

## What are we talking about? Addressing **violent extremism** and **restorative justice** at Towards an Inclusive Peace 2018

### Introduction

All around the world we can see a rise in extremist thoughts. Exclusion of the Other, populism at the expense of minorities or hate speech against certain groups are factors that fuel the potential for violence. Violent extremism (VE) can take many forms but is characterized by its destructive capacity in communities around the globe. Some people are calling for law and order as a response to VE, but we believe that the challenges we are facing around the world cannot just be solved through heavier police presence, military responses or long-term prison sentences. Instead, we believe a human-centred approach is needed: rooted within community-led approaches and drawing on the power of personal transformation as practised by Initiatives of Change (IofC). That is why we are specifically addressing restorative justice in 2018. We hope to pave a way forward through discussing how people who have been radicalized and sympathize with violent extremist thought can be brought back. This document is an overview of what the *Towards an Inclusive Peace* team thinks about the issue.

### 1. What is violent extremism?

At *Towards an Inclusive Peace*, we do not want to limit violent extremism (VE) to one single definition, but we want to be clear that we are looking at VE through a peacebuilding lens and focusing more on its root causes than its effects. In general terms, VE is about the exclusion of the Other through using misguided ideologies to justify the thinking and action of a group. Multiple drivers of VE have been identified that are conducive to radicalization, among them: denial of basic rights, widespread corruption, lack of opportunities – particularly when it comes to employment – and bad governance. In such conditions, it is easy to radicalize people.

In the last decade, there has been intense debate in policy circles about VE. Terms like radicalization and fundamentalism are often used to describe this phenomenon, in particular since the 9/11 attacks. Equally, VE has been equated with terrorism as well as with religion. That is not the way *Towards an Inclusive Peace* approaches VE, because we believe that it reduces the issue to only a small part of a much bigger challenge. For *Towards an Inclusive Peace*, we have identified multiple root causes of VE, including the economy, gender, politics, environmental issues, race and ethnicity, and religion. We don't think that this list is exhaustive, but it stimulates us to explore key drivers for VE across the world. Many, if not all, of these issues need to be considered, depending on the local context. Importantly, these are not just issues in the 'Global South' but also in the 'Global North'. They help us to understand violence not just in physical terms, but also in terms of cultural and structural violence against the Other.

### 2. Our focus on transforming violent extremism

On a policy level, three different ways of framing VE have emerged. Countering violent extremism (CVE) is the framing of VE that is mostly popular in the U.S. and in some other Western countries. It is a largely militarized, top-down response to the symptoms of radicalization. The second approach, preventing violent extremism (PVE), has been adopted by the United Nations after 10 years of insufficient results with CVE. This perspective addresses the main drivers of VE (e.g. corruption, lack of opportunities, exclusion) while still being rooted in a security perspective. In contrast, the NGO *Search for Common Ground* recently proposed the term 'transforming violent extremism' (TVE), in a bid to include the tools and approaches of peacebuilding that have been established in the last 30 years. TVE aims for a more holistic approach with a focus on the local level and on people, hence giving agency to the actors on the ground, as well as dealing with the root causes. It is the TVE approach that we want to highlight and advance at *Towards an Inclusive Peace*.

### 3. Dialogue across all levels

We believe that the disruptive impact of different forms of VE on the world at large demands a global response. *Towards an Inclusive Peace* wants to provide a space where local, national and international actors can meet to share experiences of dealing with different forms of VE that go beyond a discussion on terrorism towards a focus on root causes. We believe in a community-based approach, built upon the principles of non-violence and pluralism. The dialogue-oriented methodology that is promoted in Caux will help policy makers and grassroots activists to gain new perspectives on transforming extremist discourses. *Towards an Inclusive Peace* seeks to be a meeting point where the experience and expertise of the international community can meet the contextual knowledge of local communities and national actors.

### 4. What is restorative justice?

As the term 'restorative' implies, something has been disrupted and needs to be restored. Restorative justice is a practice that focuses on the accountability and responsibility of the perpetrator through acknowledging the harm committed and apologizing not only through words but also action, not just 'saying sorry' but 'doing sorry'. Instead of just focusing on the perpetrator as typically happens within the punitive justice system (the dominant justice system in many countries), restorative justice actively includes the victim and the community at large to provide for a space of collective healing and constructive social change.

Restorative justice is based on a belief-system (theories, principles and applications) that invites and reinforces the potential for personal and structural transformation. Even though it is challenging, particularly when lives have been lost, this approach acknowledges that perpetrators are also human beings. They have their own story to tell which may shed light on their journey into radicalization. Therefore, when they are willing to reflect, acknowledge and ultimately change their behaviour, they should be given another chance. Most importantly, this approach does not negate the rights of victims. Instead it puts them at the centre, recognizing the harm they have suffered and caring for their needs beyond attributing a sentence to the wrong-doer. The implementation of restorative justice practices should be facilitated in a safe space that needs to be created for everyone involved – either through professionals or community leaders. The participation in such a process is voluntary for all sides and it needs to be an informed choice as to what such a process would look like. Victims who have suffered harm should not be pressured into the process but invited to start a journey to come to terms with what happened that may take months, years or even a lifetime.

### 5. An inclusive justice system

Restorative justice challenges personal stereotypes and opens space to rediscover the good in the other person. We don't claim that restorative justice is always the right answer, but we believe that in many cases the dominant punitive system is not providing the space for delivering a sense of justice, healing and peaceful coexistence, let alone reconciliation. With restorative justice, there is the chance to build a new future together. It is not about forgetting the past but about learning from the past and having a future-oriented outlook that can potentially prevent such severe harm happening in the first place. For some, restorative justice is equal to reconciliation. For us, restorative justice can lead to reconciliation but is only one step in that direction.

### 6. What is the difference between punitive and restorative justice?

	<i>Punitive Justice</i>	<i>Restorative Justice</i>
Whom does the justice system focus on?	Perpetrator	Not only perpetrator but also victim(s) and the community at large that was harmed

Outlook on the perpetrator	Negative	A perpetrator is also a human being who has some good
What does justice mean?	Perpetrator needs to be isolated and sentenced	Perpetrator needs to be transformed and eventually reintegrated into the community
Consequences for perpetrator	Prison, punishment, revenge	Remorse, social work, restore the community and the social fabric
Orientation	Past-oriented	Not forgetting the past but future-oriented
Who has been damaged	The damage is done to the institution (state, law, policy)	The damage is done to the victim and/or the community

It can be helpful to imagine punitive justice and restorative justice at different ends of a spectrum. In general, a combination of the two approaches can have a more profound effect for everyone involved. For minor crimes it can be useful not to send the person to prison but rather focus on repairing the harm through social rehabilitation, for instance. When more serious crimes have been committed, it may be necessary for a perpetrator to go through the 'classic' justice system and even to prison. It is important that the perpetrator has incentives to reach out to the victim and the community through social work, remorse and other activities to repair harm. This can ultimately help the perpetrator, when leaving prison, to rejoin society successfully.

### 7. Where is the nexus between restorative justice and violent extremism?

The transformative nature of restorative justice can help reintegrate people who have been radicalized and follow violent extremist thoughts. Restorative justice processes can be part of the deradicalization processes for ex-perpetrators of VE, bringing in a human-centred approach. Instead of militaristic and securitized responses, restorative justice provides alternative tools that bring the context and conditions of perpetrators to the fore. We believe that using restorative justice to address violent extremism is a 'radical' proposition in and of itself, but one that believes in transformation and in the good of humankind.

### 8. Our three main proposals for 2018:

1. We challenge the one-dimensional approach to perpetrators and their communities offered by a militarized and securitized perspective on VE – which represents a punitive justice approach. Countering violent extremism (CVE) typically dismisses the context and does not try to understand what the underlying conditions are that led to radicalization. We propose bringing the context back into the discussion through localized approaches and solutions. Moreover, CVE approaches have dismissed human rights and we advocate for and uphold human rights, including those of perpetrators.
2. We have a human-centred approach to VE, which tries to understand what is behind the radicalization based on a certain ideology. Questions that follow such an approach include: Why has a person joined this group? What were the triggers and the underlying motivation? What would make it possible for this formerly radicalized person to live peacefully together with others in a community? Did the person join a radicalized group voluntarily or involuntarily (forced recruitment)?
3. We propose restorative justice as a peacebuilding tool to deal with ex-perpetrators while acknowledging the needs of victims. The focus on prisons rather than long-term integration processes is

not enough to alter the current situation and prevent it from happening again. Perpetrators can experience personal transformation, just as anyone else can. Society needs to look for ways to reintegrate perpetrators into society, deal with the root causes of their radicalization and rehumanize them. Through this the root causes can be understood and deradicalization can take place at the same time as communities are strengthened.

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