Background

The international community has gained considerable experience in addressing terrorism during the last two decades. Today, three major lessons stand out: First, security-based counterterrorism measures are necessary, but not sufficient. Second, there is a pressing need to invest in a preventive approach, rather than a reactive one. Third, local communities can and should play an important role in preventing radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism.

Radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism are complex phenomena that do not occur in a vacuum. Terrorist organizations tap into real or perceived political, economic, social, cultural and historical grievances to recruit followers. And while terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality or civilization, it is clear that false interpretations of all religions have long been an integral part of extremist narratives of intolerance and violence.

Course Objective

CCCPA’s training on “Preventing Radicalization and Extremism Leading to Terrorism” (PRELT) is the first of its kind in Africa. It seeks to empower local community leaders and influencers to contribute to improving “community” resilience to radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism, and to raising “individual” barriers of entry to terrorist organizations. The course provides trainees with the knowledge and skills to construct and deliver inclusive peace narratives, including those based on Sharia and Islamic teachings. It is not intended as an alternative to current peacebuilding efforts, but rather as a complementary tool.

Training Modules

CCCPA’s PRELT course is based on interactive and practical group work, which covers the following modules:

1. Understanding Radicalization through Conflict Analysis: This module enables participants to understand the link between the community-level
political, economic, social and cultural factors that can give rise to radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism. Through a simple ‘conflict analysis’ tool, the module helps participants identify actors, roots causes, triggers and dynamics that cause or exacerbate extremism. It also helps participants to identify pillars and narratives of peace in their local communities, to be used as tools to prevent radicalization and extremism. Radicalization is approached as an “individual journey” that involves complex, personal and community-based, structural factors.

(2) Rules and Ethics of War and Peace in Islam: This module is the cornerstone of the training course. It provides local leaders/influencers with a basic understanding of Islamic Sharia. In particular, the module addresses several Islamic concepts, most notably "jihad", “takfir”, “hakimiyya” and “jahiliya”, which have erroneously been used by terrorist organizations to justify their heinous acts. It also fleshes out the rules and ethics of war in Islam (protection of civilians, the prohibition of suicide bombing, etc.), and emphasizes coexistence and tolerance as central Islamic values. The module draws on the life and practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions in the three stages of the Islamic call (Mecca, Medina and Abyssinia) to highlight that terrorism was/is never admissible.

(3) Deconstructing and Refuting Terrorist Master Narratives: Through the ‘content analysis’ of propaganda material (videos, speeches, leaflets, etc.) of terrorist organizations, this module helps trainees understand how terrorist narratives and messages are constructed, including the way they frame the conflict and how they implicate religion in it. This is contrasted every step of the way with the tolerant teachings and interpretations of Islam, as explained in the previous module. The module illustrates terrorists’ selective interpretation of the Quran and Sunna and their manipulation of Usul al-Fiqh (discursive nature of Islamic Law) to cast a false legitimacy on their use of violence.

(4) Developing Inclusive Narratives and Messages: This skills-based module builds on all previous modules to empower participants to formulate alternative, positive and inclusive messages of peace and tolerance that are rooted in Islamic Sharia and community traditions. Skills include active listening, dialoguing, persuasion and influencing, etc.

**Current Status and Next Steps**

- Since 2016, CCCPA has conducted eight foundational training courses, which saw the participation of a total of 142 local community leaders from Somalia and Nigeria. It has also conducted three advanced training courses for 60 imams and religious leaders from Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon, Mali and Nigeria.

- CCCPA plans to expand to other regions in Africa, namely the Horn of Africa and the Arab world.

- In addition, CCCPA is at the forefront of regional efforts to build the capacities of African countries in the field of Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), especially as and when it overlaps with Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). The convergence between both fields has been highlighted with the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2396, which calls on member states to consider a comprehensive framework of coercive and non-coercive measures in handling ex-combatants.

- CCCPA advised the African Union on developing operational guidance Note for African DDR and CVE practitioners on implementing DDR programs in the contexts of individuals associated with terrorist organizations (in relation to screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of those individuals).

**CCCPA**

Founded in 1994 by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and re-charted in June 2017 by a Prime Ministerial Decree, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding, is an Egyptian public agency specialized in training, capacity building and research in the fields of peace and security. It is the successor of the Cairo Regional Center for Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa (CCCPA).