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Parliament of Sri Lanka



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Regional meeting of young parliamentarians of the Asia-Pacific Colombo, Sri Lanka

25-26 April 2017

Outcome Document

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On 25 and 26 April 2017, we, 39 young men and 9 young women parliamentarians from 11 countries, gathered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for a Regional Meeting of Young Parliamentarians of the Asia Pacific on *The role of young parliamentarians in advancing peaceful and inclusive societies and preventing violent extremism*. We worked in partnership with some 60 leaders of youth parliaments, civil society organizations, and international agencies. The average age of participants was 39. The meeting was jointly organized by the Parliament of Sri Lanka, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the United Nations Development Programme. Discussions were launched by panels of experts – all included men and women – and were held in plenary and working groups.

The world has witnessed new waves of violent extremism that are threatening the security and stability of our societies. For decades, our countries have addressed this challenge through a security and counter-terrorism approach. However, the continued growth of violent extremism is proof that such responses only address symptoms of deeper issues, and not the root causes to securing sustainable peace. What is required is a more comprehensive response targeted on the drivers of violent extremism. We need to shift our priorities. The UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism is a useful reference that should guide our efforts.

No one is born a violent extremist. Drivers of violent extremism are numerous. It is the result of a complex set of interactions which include unresolved conflicts, lack of socio-economic opportunities and good governance, marginalization and discrimination, as well as failure to protect and fulfil human rights for all. We also highlighted the impact of interventionist policies of some parties on the incidence of violent extremism.

In 2015, our countries committed to an ambitious agenda to achieve sustainable development, with the focus on leaving no one behind. This agenda goes hand in hand with the efforts to prevent violent extremism. Violent extremism is, however, a destructive force that erodes this global initiative, and many others. Preventing the scourge of violent extremism should therefore be a key priority of our societies, as it is a precondition for realizing the 2030 agenda.

The success of measures to prevent violent extremism largely depends on the extent to which our societies are effectively represented by parliaments, the ability of parliaments to play their role and respect for the rule of law. We believe that enhancing our political institutions to address these challenges – as highlighted in SDG 16 – is of the utmost importance, and that strong democratic parliaments that deliver for the people are crucially important. Parliaments must be fit for purpose and have the power to act in a meaningful way.

We must not be tempted into undemocratic responses to the challenges facing us. Preventative and security measures must be compliant with human rights and international law. The risk of not doing so can lead to grievances that drive further violent extremism.

We recognize that parliaments are a place of dialogue where diverse views are brought together and where conflicts can be resolved. We must strive to increase the inclusivity of our parliaments so as to ensure that all voices are represented and contribute to decision-making processes. This must include

youth. We, as young representatives closest to our country's young men and women, are best placed to channel youth views and concerns to the decision-making table. It is crucial to secure the contribution of young men and women and partnerships with civil society groups if we are to get policy right.

Political institutions have too often failed to open up to young people. Moreover, the disconnect between formal structures of power and youth is a major concern for our societies. Failure to address the disengagement of youth threatens to undermine the very legitimacy of our democracies. At a time when world youth population is bigger than ever before, only 2% of parliamentarians worldwide are under 30. In many countries the age of eligibility to run for office is above the voting age. For good governance that is inclusive, we need to do better. If you're old enough to vote, you are not too young to run for office. Also, political parties remain a bottleneck to youth participation in and access to parliament. Lack of capacity and exposure to political experience are also important barriers.

Measures are needed to enhance youth participation in parliaments, including:

- Building conducive legal frameworks to raise the proportion of young MPs, including through youth quotas and aligning the age of eligibility to run for office with the voting age;
- Establishing formal and informal youth bodies in parliaments, such as caucuses of young MPs, and establishing more systematic consultation of young people in parliamentary deliberations, especially through digital technologies;
- Building the capacity of young parliamentarians, and opening spaces for youth and exposing them to political experience such as fellowships and internships in parliament, youth parliaments, political engagement at the local level, and volunteerism. Support and educational programmes to enhance the political literacy of youth and their civic engagement are also key.

We recognise that young people are targeted for recruitment and involvement in violent extremism. As young MPs, we have a particular responsibility to listen to youth, reach out to them in their spaces, engage them in dialogue, build trust with them and serve as role models to support and inspire positive change. We need to build viable alternatives for youth, challenge misconceptions and misuse of religion and ensure that they feel they have their place in society. This requires a coordinated effort and building partnerships with numerous stakeholders, including religious and community leaders, the media and civil society.

Social media and the media at large play a big role in facilitating the engagement of youth in violent extremism. These are powerful outreach and communication vehicles, and must therefore be better utilized to reach out to youth in a constructive way, address stereotypes and misconceptions and ultimately, contribute to preventing violent extremism, rather than to inciting it.

Reintegration of radicalized youth should also be a key component in our efforts to prevent violent extremism and sustain peace. This requires developing innovative approaches and programmes by building on psychological and community-based support.

Policies on and approaches to preventing violent extremism must include the gender dimensions. Gender inequality and discrimination against women are drivers of violent extremism, which in turn reinforces women's oppression and discrimination. Gender narratives that lead to discrimination and violent extremism must be challenged and any approach to do so should include communities as a whole and be led by women. Women are key actors in preventing violent extremism and as such, their role should be recognized and supported. The region has a wealth of knowledge and models of women-centered solutions for PVE. Greater efforts should be placed on supporting these initiatives and replicating them effectively.

The importance of civic engagement and volunteerism in preventing violent extremism should not be overlooked. There needs to be a better and shared understanding of volunteerism and of its value to our

societies. It is crucial to build an enabling environment for volunteerism, and to ensure sustainable support to it.

As young parliamentarians, we are committed to:

- Ensure that our countries have a plan of action on preventing violent extremism, and infuse policymaking with youth perspectives, including by creating legal frameworks that are consistent with international human rights commitments, overseeing implementation and allocating resources to ensure delivery;
- Support policies that are conducive to preventing violent extremism and to addressing its drivers. Also support de-radicalization services, such as medical and psychological support for victims;
- Support ambitious educational programmes that promote peace and human rights, are gender-sensitive, and help counter narratives that are conducive to violent extremism;
- Push our governments to allocate more resources to ensuring that every child in our respective countries has access to education and health, science and culture;
- Support capacity building programmes for young parliamentarians and youth political engagement;
- Promote women's participation in decision-making; mainstream gender perspectives and build capacity for women and civil society groups;
- Boost partnerships with national and international stakeholders, especially those dealing with youth issues. These include inter-parliamentary exchanges on violent extremism, UN bodies, international and national civil society actors, as well as community and religious leaders.
- Connect with youth through direct interactions inside and outside of parliament, including in hard-to-reach areas so as to end marginalization and leave no one behind;
- Serve as leaders and positive role models, including by supporting youth communities and their initiatives;
- Counter the online forms of extremism by using social media and digital technologies to promote a culture of tolerance and diversity. Also, support independent media that rely on facts and counters incitement.
- Support research to better understand the push and pull factors of violent extremism.

For all of that to be possible, we need our parliaments to be strong and effective. We are therefore committed to assessing the capacity of our institutions to fully play their role of preventing violent extremism and more generally fulfilling sustainable development goals. The IPU–UNDP self-assessment toolkit on Parliaments and the SDGs is a useful tool in that regard.

We, as members of parliament, should lead the way to peaceful resolution of conflict. We urge world leaders to respect the UN Charter, and respect the sovereignty and independence of all States. We urge world leaders to always use dialogue as the way to resolve crisis.

We young MPs must take leadership roles in offering a more compelling vision and situation for all to what extremists offer. Our parliaments must be part of the solution and must act as both a platform and model for inclusion, consensus-building, and human rights. A place to resolve differences. The time has come to turn radicalization on its head, from radicalization for violent extremism, towards a radicalism for inclusion, reconciliation, peace, equality, development, and human rights.