the **Regional Seminar for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Central Africa and the Lake Chad Basin** held in Yaoundé on 27 and 28 November 2017, focused on the first pillar of this strategy by giving priority to preventive measures that have the particularity of highlighting **the need, in a society in crisis, to rethink the cohabitation, not only for reducing pain and human suffering, but also to aspire to a more stable, more just and more conducive society for the material and immaterial well-being of its citizens.**

It was acknowledged during these meetings that **the prevention of violent extremism is not a choice or an option but a necessity.** In addition, these high-level meetings have highlighted a common sense of the need to multiply spaces for dialogue wherever possible.

With the aim of creating a link between all stakeholders in the prevention of violent extremism, the dialogue is not only a tool to **"talk about"** the preventive approach, but simply a mean **"to talk to each other"** - to avoid falling into the trap of unique thinking, **"to**

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<sup>1</sup> 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](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](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/Aussenpoliti-scher-AktionsplanPVE160404\\_FR.pdf](https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/fr/documents/publications/SchweizerischeAussenpolitik/Aussenpoliti-scher-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>

<sup>2</sup> « 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](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](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>

- Alger, June 2018: <https://www.ipinst.org/2018/09/peace-and-prevention-of-violence-sahel-sahara-third-regional-conversations>

**listen to each other"** while developing a **"culture of openness and inclusion"**, essential in the construction of **"peaceful societies"** and less favourable to violent extremism.

### C. Scope of the seminar

At the Yaoundé meeting, the participants unanimously invited the organizers not to abandon this inclusive dialogue exercise along the way. In that light, the Seminar entitled **"Participative dialogue for the prevention of violent extremism in the Far North Cameroon and its periphery"** was held on 24 and 25 July 2018 in Maroua, Cameroon. The seminar was organized with the support of the Government of Cameroon by the African Center for International Economic and Strategic Diplomatic Studies (CEIDES) and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) of Switzerland.

This high-standard meeting, held in French and English, brought together about sixty participants from Cameroon and the Lake Chad Basin region, representing governments, political leaders, civil society organizations, research centers and training, professionals from diverse backgrounds - including the media - and regional and international organizations.

Many speeches marked the opening ceremony of this participative dialogue session built around a high-level round table entitled: *"Invest in peace and the prevention of violent extremism closer to the people: opportunities and constraints"*. These included speeches from the Representative of the Governor of the Far North Region, Mr. ASSIGA EBANA Herman Bertrand, the Divisional officer of the Diamaré (Maroua), Mr. Ernest Samuel Christian EBELLE, the Representative of the Commander of the Fourth Joint Military Region (RMIA 4), Captain HAMADOU LAME, Director of the Center for Studies and Research in Peace, Security and Integration (CERPSI), Pr Saibou ISSA, the interventions of the Ambassador of Switzerland in the Republic of Cameroon , Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea, HE Mr. Pietro LAZZERI, the Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in Cameroon, HE Mr. ALLEGRA BAIOCCHI and the President, African Center for International, Economic and Strategic Diplomatic Studies (CEIDES), Dr. Christian POUT.

The seminar was built around the following principle: *"to eliminate the conditions favourable to the spread of violent extremism, we must understand the underlying causes of extremist violence, act upstream to prevent the spread of violent extremism by bringing into the concerned areas, concrete solutions to the problems encountered, being attentive to the needs and rights of the populations and proposing concrete responses to legitimate demands so that they do not seek to express themselves by violence "*. To round up, the seminar invited the participating actors to informally share their analyzes, their experiences and their ideas to achieve, through dialogue and the construction of synergies, an alternative solution to violence

## II. Summary of work

### A. Concepts challenged by the approach to preventing violent extremism

As the process of stabilization of Boko Haram affected areas in the Far North of Cameroon begins, the need to understand the concepts surrounding the approach to the prevention of violent extremism is sharply updated. This need for clarification is not less important, as the terminology related to violent extremism is complex and still largely controversial. The main one being that many terms used in this field do not have a universally accepted definition. As emphasized in the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, the phenomena of "terrorism" and "violent extremism" are not clearly defined. It goes the same for concepts like "stabilization", "recovery" and "de-radicalization" that are perceived differently by the actors. None of them is synonymous to the concept "prevention".

However, the participants agreed on several points, beyond or in spite of the undecided terms: on the one hand, the notion of prevention clearly invites to go beyond the short term or the treatment of the only symptoms, to go towards the transformation of the causes of violence and on the other hand, to transform the causes, it is necessary to apprehend them in all their diversity. Very few studies have already highlighted **the need to take account of situational intelligence**; the ability of individuals to understand contexts, both in the search for a better understanding of concepts and in the elaboration of fast-paced actions and sustainable above all.

The absence of relevant related work in the region was unanimously observed and led stakeholders to ask academics and researchers to actively engage in such work. On the one hand, they must keep on investigating on such questions as: What is the reference to stabilization, recovery and de-radicalization in the Far-North region and the surrounding areas? What is the link between these concepts and the stakes of the prevention approach?

Above all, however, based on sound empirical data and scientific methodologies, they must generate a fine and nuanced knowledge of the realities faced in the sub-region, the causes of violence - in order to contribute to the emergence of answers. adequate prevention.

### B. Addressing extremist violence in society

#### 1) Etiology of violence and potential for recidivism

The etiology of violence and the potential for re-offending in the region can be structured around five general concepts:

- **The convertibility of the actors and the entrepreneurship of the violence:** without any clear evidence that Boko Haram has capitalized the criminal expertise of the armed bands which preceded it in its area of action, it is nevertheless necessary to note footbridges between banditry and violent extremism, the latter appearing for many members of Boko

Haram as a screen to sublimate organized crime by hiding behind ideological motivations. Thus, among the undrained recruits, there are risks of reconstitution of armed groups or participation in initiatives requiring a "skilled workforce". The wandering of this stateless work force is getting stronger with the Boko Haram recruits still reluctant to surrender and fearing to be caught by the Defense and Security Forces (FDS) of the countries in which they are operating at the moment.

- **The reproducibility of conflicts:** responses to sociopolitical, identity, intergenerational or natural resource exploitation conflicts over the past three decades have generally adopted a management logic (quest for calm) rather than resolution (search for a sustainable and lasting solution) and the prevention of cycles of violence. It is more the symptoms of the conflicts than the object of the dispute that are addressed. Consequently, the regenerations of violence remain possible as soon as the situation is favorable, the same causes producing the same effects. In addition, as time passes and the "elders" disappear, the villages lose knowledge of the traditional resolution of social conflicts and particularly land disputes. Added to this is the proliferation of weapons emanating from regional conflicts and trafficking;

- **The profitability of the violence:** it is admitted today that the security crisis in the Basin of Lake Chad is a result of governance crises, particularly socio-economic. Over the past three decades, the boycott of standards and illegality in general, have marked large parts of the modes of production. Also, the link between crime and work has sometimes been highlighted in the speeches of highwaymen as well as those recruiters of the Boko Haram Al-Barnawi faction who, failing to convince by indoctrination, use financial incentive. **In any case, the use of force as a transfer of ownership mechanism is a persistent route;**

- **The segmentation of armed groups:** conflicts of leadership, saturation of operating areas, effectiveness of security measures, etc. have frequently led armed groups to split up and relocate to new spaces. Boko Haram split, giving birth to two factions, the second occupying Lake Chad and its surroundings. It seems unfounded to regard them as rival factions dedicated to confront each other and destroy each other. The risk (and the main trend), in the Lake Chad Basin region and more generally in Central Africa, is rather to new divisions that would atomize large groups, multiply areas at risk, increase the illegibility of leadership and the fluctuation of actors of violence and modes of violence (violent extremism, banditry, organized crime, traditional conflicts).

- **The very low attention devoted to transforming the causes of violence:** the absence of measures to tackle the causes of violence in order to prevent its occurrence condemns the Far North of Cameroon and the surrounding areas to a perpetual stagnation in the spiral of violence. To get out of this, it is necessary and urgent to give prior place to the prevention approach in view of the persistence of violence on the ground, as well as taking into account the hybridization of threats (fusion between violent extremism and other forms of violence) which further complicates the search for solutions.



## 2) Concrete causes of the youth rallying to Boko Haram

The reasons why young people rally to Boko Haram are diverse and varied, sometimes related to the personal trajectories of the young enlisted, but generally referring to a series of explanations where we find the following hypotheses:

- The very poor economic conditions in villages where young people, generally uneducated and jobless, disappointed by an unproductive environment, are a vulnerable target and easily seduced by offers of rapid enrichment, land use and fishery resources, and easy marriages;
- The frustrations experienced by some people, mainly young people, who have not won their case following the resolution of certain disputes (including land) and who see in the sharia advocated by Boko Haram alternative justice;
- Conscious or unconscious adherence to Boko Haram propaganda, carried out in mosques, in youth circles or even through the distribution of money and dates, some of whom believe that they are mystically conditioned to attract recruits ;
- The closing of the borders, which has deprived thousands of young people of their jobs, and which has made them vulnerable, unable to provide for the needs of their families. The attractiveness of Nigeria, which is often perceived as an eldorado by young people, can from this point of view be compared with the absence of the state in the border areas.
- Failures of the State and parents in terms of supervision of young people. State programs are very hard on young people, and parents, indexed in the way of resolving certain intergenerational conflicts, have sometimes been catalysts for the engagement of their children in the ranks of Boko Haram;
- In a traditionalist culture, the social weight of marriage (and its cost) weighs heavily on young men who have also been able to join Boko Haram hoping to find either the means to take a wife, or to find a wife in the ranks of the group; and for young women, it seems that it is not uncommon either when joining the group, they also seek to escape the strong social constraints they are subjected to in their families and communities of origin.

### C. A map of actors involved in extremist violence

#### 1) Defense and security forces

In response to the globalization of the threat, the strategic reorganization of the military command of the Lake Chad Basin countries at the local, regional, national and international levels has caused serious problems to Boko Haram. If there is still resistance in the area of Lake Chad, the Cameroonian side is already under a relative control. **However, the region is not yet immune to the stagnation of a cyclical conflict. Indeed, containing is not healing.**

## **2) Defense and security forces and populations**

Collaboration between the defense and security forces and the populations is assessed according to the evolution of the situation in the field. At the genesis, the populations were suspicious vis-à-vis the army because of its propensity to brutality and the systematic violations of the international humanitarian law. Just as the army did not trust these populations, some of whose children had joined the ranks of Boko Haram. With the proliferation of attacks, acts of serious violence perpetrated on the population and the asymmetrical nature of the conflict imposed by Boko Haram on the army, which by then were accustomed to conventional war, collaboration has imposed itself. The people needed the protection of the army and the army needed the information from the people. The two started to collaborate.

This interaction arises through the Vigilance Committees and traditional authorities. Their mission is to provide intelligence to the defense and security forces operating in their villages.

## **3) Political representatives**

By inscribing their actions in the principle of defending the territorial integrity of Cameroon, political representatives lined up behind the Cameroonian army to offer them moral and material support. They also did not remain insensitive to the reports of the NGO Amnesty International accusing the Cameroonian army of human rights violations in the war against Boko Haram. On several occasions, they stepped up to affirm and reaffirm their unconditional support to the soldiers, by maintaining the idea of a sovereign army, which deploys enormous resources to preserve the territorial integrity of Cameroon.

## **4) National NGOs**

Several NGOs are involved in the fight against extremist violence. The Center for Self-Help for Sustainable Development (CAPROD), the Research Community Action for Ethics and Development (RACED), the Solidarity Action for Human Rights and Democracy (ASDHD), the Association for Fighting Violence Against Women (ALVF) and the Association for the Promotion of Girls' Education and Supervision in the Logone Valley (APEF). The action of two of them was highlighted by the participants. It is the Collective of Civil Society Organizations Against Radicalization and Terrorism (COSC-CRT) and the Local Action Association for Alternative Development (ALDEPA).

Exposure to shredded bodies by bombs, gunshots, physical and psychological injuries, etc. can lead to post-traumatic shocks that negatively affect the humanity of those who have been in contact with such atrocities. It is mindful of that, that the COSC-CRT is deployed in the crisis zones of the Far-North region to provide support and psychological guidance to civilians and military victims of the horrors of conflict. Between 2016 and 2018, it moved in areas such as: Fotokol, Dougoue, Bodo, Limani, Amchide, Kolofata, Kerawa, Talamade, Kouyape etc.

ALDEPA provides psychosocial support to children and women in critical situations. The psychosocial care of children is done through the organization of fun activities, sports, group and individual therapies and various games. Concerning women, a Resilience and Gender-Based Violence Project (GBV) for refugee women and girls from Minawao has been set up by the association. This project resulted in the construction of a GBV Management Center that allows women to feel in community and to be useful to society.

#### **5) The media**

The media (print, radio, television ...) in the heart of this crisis, have not failed in their duty to inform the public and readers in real time, to denounce (skids and the inertia of some military and civilian authorities) and to go further by engaging in the sensitization against enlistment, radicalization and violent extremism. Community radio stations have been particularly involved in this awareness-raising mission through debates, spots and alternative messages. Some presses, by their professionalism in the restitution and processing of information relating to terrorism in general, received prizes and congratulations from the Head of State. These include "l'oeil du Sahel", "Le Jour" and "Mutations". These marks of recognition amply demonstrate that their contribution to the overall strategy for preventing and fighting violent extremism in the Region is important and appreciated.

#### **6) Research centers and academics**

Through various activities (round tables, seminars, conferences, scientific articles, etc.) aimed at investigating the root causes of extremist violence and offering guidance to public decision-makers, research centers contribute to the construction of peaceful societies. . This is the case, for example, of the Study Center for Development and Prevention of Extremism based in N'Djamena (Chad). Through their various actions they note that the preventive approach is nowadays, the cheapest mean for the fight against violent extremism in Chad. It is in this perspective that he initiated a process of influence with the Ministry of National Education to introduce into the curriculum a subject exclusively devoted to the cardinal values of the preventive approach: tolerance, dialogue interreligious and cultural, respect for differences and peaceful coexistence between religions and cultures.

In the same time, the rise of violent extremism has urged academics to understand the changes and actions that are being taken at different levels to address them. Their analyzes give an account of the way in which the Cameroonian society experienced the Boko Haram phenomenon, responses elaborated by the State and the local, national and international actors to curb this particularly harsh context, and give the floor to those who experienced the Boko Haram phenomenon in Cameroon. Specifically, two books directed by teachers from the University of Maroua appeared repeatedly in the words of the

participants: **Boko Haram au Cameroun: Dynamiques plurielles** and **Regards croisés sur Boko Haram au Cameroun**<sup>3</sup>.

#### 7) Religious communities

In Chad, a national day of peaceful coexistence is organized each year by an inter-religious platform that brings together Catholics, Muslims and Protestants. It aims to renew their commitment for cohabitation. The message of the platform is focused on unity, respect for religious difference and love of neighbours. It shares its experience with other countries in interreligious dialogue.

The Cameroonian experience in this area also deserves to be highlighted. In the six departments of the Far North Region, the Cameroon Association for Interreligious Dialogue (ACADIR) has set up dialogue platforms that have played a major role in promoting the idea that **violent extremism is not a conspiracy of Muslims against Christians**. On this day, 49 communes have been sensitized by ACADIR on the importance of living together in religions diversities.

In Diamaré, (Far-North / Cameroon) **awareness-raising and sensitization actions on the positioning of the Muslim community in relation to extremist ideology** are the main contributions of the Muslim community. Indeed, since 2014, there has been a surge of sermons in mosques, urging the believers to reject anything related to extremism in religion. Example is often taken from the City of Medina where the prophet of Islam, setting up his first City-State, organized the peaceful and harmonious cohabitation between Muslims, Christians and Jews. This is a position that contrasts with any suspicion of complicity or indulgence with the ideas brought by Boko Haram.

#### 8) Partners of international cooperation

Since 2016, UNDP has focused on strengthening the resilience of communities that are victims or exposed to extremist violence in the region. Its action consists mainly in: revitalizing domestic markets (reconstruction of markets in Zamai, Mouzogo, Kourgui, Mora and Kousseri), promoting income-generating activities (about 800 young people have benefited from this program), strengthening the capacities of community leaders in conflict management and social cohesion, implementing training programs for Koranic school teachers, etc.

Along with UNDP, are other United Nations agencies (UNICEF, WHO, WFP, UNFEMMES, OCHA, UNHCR) and humanitarian actors (ICRC, MSF-Switzerland, Plan International) which, through their respective mandates, work towards alleviating the needs of helpless populations and resolving the crisis.

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<sup>3</sup> François Wassouni et Adder Abel Gwoda (dir.), *Boko Haram au Cameroun: Dynamiques plurielles*, Editions Peter Lang, 2017 ; François Wassouni et Adder Abel Gwoda (dir.), *Regards croisés sur Boko Haram au Cameroun* Yaoundé, Editions du Schabel, septembre 2017.

### III. Key Lessons Learned, Challenges and Recommendations

The remarkable quality of the speakers and participants, their knowledge of the realities of the region and their own experiences in the field of violence prevention, made the two days of the seminar a moment of rich sharing and highlighted on the one hand that the time has come to strengthen a violence prevention approach and, on the other hand, a set of lessons learned in terms of challenges to avoid the trap of a cyclical conflict.

#### A. Building confidence in the future in the Lake Chad Basin: the relevance and importance of the approach to preventing violent extremism

Several factors militate in favor of the relevance of the implementation of the approach to the prevention of violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin:

**The relative calm of Boko Haram:** the counter-offensive led by the armies of the Lake Chad Basin region has allowed major effects to be obtained in limiting the expansion of the extremist group. Even if the time is not euphoria or victory, it is clear that this situation of relative peace is a resource to mobilize to implement the instruments of the prevention of violent extremism.

**The concrete needs of the people of the Lake Chad Basin:** from studies and statistics, the participants emphasized that violent extremism is not the main concern of the populations of the region. To the question "what are the most important problems that countries face and governments will have to tackle? It has been recognized that concerns related to unemployment, health, education, transport infrastructure, drinking water supply and poverty are cited first, well in advance of security issues. This shows if it is necessary, the urgency of the immediate implementation of preventive actions to prevent these legitimate concerns from becoming the essence that will fuel the engine of violent extremism.

**The clear and objective conclusion that the actors have not yet fully grasped the prevention approach:** most interventions aim to manage the effects of violence, and very little is done in terms of awareness and strengthening understanding of the causes of this violence. Whereas, the motivations of Boko Haram members must be confronted in order to curb the rise of violent extremism in the region. Therefore, it is important to continue the dialogue initiated in Maroua to maintain the desire to act upstream, and to create synergies between stakeholders in the prevention of violent extremism.

**The absence of a dynamic of personal empowerment of the actors, essential to a process of transformation of the causes inherent to the violence:** it is the result of the absence of coordination between the multidimensional interventions led by the actors including State, international organizations, NGOs, INGOs, MSDS, media, etc.

Alongside these explanatory factors, there is a set of challenges that complicate investment in the preventive approach

## **B. Challenges to avoid the trap of a cyclical conflict**

**Challenge number 1: The necessary collective awareness of the issue of violent extremism.** This awareness should go beyond the Far North region. Nowadays, this global issue seems to be of greater concern to people in the areas affected by the crisis and involving the organizations of the United Nations system, the international, national and local civil society. It is as if the issue is of interest only to these organizations and the areas in which they work, whereas violent extremism is a concern that calls for the cooperation and collaboration of all the society.

While the Boko Haram issue has sometimes been discussed in the National Assembly, it is not certain that strong resolutions to make the issue of violent extremism a national concern have been adopted. Moreover, no sooner have we finished curbing this violent extremism in the Far-North region than other outbreaks have emerged in the English-speaking areas of the country, with terrible consequences. It is urgent that strong action be taken at the highest level of the State so that the issue of violent extremism, beyond the military responses, can become a national concern and that actions carried by a real political strategy in a sustainable perspective can be taken to prevent it.

If sensitization and other forms of response have been oriented to the areas directly affected by this violence, it is time they reached the other parts of the Far North, Adamaoua and North which have heard of it only at distance. In the same way, it is imperative and urgent to involve a wider section of the society in the reflection and the action to address the challenge of violent extremism: Everybody must be involved in order to better understand it, and to question it in order to provide multi-sectoral answers (primary schools, secondary schools, universities, research circles, religious leaders, artists, media men, youth workers, traditional authorities, etc.). It is only by rallying one another to this cause and by merging multi-sectoral intelligences that we will achieve sustainable and effective prevention.

**Challenge number 2: understand the causes of extremist violence and initiate policies and actions that will transform them.** If we consider that violence is not the result of chance, the identification of its causes and the commitment of measures to prevent their presence is a challenge for the construction of peace in the region of the Far North and its periphery. Knowing that peace is a permanent construction, this work of transformation of the causes constitutes in itself a significant advance in the quest and the elaboration of the solutions to be addressed to the extremist violence, on the condition to value it more by moving from awareness to concrete actions on the field. This is one of the major challenges of prevention, which must also be supported by a clear political will.

In this need to take action, research is expected to produce solid contextualized studies making it possible to better distinguish the causes of violence and thus to better guide prevention actions. Currently, the understanding of the phenomenon of violent extremism is hampered by the inconsistency of some methodological approaches to the problem. Deficiencies that require more serious research by researchers and more capacity-

building initiatives within organizations or institutions that address the issue of violent extremism.

**Challenge number 3: The necessary learning of the culture of dialogue.** By fostering the increase of knowledge and broadening of perspectives, fighting sectarianism and polarization in favor of openness, dialogue is an instrument which gives room to new ideas and innovative solutions such as the approach to the prevention of violent extremism. Its recurrent practice is therefore a challenge to be taken in order to bring all stakeholders to align with this new paradigm that recommends the adoption of inclusive dialogue as a necessary and necessary passage to the preservation of peaceful cohabitation. It is from dialogue that the acceptance of others and the spread of a culture of tolerance will be achieved.

**Challenge number 4: the development of a multidimensional and multi-stakeholder prevention strategy.** The personal management of violent extremism by the state with a strong security and military orientation is insufficient. Many other non-military actors have roles to play and useful actions to take to ensure that the surpassing of such a security situation is successful. Thus, we must depart from the prevailing discourse that peace is the only responsibility of the government and the defense and security forces to adopt a culture of co-responsibility that is based on teamwork. Whether it is politics, defense and security forces, international actors, researchers, civil society etc., finding the meaning of synergies and ensuring the construction of a "united spirit" requires to revisit the ways of thinking and acting that are currently taking place by making them evolve towards "collective action".

**Challenge number 5: the collaboration and coordination of the actions of civil society organizations.** Here and there, we could observe a form of scrambling, the reproduction of the same activities by the various actors, whereas a coalition of actions and means would have been more useful. Sometimes, there is even a form of opportunism among some civil society actors, who suddenly become specialists in the prevention of extremism. The UNDP action to set up a platform for civil society organizations in the Far North, which organizes meetings where their actions discussed, experiences and challenges are shared, was a useful and beneficial initiative.

**Challenge number 6: the need for a quick response to the immediate needs - material as well as moral - of the populations.** Highly affected by the horrors perpetrated by Boko Haram, often done in their midst, the communities still carry deep in themselves the traumas of the crisis with survival problems that they have not yet solved. But at the same time, hunger, precarious housing, lack of opportunities to carry out income-generating activities, health problems, life on drip and the many losses in human lives and materials, make consciences paradoxically still willing to be seduced by extremist allocutions.

Development investment (reconstruction of damages, construction of basic social equipment, communication and telecommunication infrastructures, strengthening of the State presence in border areas, etc.) are therefore, urgent actions to restore people's confidence and allow them to return to normal life.

As for intangible needs, the need to take care of people who have experienced heavy trauma is necessary. To this is added the need for belonging to a group, a community, society, which gives people the means to express themselves, to be listened to and to have the feeling of having a place and a role to play in society. At this level, the importance of dialogue in its capacity to structure inclusive societies has been strongly emphasized, as is the role of mothers who may better than anyone help their "lost children" to reconnect with the sense of belonging to the same company.

**Challenge number 7: The issue of ex-hostages and ex- Boko Haram fighters.** This question concerns both the State and its bilateral and multilateral partners and local communities. The returnees find it difficult to be accepted by the people, while the state itself seems to have developed no conceptual framework, legal, regulatory, or any concrete measure to handle this process. This is one of the most difficult problems of stabilization underway in the Lake Chad Basin in general and in Cameroon in particular. While in Niger and Nigeria, for example, mechanisms have been developed to encourage surrenders with the construction of reception and reintegration facilities, this is not yet the case in Cameroon. The management of the Mozogo and Kolofata cases shows that great efforts remain to be made in this movement and the State alone could not succeed this bet. It is necessary to envisage frameworks, means, measures of supervision, sensitization of the populations and preparation of the actors of justice to handle this difficult phase of the management of the crisis.

We must also see an additional difficulty related to these "returnees". If they face exclusion on their return, if the reasons that made them leave do not change, what will happen? And, beyond their return and reintegration, there is the question of **their role as agents of change and prevention: is it possible?** These are also questions that have emerged from the discussions, which probably constitute as many projects on which further work is needed.

**Challenge number 8: The question of Boko Haram fighters, what place for dialogue?** The possibility of a dialogue with Boko Haram still seems to discourage many participants. Even if they recognize the existence of initiatives that have been taken in this direction by the army or the administration and which have led to positive results - in terms of the release of hostages or the surrender of certain persons who were engaged in violent acts on behalf of the extremist group - the tendency to label extremists inevitably leads to a polarization which in turn reinforces the stereotypes that hinder the possibility of a fruitful dialogue.

Those who are in favour of a dialogue regret the fact that until now, this preventive method is not yet sufficiently inclusive and stress the need to strengthen the capacities of actors in this area.

**Challenge number 9: The resolution of the education equation, the supervision of the youth and the control of the contents of the lessons taught in Koranic schools.** It will be necessary to invest massively in the education and the construction of the centers of supervision of the youth, with beforehand strong actions so that people give an interest to



education ("we note a resignation of the parents from the education of their children "). Similarly, special attention should be given to monitoring and reviewing the curricula of Koranic schools that have been in many places the recruiting centers of Boko Haram.

### **C. Recommendations**

In order to meet these challenges, the following recommendations have been made:

#### **❖ Recommendations addressed to the Government of Cameroon**

- Develop and implement, through participatory processes, a national plan for the prevention of violent extremism;
- Further professionalize the platform or space for dialogue at the local level, which will be in charge of addressing issues related to the prevention of violent extremism, in particular by ensuring the quality of the actors or by strengthening their capacities;
- Engage in a process of transforming the causes of violent extremism by implementing national development policies in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Guarantee human security by:
  - winning the hearts and minds of local communities through initiatives such as market revitalization, youth empowerment (promotion of employment), capacity building of community leaders etc. ;
  - guaranteeing the promotion of education in the territorial borders of the far north Cameroon. As a form of primary prevention, education promotes dialogue, develops critical thinking, develops resilience against extremist propaganda, promotes the questioning of legitimacy and appeal to extremist beliefs, enhances emotional trust and resilience etc.;
  - fighting frustrations and instability (marginalization and discrimination, exclusion, injustice, corruption, bad governance and violations of human rights and the rule of law etc.);
  - consolidating psychosocial care initiatives for children / refugees / returnees (play and sports activities, group and individual therapies, educational talks, etc.);
  - overcoming food insecurity and the humanitarian crisis;
  - promoting past, memory and collective history treatment initiatives in communities affected by violence.

#### **❖ Recommendations to the Defense and Security Forces**

- Improve the army-population relations, in particular through:

- Civil-military actions designed to build and maintain a climate of trust between the Defense and Security Forces and the population (actions undertaken to support affected populations in the fields of health, education, etc.);
- Set up joint committees to identify security needs and how to respond to them;
- Pay more interest to the respect of human rights, condemn abuses in this area and apply the law in cases of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law;
- Get more familiar with the approach to preventing violent extremism in order to move from a reactive logic to a proactive one
- ❖ **Recommendations addressed to civil society organizations and religious communities**
- Take full account of the implementation of a concerted strategy to ensure synergistic work, which will prevent the fragmentation and neutralization of actions in the field;
- Get involved in all initiatives and programs aimed at strengthening their capacity to prevent violent extremism;
- Increase training opportunities on theoretical and practical tools that contribute to building peace and social cohesion among communities;
- Adopt a collective and inclusive approach to raising awareness of religious radicalism, taking into account cultural particularities, the gender approach and giving prior place to inclusive dialogue, messages of tolerance and openness;
- Strengthen their outreach by continuing to rely on community radio to disseminate content and programs in local languages which oppose the promotion of violent extremism.
- ❖ **Recommendations addressed to researchers**
- Engage resolutely in the construction of a contextualized and consensual conceptual corpus allowing unequivocal communication between the actors and with the populations;
- Create and strengthen synergies with civil society actors involved in issues related to the prevention of violent extremism;
- Design and propose to the decision-makers texts to elaborate a more ambitious legal framework that DRR, concerned with Human Rights, integrating the endogenous

practices of conflict resolution, reintegration of the ex-combatants and the question of their role of these as agents of change and prevention.

❖ **Recommendations addressed to women and young people**

- Work to be actively involved in seeking solutions against violent extremism which they are both actors but mostly victims, for example by campaigning for the respect of women's rights and gender equality, using their role of mothers to identify and correct the first signs of radicalization within their homes etc. ;
- Share the unhappy experiences of the repentant to prevent other women and young people from being seduced by extremist rhetoric;
- Promote dialogue in communities and families in order to encourage religious tolerance, increase cohesion and the respect for socio- religious diversity;
- Conduct advocacy actions to increase economic activities that contribute to the empowerment of women and youth;
- Encourage and work with public authorities and international actors to effectively and efficiently implement United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2250 on the involvement of women and youth in peace building, respectively and security;

❖ **Recommendations to the media**

- Emphasize the efforts already made to promote local communication;
- Raise awareness on the importance of effective and relevant communication in a degraded situation, because, communication is of paramount importance in the management of a crisis;
- Gradually migrate towards a proactive communication, which anticipates the threat instead of undergoing it.

❖ **Recommendations addressed to the States of the sub-region and the region**

- Consolidate the promotion of the regional stabilization strategy for the Lake Chad Basin region by:
  - Structuring the processes of de-radicalization of disengaged Boko Haram fighters;
  - Ensuring the resettlement of displaced persons and refugees;
  - Strengthening states' capacities for governance and consolidating the rule of law;
  - Engaging the socio-economic revitalization of the region;

- Acting together through inclusive dialogue and building multi-dimensional and multifunctional synergies between stakeholders in the prevention and combating of violent extremism;
- Developing a regional plan for the prevention of violent extremism.

❖ **Recommendations to the UN system and international partners**

- Tackle in partnership with the Lake Chad Basin States the causes of extremist violence;
- Coordinate their activities with the States of the region to facilitate the effectiveness of actions on the ground;
- Support national and regional efforts to prevent violent extremism by strengthening the capacity of actors to respect human rights and the rule of law, good governance, inclusive dialogue and sustainable development;
- Integrate a component to prevent violent extremism / sensitize partners in development programs and projects.

#### **IV. Perspectives**

Recommendation of the Yaoundé seminar of November 2017, the meeting of Maroua created the link between the local actors and amply contributed to the diffusion of a "culture of the openness and the inclusion", essential in the construction of "companies soothed and better able to prevent the causes of extremist violence. In general, it has fostered the emergence of a climate of mutual trust between the actors of the Far-North region and its periphery, which is necessary for the emergence of synergies between the various actors involved in the prevention of violent extremism.

From this point of view, the importance of the participation of all stakeholders was recognized in the integration of the problem of prevention in the strategies which are currently being developed in the region. The enlightening and mutually beneficial conversations around this issue should therefore be encouraged, according to the wishes expressed by representatives of the administration and the army, so that the various actors involved in prevention help governments in the efforts they deploy to avoid the resurgence of Boko Haram or the emergence in the region of other criminal organizations.

To promote dissemination and ownership of the results obtained during this dialogue session, this report will be tabled on the EPV Online Platform launched in January 2017 by the Swiss FDFA and the GCPS (link: <https://pveplatform.forumbee.com>) and on the CEIDES website ([www.ceides.org](http://www.ceides.org)).

As well, in the perspective of implementing a sub-regional CEMAC / CEEAC policy on insecurity, a copy will be sent to the representatives of the Ministry of External Relations of Cameroon who expressed the need to integrate the results of the Seminar work in the technical file that Cameroon will submit at the upcoming international meeting.

In addition, an active exchange on the results of the high-level meeting will take place with the LCBC during missions to the headquarters of the organization or as opportunities arise. In the same way, the results of the seminar will be shared during round tables organized in the region or at the capitals of multilateralism.

Finally, CEIDES will take all appropriate practical steps to follow up all the initiatives taken during this meeting of high standard.

# Appendix

## Photos



Opening speech by the representative of the governor of the Far North region



Interview of the Swiss ambassador in the Republics of Cameroon, central Africa and Equatorial Guinea



Address of the Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator of the United Nation System in Cameroon



Address of the Representative of the Commander of the Fourth Joint Military Region (RMIA 4)



Address of the Diamaré Divisional Officer (Maroua)



Interview of the President of the African Center for International, Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic Studies (CEIDES)