Toward a Global Consensus
- Stop Violent Extremism!

Violent extremism is a scourge of our time. It kills the innocent. It kills our loved ones. It kills the hopes of women and men across many countries for better lives for their children and their communities. It must stop.

We, the women and men of the Club de Madrid, democratic former presidents and prime ministers, present these principles and recommendations in the pursuit of a Global Consensus on preventing and countering violent extremism, domestic and international – an urgent and shared need.

We urge leaders and citizens everywhere to join us in a concerted effort to put an end to a reality that is causing so much pain and devastation.

As democratic political leaders who believe that democracies must be accountable to their peoples and deliver tangible results, we endorse the following principles that we commend to all for implementation in all our respective communities.

We seek human security, economic, social, and political inclusion, and the protection of human rights.

We seek fairness and social justice, and respect for all women and men and their beliefs.

We seek order and liberty, excluding no one.

We seek public accountability, transparency, and equality for all under the law.

We seek shared societies, safe for difference.

A New Framework

There are many explanations, theories and models for why individuals and groups become radicalized. While there is no universal formula, we are increasingly clear as to the drivers and underlying factors conducive to the rise of violent extremism.

Having listened to hundreds of voices – experts, political leaders, and civil society – we present elements for a new and effective framework for the prevention and countering of violent extremism.

Legitimacy

We know violent extremism can thrive where there is poor or weak governance, or where the government is seen as illegitimate. Where these conditions persist, grievances are often left unaddressed, and frustrations can easily be channelled into violence.

Preventing and countering violent extremism requires women and men to make a genuine commitment to practising democratic values and human rights, open and accountable government, and respect for the rights of minorities".

Inclusion

Fighting poverty is a moral imperative, even if there is little empirical evidence of a direct causal link between poverty, unemployment, marginalisation and violent extremism. But where systematic exclusion creates injustice, humiliation and unfair treatment, it can produce a toxic mix that allows violent extremism to flourish.

Political leaders everywhere have a duty to represent all their citizens, empower women and young people, and ensure that every individual, group and community has equal access to economic development and other opportunities. They must avoid and reject setting citizens against each other for the sake of political gain".

Faith and Ideology

Religion is rarely the only factor that explains the rise of violent extremism. No religion is a monolithic entity. Religious motivations are usually interwoven with those that are socio-economic, political, ethnic and related to identities.

Religion can intensify conflicts or be a force for good. It is the way that beliefs are held and ideologies are exercised that makes the difference.

" No religious tradition in and of itself can or should be blamed for violent extremism. However, religious and thought leaders have a responsibility to be role models, tackle tough and sometimes uncomfortable questions, promote inter-faith dialogue, and engage with disenfranchised youth".

Education

Quality education is vital for human development. While there is no simple correlation between educational achievement and violent extremism, education that does not lead to employment, enterprise and human wellbeing creates resentment that can be exploited by extremists.

Likewise, religious educators that fail to emphasise tolerance, within and amongst religions, while promoting their faith, contribute to radical and narrow mind-sets that make extremist ideologies resonate.

" Governments need to understand the link between education, employment and opportunity, and remove barriers and facilitate social mobility and connectivity. Religious educators need to offer people a firm grounding not only in their own religious tradition but also in universal human values and tolerance".

Technology

Information technology – especially the Internet, smart devices and social media – has improved the lives of billions of people. But it has also given violent extremists opportunities to disseminate their ideology, connect with supporters, and mobilise resources.

❝ Governments, civil society and private corporations must commit to strategies that facilitate freedom of expression – even of controversial and contentious views. However, they must also prevent the use of these tools to further radicalization and extremism, and collaborate in challenging extremist narratives and galvanising 'counter-speech'.❞

Prevention

Government approaches that are short term, overly repressive, and ignore the complex causes of violent extremism rarely succeed, and may – in fact – be counterproductive. There continues to be a lack of emphasis on prevention and non-coercive means of tackling violent extremism, and the potentially enormous contribution by women, educators, thought leaders, community groups, and the business community.

❝ Each government should have a long-term prevention strategy, and commit serious political and financial resources to its implementation. They must also collaborate internationally, sharing new approaches, strategies, innovative practices, and lessons learned".

Entrenched Conflicts

The vast majority of violent extremism is found in the context of entrenched and unresolved conflicts, where violence begets violence. Numerous studies have documented vicious and self-destructive cycles of revenge, economies of war, and 'cultures of death' in which violence becomes a way of life.

" Governments and international organisations, such as the United Nations, must do everything in their power to break the political and institutional deadlocks that prevent conflicts from being resolved. In an interconnected world, governments need to prioritise conflict prevention, resolution, and capacity building, even when those conflicts appear distant".

Regional Solutions

Driven by short-term interests, governments have at times furthered the rise of violent extremist groups, with disastrous consequences. These interventions have in many cases unleashed forces beyond their control, and fuelled proxy wars that have caused massive human suffering while creating a platform for violent extremists.

" Political leaders must recommit to regional dialogue and cooperation as the principal means to address rivalries and conflicts. They must recognise that the enemy of their enemy is not always their friend, and that the long-term consequences of short-sighted politics may come back to haunt them. This is true for both regional and international interventions".

Security

The fight against violent extremism requires the lawful use of police, intelligence services, and – sometimes – the military. In many cases, however, their excessive or unlawful use has exacerbated conflicts and been a cause of radicalization in its own right.

" *The key test for the responsible and effective use of security measures is whether they foster the conditions that allow societies to become stable, cohesive and peaceful in the long-term. Repressive means are unavoidable, but they must be used in accordance with domestic and international law, and be balanced with outreach, counter-messaging, efforts to build economic and social inclusion, community resilience, de-radicalization programs, and meaningful political dialogue".*

Practising What We Preach

The challenge that is outlined in this document requires the mobilisation of major community, national and international resources, not only of governments but of civil society and the private sector. It calls for imagination and the continuous re-examination of our own assumptions, and in some cases major policy change. To reverse the spread of violent extremism will take foresight, patience, political will and long-term commitment.

" *The most important elements in this struggle are courage and credibility. We cannot instil the virtues of democracy, pluralism and tolerance in young women and men if we are not practising these qualities ourselves. The challenge is urgent. We call on all leaders and citizens everywhere to commit to these principles, join us in addressing this essential challenge of our time, and shape a more constructive future".*