



UNCCT Conference on International and Regional Counter-terrorism Strategies

31 January 2013 – 1 February, Bogota, Colombia

Presentation by Lia van Broekhoven, Cordaid

Panel: “Understanding national dynamics and realities to develop national strategies”

In this presentation I will focus on answering the following questions:

- *What is the relevance of the origin of the terrorist threat for the development of national strategies?*
- *How to identify non-governmental stakeholders, including opposition groups, and engage them in a strategy?*
- *Strengths and weaknesses of national counter terrorism strategies*

Good afternoon, delegates from the Colombian government, the Saudi Arabian government, CTITF and CTED, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for giving me an opportunity to share a number of thoughts from a civil society perspective. I am working for Human Security Collective, a collaborative that was established by the Dutch development and humanitarian organization Cordaid, the global conflict prevention and peace building network GPPAC and the Kroc Institute of International Peace studies in the USA. Our initiative brings together over 40 civil society organizations and networks world wide which have been engaging the UN on the global strategy.

We have established this initiative because violent extremism, terrorism, and countering these are too important to be left to the government and the security sector. Current events such as the peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC, the military intervention in Mali, and developments in the Mena region after the uprisings last year show that a sustainable way forward to transform these in their nature different conflicts need the involvement of civil society, of organized groups of citizens. Military interventions or police actions can be required to bring a certain measure of stability, but they are not the only solution to deeply entrenched societal problems that lie at the root of most expressions of terrorism and violent extremism.

Political solutions are needed to address what the UN strategy calls the root causes of violent extremism. By political solutions, I do not only mean the necessity of institutions that safeguard the democratic participation of people such as open and free elections and a functional division of institutional powers but also and more over the space available for citizens and their organizations to participate in the public realm, to voice their concerns on and alternatives for security matters that affect them directly in their daily lives. Without their participation national security policies and interventions will not be sustainable and worse counter productive.

The global strategy stipulates that prolonged unresolved conflicts, lack of rule of law and violations of human rights, dehumanization of victims of terrorism, ethnic, religious, national discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and lack of good governance are conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. Civil society organizations we are working with underscore this. There is however a significant but. There is hardly any civil society actor that would describe their mission and work in terms of countering violent extremism. What they, what we do is not to fight terrorists or criminals but to further human security. Human security is about the dignity of human beings in situations of conflict and extreme violence. It is about including in dialogues to achieve greater stability and peace, those that we perhaps fear most or those that we find very hard to understand as they may not at all share our values. It is about daring to criticize governments that do not deliver on their responsibilities and thereby drive communities into the arms of groups that offer bad alternatives often at gunpoint. It is about addressing the grievances of victims of terrorism and counter terrorism. It is about the quality of governance. And most of all it is about seeking community engagement, not because communities are the eyes and ears of terrorist and crime fighters, but because communities and their leaders are the ones that are vital for bringing about change and building a culture of stability and peace. This is a real challenge but one that in my view has to be taken up in developing effective national strategies.

Civil society involved in our collaborative emphasise that it is important to know the origin of the terrorist threat. What is terrorism in a national context and how is it perceived by the different stakeholders? Here are a few questions that are raised by civil society: Are armed groups that in essence pursue a political agenda to achieve a form of territorial autonomy terrorists? Are groups that protest peacefully against repressive regimes terrorists? Are civil society groups that dialogue with terrorists, terrorists? Are international NGOs that facilitate and support e.g. human rights initiatives a terrorist threat as they are in our current world more and more criticized by governments for undermining a national security agenda and national unity? The answer by a number of state authorities to these questions would be yes. The civil society reply may be more nuanced and informed by lived realities in communities. A common understanding between government and non government stake holders of the terrorist threat is vital in informing a national strategy.

We are asked also by CTITF whether we and the civil society we are working with are credible, trustworthy or to put it more broadly how are the UN and how are governments able to know which civil society organizations are legitimate when it comes to developing security strategies? This question is as legitimate as it is to ask whether certain governments are legitimate in the eyes of their citizens when it comes to their protection. In our experience it is important that diverse civil society participate in furthering a security agenda. Civil society in its entirety is not a sector with a representational structure vis a vis the government or an international body. It is all types of organized initiatives by citizens and communities in a country (or regionally or globally) that pursue a particular interest. Therefore, a broad participation is preferable above an approach in which a singular group claims to represent civil society. At the same time one cannot pursue a strategy with groups that have too many topical and possibly conflicting interests. This is indeed the key challenge of involving civil society in the development of national strategies and one that we must address in our engagement with governments and the security sector.

In many societies, there exist civil society that have an independent position that allows them to engage with “governmental and non governmental stakeholders”. These persons are vital to help develop a national strategy as they are trusted by both. They can connect various communities of interest and are able to build a process towards a common human security agenda. They can move in and between the different spaces occupied by security forces, violent extremists, government, entrepreneurs and communities as they approach all of them first and foremost as human beings and people that belong to society. Often they are driven by a strong moral compass and an aim to

rebuild a society that is affected by violence. They can be women, religious or faith-based leaders and young men. They seldom seek the limelight and courageously pursue their work. At times they are literally caught in between the violence from terrorist groups and government security forces. We as a global civil society collaborative have a responsibility to secure the space they need to operate.

I started by saying that security is too important an issue to be left to the government and the security sector. Developments in many parts of the world underscore this. In view of developing a national strategy there is the paradox that such strategy can have great strength as it is conceived and owned locally, but is at the same time conditioned by global standards. This is also true for civil society and the role it can play through their work in addressing structural causes of violent extremism.

In countries where civil society has freedom of association and assembly, and freedom of speech national processes to develop counter terrorism strategies can truly benefit from their participation. In those circumstances it may be civil society itself that has reservations to enter the security realm. In countries where the operational space of civil society is reduced national strategies will have in my opinion by the very fact that citizens are not allowed to enter the security realm weaknesses in their operability and effectiveness. The measures formulated in the global strategy particularly in pillars 1 and 4 would then be quite useful to debate with governments by civil society operating at a global level together with the UN. At the same time measures and standards on e.g. countering terrorism financing in pillar 2 can be used by governments with international legitimization to further reduce civil society space in already dire contexts for them to operate and would need to be revisited or reformed.

Understanding these paradoxes and making a concerted effort to overcome them is one of the areas of work of our collaborative and one of the challenges for developing national strategies on human security, which we prefer to be the notion to address violent extremism. I look forward to discussing this further with my distinguished fellow panellists and the audience.

Thank you