

**PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM
AND
COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

ISSUE PAPER

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The Australian Civil Society Coalition for WPS

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security is a non-partisan and independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks and individuals working to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in Australia, Asia and the Pacific region and globally.

Our vision is a world in which gender equality, and the contributions and rights of diverse women and girls, are at the forefront of transforming conflict to build peace.

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Issue Papers

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security commissioned the writing of thematically focused Issue Papers to inform the development of Australia's second National Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2nd NAP) and to advance the discussion on women, peace and security in Australia. These Issue Papers build on key themes outlined in "[*Listening to Women's Voice and Making the Connections to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Fifth Report of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security.*](#)"

Issue Paper Contributors

The Australian WPS Coalition thanks Laura J. Shepherd and Livia Ceccon for their contribution.

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Livia Ceccon is a Policy Analyst with experience in researching women's rights and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict zones. She holds a Master degree in International Relations at the University of Western Australia, and her professional experience includes working for the government and non-government sectors both in Australia and internationally.

Preventing Violent Extremism and Countering Violent Extremism

The UN Secretary-General has described violent extremism as 'a scourge of our times'. Support for extremism is not limited to a specific region, or to any particular demographic. Similarly, violent incidents such as those perpetrated in Indonesia, Barcelona, Manchester, and Berlin, among others, has raised the level of concern about extremism around the world. Many governments are seeking new ways of preventing and countering such violence. Australia itself has increased its investment in initiatives to counter violent extremism. Based on previous experiences in the field of peace and security governance, the role that women can play in this context must not be underestimated.

The most recent in the suite of Women, Peace and Security resolutions, UNSCR 2242, brings counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism (CT/CVE) into conversation with women, peace and security initiatives. The Resolution articulates violence prevention in a new and different way: the prevention and countering of terrorism and violent extremism becomes central to the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. The next iteration of Australia's National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2018) presents a unique opportunity to refine and reshape WPS priorities and actions. This paper outlines some of the critical issues to consider when enhancing violence prevention through WPS in the form of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

Our Vision

The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace, and Security is guided by a vision of a world in which gender equality, and the contributions and rights of diverse women and girls, are at the forefront of transforming conflict to build peace. The Women, Peace and Security agenda incorporates a focus on conflict prevention that acts as a foundation for preventing and countering violent extremism in Australia and across the world. The UN Secretary-General recently announced a 'collective recommitment' by UN member states to the prevention agenda, with the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, presented to the UN General Assembly in 2015, which has a distinctive set of provisions related to gender equality and the empowerment of women. P/CVE initiatives and WPS planning and implementation are therefore inter-related and are two elements of a coherent peace-oriented domestic, foreign, and security policy platform.

What Does This Mean for Australia's Next NAP?

Three paragraphs of UNSCR 2242 are devoted to explaining how the WPS and CT/CVE agendas could align better, with priority given to mainstreaming gender in the operations of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) (para. 11). The resolution also calls for better data collection in this sphere, and 'the participation and leadership of women and women's organisations in developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism which can be conducive to terrorism' (para. 13).

This paper focuses on P/CVE rather than CT/CVE, as prevention is already an established pillar of the WPS agenda. Historically, the 'prevention' pillar of the agenda has been somewhat overlooked in favour of close and sustained engagement with participation activities (e.g. ensuring that women are involved in peace negotiations or that women are represented in national security organisations) and protection activities (ensuring that women are protected from sexualised and gender-based violence). Where prevention has featured, it has predominantly related to the prevention of sexual violence in conflict. The next iteration of the Australian NAP can shift the balance in favour of prevention, in line with the stated priorities and objective of the UN Secretary-General..

There have been many concerns raised about the integration of P/CVE with WPS. These include:

- P/CVE programs that claim to focus on gender equality and women's empowerment without adequate specification of these terms, or which focus solely on the women 'at risk' of radicalisation
- a lack of appropriate gender training for practitioners engaged in P/CVE program delivery both within the national context and overseas, which can lead to the assumption that 'gender' is a synonym for women
- a lack of confidence in government, and a lack of trust between community groups and state actors.

Relatedly, there are many issues raised within various communities of scholars and practitioners about the alignment between P/CVE and WPS. These include the articulation of strategic concern for gender equality initiatives in multiple contexts that is then not consistently put into practice, which leads to the perception that women's rights can be bartered to appease certain political actors and to achieve specific political ends. Further, there is often a lack of attention paid to the gendered dynamics of radicalisation and, specifically, to the radicalisation of women and a lack of understanding of the various and often conflicting roles that women play in counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism. The Australian government would do well to leverage the extensive research expertise in this sphere, both within and beyond Australia, to ensure that plans and initiatives are evidence-based and pay due attention to gender as a power dynamic as well as the roles and representation of women within the domain of P/CVE.

It is critical that women are neither instrumentalised nor put at risk, in the service of P/CVE. As advocates of the Women, Peace and Security agenda have consistently reminded us, the WPS agenda is not about 'making war safe for women'. Prioritising P/CVE within WPS in Australia, both immediately and in the next iteration of the National Action Plan, must not pay lip service to the roles and representation of women but truly value women's experiences and reflect the concerns of communities and community organisations if it is to be effective.

Around the world, countries such as Canada and Sweden have included the discussion of P/CVE on their National Action Plans. Sweden, for example, commits to 'ensur[ing] the inclusion of gender perspectives in measures intended to counteract and prevent conflict, radicalisation and violent extremism'. Others, like the United Kingdom, the United States, and Spain, have dedicated an entire Thematic Area of their NAP to describe their commitments with strategies to prevent or counter violent extremism. Australia must take a similar leadership position advancing the integration of the WPS and P/CVE agendas.

Recommendations

The Coalition recommends that the Australian government should:

- Pay due attention to gender as a power dynamic, as well as the roles and representation of women within the domain of P/CVE, per WPS principles and best practice.
- Integrate P/CVE as an emergent political and security issue in the next iteration of the NAP, highlighting the cross-cutting relevance of the pillars of WPS to P/CVE.
- Outline in the NAP how current P/CVE initiatives, e.g. programs under the auspices of the Living Safer Together initiative, have WPS dimensions.

- Map how WPS priorities and commitments affect current and future P/CVE initiatives to inform NAP policy and implementation.
- Foster, through the NAP, the opportunity for women and women-led organisations working in the P/CVE space to share best practice and lessons learned across states and territories to ensure joined-up governance of P/CVE initiatives and their alignment with WPS provisions.
- Ensure all future P/CVE programs developed while the NAP is in force incorporate evidence-based evaluation and assessment mechanisms to measure the efficacy of the programs have been, with particular emphasis on WPS alignment, and leverage the extensive research expertise in this sphere, both within and beyond Australia.
- Ensure comprehensive gender training for all involved in P/CVE program delivery, leveraging existing expertise in gender training for peace and security forces as part of Australia's WPS commitments.
- Commit to bottom up, co-designed P/CVE initiatives, working with women and women-led organisations, such that community groups are engaged as active participants not only in delivery but also in the formulation of P/CVE initiatives as part of Australia's WPS commitments.
- Recognise the different ways that women are involved with violent extremist groups, including as supporters, perpetrators, recruiters, members of all-female police groups, wives and mothers, amongst others, ensuring the representation of women from diverse backgrounds in both P/CVE program documentation and the next iteration of the NAP.
- Prioritise long-term project funding and core funding for organisations working on P/CVE that include women in their programs as well as those organisations that are women-led, in line with WPS principles and commitments.
- Play a leadership role in strengthening the discussion on WPS and P/CVE within international organisations, such as the United Nations, mainly through advocacy regarding disbursement of resources from the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.

Want to know more?

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