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REFERENCE:

24 February 2016

Dear representatives of human rights organisations,

Many thanks for your letter of 4 February 2016, and for sharing the joint written statement submitted by civil society organisations to the 31st session of the Human Rights Council, in which you raise serious concerns regarding the potential impact of initiatives to counter and prevent “violent extremism” on the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Let me assure you that I take these concerns very seriously. In my opening statement to the 28th session of the Human Rights Council on 5 March 2015, I already pointed to the “real danger that in their reaction to extremist violence, opinion-leaders and decision-makers will lose their grasp of the deeper principles that underpin the system for global security which States built 70 years ago”. Furthermore, I stressed that any response to extremist violence must be targeted, proportionate, and legal. I recently underscored that we’ve seen recently how governments put pressure on civil society as a misguided way to fend off extremist thinking and that, unless States support a human rights agenda, they will only reinforce the narrative of extremist ideologies.

In his recently published Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, the Secretary-General also urged vigilance “in ensuring that Member States’ efforts to address violent extremism are respectful of the rule of law and in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law, as well as international humanitarian law, if applicable” (A/70/674, para. 20). He recommended, inter alia, that Member States “review all national legislation, policies, strategies and practices aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism to ascertain whether they are firmly grounded in respect for human rights and the rule of law, and whether they put in place national mechanisms designed to ensure compliance” (para. 50).

As you know, my Office is organising the panel discussion on the human rights dimensions of preventing and countering violent extremism pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 30/15. For your information, please find attached the draft concept note for the panel, which will take place on 17 March 2016. The Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights will make introductory remarks which will aim to take into consideration all relevant issues, including the concerns raised in your letter.

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In addition to the summary report of the panel discussion, my Office will also submit to the 33rd session of the Human Rights Council a compilation report on best practices and lessons learned on how protecting and promoting human rights contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism, and we would appreciate submissions from all of the signatories to your letter. My Office would be grateful if related information could be sent by 11 April 2016; any input received from stakeholders will be taken into consideration for the compilation report and will also be made available for consultation online (www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/RuleOfLaw/Pages/PCVE.aspx).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein".

Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein
High Commissioner for Human Rights

31st session of the Human Rights Council

Panel discussion on the human rights dimensions of preventing and countering violent extremism

Concept note (as of 11 February 2016)

- Date and venue:** 17 March 2016, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., Palais des Nations, Room XX, Geneva
(will be broadcast live and archived on <http://webtv.un.org>)
- Objectives:** Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 30/15, the panel discussion aims to examine the human rights dimensions of preventing and countering violent extremism.
- Chair:** H.E. Mr. Choi Kyonglim, President of the Human Rights Council
- Opening statements:** H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations (*video message TBC*)
Ms. Kate Gilmore, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Panellists:**
- Mr. Ahmed Abbadi, Secretary-General of La Rabita Mohammadia des Oulémas and Professor at Cadi Ayyad University of Marrakesh
 - Ms. Mehreen Farooq, Senior Fellow at the World Organization for Resource Development and Education
 - Mr. Gastón Garatea, Professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru and former Chair of the National Bureau for the Fight against Poverty
 - Ms. Nazila Ghanea, Member of the Board of Trustees of the Universal Rights Group and Associate Professor at the University of Oxford.
- Outcome:** The expected outcomes of this thematic discussion are the following:
- States and other relevant stakeholders will gain a better understanding of the issues reflected in resolution 30/15;
 - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) will prepare a summary report on the outcome of the panel discussion, which will be submitted to the Council at its 33rd session in September 2016.
- Mandate:** On 2 October 2015, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 30/15 "Human rights and preventing and countering violent extremism" in which it decided to convene a panel discussion to discuss the human rights dimensions of preventing and countering violent extremism. The Council further requested the OHCHR to present a summary report of the panel discussion.
- Format:** Opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists (estimated to take up to 1 hour) will be followed by an interactive discussion. The list of speakers for the discussion will be established at the beginning of the panel and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups will be moved to the beginning of the list. States and observers, including representatives of civil society, take the floor for a 2-minute intervention each (total 45 minutes), followed by responses from panellists (15 minutes). A second round of interventions from the floor (45 minutes) will be followed by responses and concluding remarks from the panellists (15 minutes). To make the panel interactive, speakers are encouraged to focus their interventions on the themes of the panellists either by asking questions to the panellists or sharing relevant national experience. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

Background: In resolution 30/15, the Human Rights Council urged States to “ensure that any measures taken to prevent and counter violent extremism comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law” (paragraph 3). The Council also called upon “States and local entities involved in supporting the prevention and countering of violent extremism efforts to continue to facilitate the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including through human rights education and training, as well as due process and the rule of law” (paragraph 4).

The resolution further underscored the central role of the United Nations in preventing and countering violent extremism and called upon the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights “and relevant international stakeholders to complement ongoing United Nations initiatives on preventing and countering violent extremism in full accordance with their respective mandates” (paragraph 16).

Background documents:

- [Human Rights Council resolution 30/15](#) “Human rights and preventing and countering violent extremism”
- Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism ([A/70/674](#))
