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*Combatting the issue of marginalized youths' involvement with extremist groups*

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## **Committee:** GA 1- International Security and Disarmament

**Issue:** Combatting the issue of marginalized youths' involvement with extremist groups

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### Introduction

No one is born an extremist. Rather, there are numerous factors that lead individuals to join extremist terrorist organizations. Currently, terrorism is becoming more widespread and more threatening than it has ever been. Equally disturbing is that the average age of terrorists has become younger than in previous generations, so much so that children, as young as 10 years of age are being recruited by extremist groups. Examples of this can be seen all over the world, from Iraq to Nigeria, from Myanmar to Sri Lanka. The lack of education is possibly the biggest contributing factor leading to this issue, while obviously some recruitments are the result of groups forcing children to join. Also, the lack of governmental oversight becomes a critical issue as sufficient protection from the influence of extremists cannot be provided. Poverty is another crucial factor, as the economic circumstances in some countries leave joining an extremist group as the only option for the youth to generate income and meet their basic needs. This issue is one that must be approached with a high level of care as the reasons for joining an extremist organization ranges wildly from person to person. Preventing the youth from joining terrorist organizations is absolutely vital to defeat terrorism. The growth of such organizations depends primarily on the repeated cycle of drafting youth from year to year. These younger recruits are especially vulnerable, as terrorist organizations prefer them as they prove to be both, more loyal and strongly motivated. The committee must be creative, decisive and emphatic in its resolve to come up with appropriate solutions to this critical issue.

### Definition of Key Terms

#### **Extremist**

A person who holds extreme political or religious views, especially one who advocates illegal, violent, or other extreme action.

#### **Radical**

Believing or expressing the belief that there should be extreme social, political or economic change.

#### **Terrorism**

There is no agreement on the definition of terrorism. United States law defines it as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents." According to Jonathan Andre Matusitz, "it is the use of violence or threat of violence in pursuit of political, religious, ideological or social objectives. It can be committed by governments, non-state actors, or undercover personnel serving on the behalf of their governments. It reaches more than the immediate target victims and is also directed at larger societal targets, and it is both illegal by legislation and inherently immoral.

## **Ideology**

A set of beliefs or principles, especially one on which a political system, party, or organization is based.

## **General Overview**

Recruitment of children by terrorist and violent extremist groups is happening in countries all over the world such as, but not limited to Iraq, Syria, Nigeria and Myanmar. This recruitment process exists, regardless of the presence or the absence of armed conflict in the country. Terrorist organizations today are recruiting and influencing youth to carry out their campaign of deathly acts in the name of God and their ideologies.

### **1) Extremist Groups**

The Chambers Dictionary defines an extremist as “someone who has extreme opinions, especially in politics”, and states that when the word is used as an adjective it means “relating to, or favoring, extreme measures”. A “radical” is someone who favors far-reaching social and political reform. This becomes dangerous especially when the ideology of the extremist is combined with violent actions. It is worth recognizing that on their own, radical opinions or ideas are not seen as problematic or dangerous. However, many extremist groups are currently terrorizing various places just to bring attention to their ideology.

### **2) Causes of youth to join**

Young people turn to violent extremist groups to find a sense of recognition, fellowship and identity.

“Children primarily have positive and pro-social motivations for joining armed groups, including a love for their family and community, a need to be part of meaningful groups, and a desire for a sense of significance in their life,” says Dr Siobhan O’Neil, Project Lead for the ‘Children and Extreme Violence’ project at UNU.

In addition, joining an extremist group, gives youth the opportunity to break away from poverty and have an income due to the fact that many extreme groups are funded by various people, countries and organizations. Furthermore, some individuals may feel safer when they are a part of an extremist organization, since there are often consequences in rejecting the call to join these groups. Lastly, extremist groups often give participants a sense of importance in their communities by becoming an essential part of the organization. Also, in some cases the appeal to join these groups is a result of the adrenaline and excitement that comes with being a part of an armed extremist group.

### **3) Why do terrorists choose the youth?**

Terrorist and violent extremist groups are especially exploiting children to boost their visibility towards media. The analysis of a six-month dataset of ISIL propaganda revealed a total of 254 events that included images of children; 38 percent of the images were of children engaged in acts of violence or being exposed and normalized to violence. The images are used to shock the public and to create an impact on social media. Using youth for support roles or as combatants is economically more beneficial for extremist groups, since the youth are paid less and, in some cases, not paid at all. Moreover, it is easier for extremist groups to control youth both physically and mentally and to make them believe in their ideologies. Children have tendencies to show respect and loyalty to authority figures that they feel show them love and care, which is the main reason why extremist groups tend to favor youth over older persons.

### **4) Use of Internet**

In the past, extremist groups have had to meet face to face with potential members in order to make them join their group, which was a time-consuming process. However, with the advance of communication technology, reaching out to new members has become much easier and more time efficient. E-mail, chat rooms, e-groups, forums, virtual message boards, all facilities frequently visited and used by youths, have also been increasingly used by terrorists as virtual training camps, providing an online forum for extremist groups to lure youth into their ideology and group.

### **5) Effects of 'Youth Bulge'**

A new study completed by Population Action International (PAI), indicates that there is a strong connection between countries prone to civil conflicts and those with burgeoning youth populations. The study contends that countries with rapidly growing young populations often end up with unemployment and large pools of disaffected youths who are more prone to recruitment into terrorist groups.

Developing countries undergoing demographic transition or those moving from high to low fertility and mortality rate are especially vulnerable to civil conflict. A large proportion of young adults and a rapid rate of growth adversely affects the rate of unemployment, which causes dependence on parents and low self-esteem to youth. While these kinds of frustration towards the society does not directly cause violence, it does increase the possibility of persons joining an extremist group.

Between 1970 and 1999, 80 percent of civil conflicts occurred in countries where 60 percent of the population or more were under the age of thirty, according to the PAI report. Today there are sixty-seven countries with ‘youth bulges’, of which sixty are experiencing social unrest and violence.

## Major Parties Involved

### **Iraq**

According to the United Nations, there were 274 cases of recruited children by the Islamic State in Iraq, and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria and Iraq, in 2015 alone. UN reports also include military training given to 10-year-olds in rural Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr and rural Raqqah. It should be noted that there are several cases involving 7-year-olds as well. The children are trained for many kinds of military tasks and maneuvers, such as transporting supplies, spying, planting explosive devices and engaging in attacks.

### **UNODC**

The Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provides legal counter-terrorism assistance to the Member States. It aims to implement a universal legal framework against terrorism. In the last five years, it prioritized the issue of the youth’s role in terrorism. In order to guide the Member States on the subject, several reports such as *Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorists* and *Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System* have been published.

### **Myanmar**

Earlier this year, the United Nations called for the Burmese generals to be tried for genocide on Rohingya Muslims as a result of various events that include the revocation of citizenship rights of Rohingyas and the displacement of 120,000 Rohingyas to internment camps. The wall between the Rohingyas and the rest of the population isolated the Rohingya youth, resulting in a reduced average age in extremist groups in Myanmar.

### **Sri Lanka**

After the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009, Sinhala Buddhists alleged that the peaceful

environment of Sri Lanka was destroyed by Muslims and Christians. Throughout the years, there have been several attacks on these groups by Buddhists. As a result, in 2012, an extremist group called the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) was formed, which is described by Dayan Jayatilleka, a leftist Sri Lankan diplomat, as being an “ethno-religious fascist movement from the dark underside of Sinhala society”. Various journalists also claim that Mahinda Rajapaksa, the new president of Sri Lanka at that time, was a strong supporter of the BBS. Another important concern in Sri Lanka is the high birth rate. Numbers show that 22 percent of Sri Lanka’s population is between the ages of 15 and 29. While the effect of the BBS on Sri Lankan youth is undeniable, this too only adds to the present risks associated with large youth populations.

## **UNESCO**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) currently has a project on the prevention of violent extremism through youth empowerment. It is especially focused on the countries of Tunisia, Jordan, Libya and Morocco. The project’s aim is to create a space for the youth where they can express themselves without any boundaries.

## **Nigeria**

According to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, it is estimated that 8,000 children have been recruited by Boko Haram, an anti-western, jihadist organization in Nigeria. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights received several reports that children not only clean, cook, carry supplies and use weapons, but they are also forced to attack their families or act as human shields, in order to prove their loyalty to Boko Haram. Because of the non-stop threats and actions of Boko Haram, 2.5 million Nigerians have left their country. In 2018 the United Kingdom offered assistance to Nigeria in order to decrease the effect of extremist groups, especially Boko Haram. U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May promised to provide military training and equipment, launch a crisis response program and to contribute \$16 million in educational institutions for children living in conflict zones.

## Timeline of Key Events

When	Event
December 1994	The General Assembly, resolution 49/60, approved resolution 49/60: The Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism
2005	The Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) was established by the Secretary General.
April 23, 2015	Security Council held the first ever formal debate on “The Role of Youth in Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Peace.”
August 21-22, 2015	Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security in Amman, Jordan, called actions from governments to support young people in preventing violence and violent extremism and to ensure the full provision of their human rights.
December 2015	The Secretary General presented his Report on the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, for the 70 <sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly, which was about strategies to challenge narratives associated with violent extremism and youth in extremist groups.
October 2016	UNESCO International Conference on Internet and the Radicalization of Youth, held in Quebec, Canada.

### Previous attempts to resolve the issue

The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was adopted by consensus in 2006 but failed to address the core of its issue.

The Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism was presented in 2016. This is a comprehensive plan that includes many important recommendations. This could be used as an important guide but it hasn't resulted in great outcomes because it hasn't been implemented for a very long time.

Very little has actually been done to combat this issue of recruiting youth for extremist groups . None of the previous attempts addressed the issue at its core. The first United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was a very simple step towards the solution of the issue and perhaps the biggest problem is that plans are constantly being made but they are far too vague in their approach and fail to make significant change happen.

### Possible Solutions

The creation of an international legal framework is the most crucial step in solving this issue. Moreover, providing education is an effective way of ensuring that children stay motivated towards better career goals and in keeping youth resistant in any attempts of potential brain-washing. Social media is an important platform that is used for recruitment and so, must be more closely monitored and equipped with online safety measures. Overall, with more careful counselling and guidance of children and making available increased job opportunities, the number of young people who resort to extremism can be decreased.

### Useful Links

[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)

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002605/260547e.pdf>

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Child-Victims/Handbook\\_on\\_Children\\_Recruited\\_and\\_Exploited\\_by\\_Terrorist\\_and\\_Violent\\_Extremist\\_Groups\\_the\\_Role\\_of\\_the\\_Justice\\_System.E.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Child-Victims/Handbook_on_Children_Recruited_and_Exploited_by_Terrorist_and_Violent_Extremist_Groups_the_Role_of_the_Justice_System.E.pdf)

<https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-173550/Young%20people%20and%20extremism%20resource%20pack%20for%20youth%20workers.pdf>

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