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## Summary Report

### **National Senior Course for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) - Côte d'Ivoire**

**Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, November 23-26, 2022**



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### **Note from the course directors**

The course directors would like to thank all participants and resource persons for their invaluable contributions to this interactive course. However, they remain solely responsible for any shortcomings and for the transcription of the work in this report.

Any questions about the course should be addressed to the co-directors:

- Col. Christian Emmanuel MOUAYA POUYI, Training Manager, ACSRT / AU ([pouyim@africa-union.org](mailto:pouyim@africa-union.org) / [mouayapouyi2003@yahoo.fr](mailto:mouayapouyi2003@yahoo.fr))
- Ms. Carol MOTTET, Senior Advisor, Peace and Human Rights Division, Swiss FDFA ([carol.mottet@eda.admin.ch](mailto:carol.mottet@eda.admin.ch))

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## I. Introduction

A joint program of courses for the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) has been developed by the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) of the African Union (AU) and the Government of Switzerland (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Peace and Human Rights Division - FDFR/PHRD) for senior officials of AU Member States. The objective of this program is to analyse the root causes of violent extremism (VE) in the regions where the courses are held, to highlight the role of various societal actors in preventing such extremism, and to understand how prevention tools can empower these actors to respond to the needs of affected populations. Among these tools, the course emphasizes the **importance of dialogue, in its many forms, to prevent tension and violence and to bring peace to conflict areas.**

Cooperation between the two institutions is not new: under this joint program, several PVE courses have already been conducted at both the regional and national levels, including two regional courses for Central Africa (Yaoundé, 2019<sup>1</sup> and Libreville, 2022<sup>2</sup>) and a first regional course for West Africa (Accra, 2022<sup>3</sup>).

A concept note sent to all participants prior to the course explains in detail the objectives of the course. A structured methodology has also been developed that forms the framework of the different courses. It is expected that they will form the backbone of a manual for participants, whether state institutions, civil society or private individuals, who are involved in the prevention efforts that many actors and countries wish to pursue.

This course was particularly interesting because Côte d'Ivoire has not experienced any attacks by armed groups in the last twelve months and participants were divided between welcoming the measures taken by the authorities to contain them and fearing that this calm would be a respite, given the country's proximity to areas of violent conflict in neighbouring countries and the existence of vulnerabilities that could present a breeding ground for VE.

## II. Course Scope, Process and Resources

The course, held on **November 23-26, 2022 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire**, at the request of the Ivorian authorities, brought together **some 50 participants** from the defence and security forces (DSF), the decentralized administration, the National Assembly, the Prime Minister's Office, the judicial sector, and civil society. They were accompanied by facilitators, mainly from West Africa. The background to this course was the regional context, marked by the southward advance of armed groups occupying vast territories in the Sahel. The main objective was to become aware of this reality by analysing the available data on these groups, understanding the causes of this situation and the possibilities of slowing down this advance towards the countries

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<sup>1</sup> Rapport du Cours Afrique centrale de 2019 (Yaoundé) : [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39274-doc-rapport\\_synthese\\_fr.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39274-doc-rapport_synthese_fr.pdf) ; Report of the 2019 Central Africa Course (Yaounde):

[https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39274-doc-summary\\_report\\_1.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39274-doc-summary_report_1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Rapport du Cours Afrique centrale de 2022 (Libreville) : [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42136-doc-Cours\\_regional\\_PEV\\_CEEAC\\_28-31.03.2022\\_Rapport\\_synthese\\_v.2022\\_04\\_25\\_FINAL\\_F.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42136-doc-Cours_regional_PEV_CEEAC_28-31.03.2022_Rapport_synthese_v.2022_04_25_FINAL_F.pdf) ; Report of the 2022 Central Africa Course (Libreville): [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42136-doc-Cours\\_regional\\_PEV\\_CEEAC\\_28-31.03.2022\\_Rapport\\_synthese\\_v.2022\\_04\\_25\\_FINAL\\_E-1.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42136-doc-Cours_regional_PEV_CEEAC_28-31.03.2022_Rapport_synthese_v.2022_04_25_FINAL_E-1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Rapport du Cours Afrique de l'Ouest de 2022 (Accra) : [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42278-doc-Cours\\_regional\\_PEV\\_AO\\_Accra\\_4-7.07.2022\\_Rapport\\_synthese\\_v.2022\\_10\\_04\\_F\\_1.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42278-doc-Cours_regional_PEV_AO_Accra_4-7.07.2022_Rapport_synthese_v.2022_10_04_F_1.pdf); Report of the 2022 West Africa Course (Accra): [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42278-doc-Cours\\_regional\\_PEV\\_AO\\_Accra\\_4-7.07.2022\\_Rapport\\_synthese\\_v.2022\\_10\\_04\\_E\\_1.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42278-doc-Cours_regional_PEV_AO_Accra_4-7.07.2022_Rapport_synthese_v.2022_10_04_E_1.pdf)

of the Gulf of Guinea through preventive measures that the main Ivorian actors (government, DSF, parliamentarians, religious and traditional leaders, local authorities, the media and members of civil society) should take to avoid the suffering experienced in the Sahel regions occupied by the groups being repeated in Côte d'Ivoire.

At the **opening ceremony**, General Tourey, speaking on behalf of the Ivorian Minister of Security, for whom he is an advisor, began by highlighting the efforts the Ivorian government is making to reduce the risk of VE on its territory (adoption of anti-terrorism strategies, SSR programs, consideration of human security, allocation of significant budgets for defence, special development program for the northern regions), before focusing on the complexity of prevention, the importance of dialogue at all levels, especially between the DSF and the people affected by violence. It was preceded by a welcoming speech by the Swiss Ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire, who showed how important this prevention work is in a region troubled by VE, and who expressed her satisfaction that this course was taking place in a country that is at peace, although surrounded by neighbours whose institutional stability is shaken. For this peace to be maintained, it is urgent to actively learn the lessons of regional disturbances. Finally, the Director a.i. of the ACSRT recalled the importance of working collectively and concretely by relying on existing good practices, in particular on all the experiences of dialogue that have enabled, where possible, to prevent the emergence of this VE. He emphasized that if the terrorist threat is growing, we must ask ourselves if the resources to counter it are adequate and if the active participation of all, based on dialogue, is ensured. This course, however, is based on dialogue, which begins with the example set by the participants themselves.

Like the other courses mentioned above, the National PVE Course - Côte d'Ivoire included **20 modules**. Each presentation made by the resource persons was discussed in order to locate the topic in the reality of each participant. This allowed the participants to understand, through discussions and practical exercises, the scope, complexity and importance of the prevention approach. As with the other courses in the program, these modules were divided into three main chapters: Knowledge of **the drivers of VE, the strength and tools of the PVE, and the roles that each actor in society** is called upon to play in their own area.

This summary report presents the main content of the course and the exchanges that it generated. To avoid repetition, it does not go into detail on the scope (concept, issues and objectives), methodology, resources and organizers of the joint program, as these elements were presented in the reports of the 2019 and 2022 regional courses. They are available in English and French on the AU website (see links above). The organizers invite readers to refer to them for a comprehensive presentation of this course program and the importance and usefulness of PVE for the future of States.

### **III. Results of the PVE Course**

#### **III. 1 Analysis of the drivers of violent extremism (VE)**

**An overview of the current state of VE in Africa and the Sahel** was first presented so that participants could refer to common and shared knowledge on this topic. According to the presenter, VE occurs in countries in conflict, in simmering or poorly resolved conflicts. While VE trend is down in the Middle East, in Africa it is the opposite. Currently, five of the ten countries impacted by VE are located in Africa and for the year 2022, from January to September, there are 950 attacks and 3,863 deaths on the continent in three to four attacks per day. We also note that the dynamics of violence have resulted in an uninterrupted multiplication

of groups (Islamic Group in the Sahel, Boko Haram, Islamic State in West Africa, in the Sahel in Central Africa), that the territories where they operate is constantly expanding and that no region in Africa is spared. However, there has been a change in the composition of the groups in recent months and years: many young people with little knowledge of the Quran, and more and more women who are given operational roles, are joining the groups. The objectives of VEs are the same everywhere: to weaken the existing power, to delegitimize the State and, to this end, control the borders, the judicial systems, the schools and the various economic powers. To achieve this, they attack civilian targets, DSF, infrastructure and engage in criminal activities. They manipulate, depending on the situation, a range of concepts, such as religious extremism, ideologies relating to racial or ethnic differences, emotional reference to historical and cultural facts, social and political injustices, or economic claims (free gold panning, theft of livestock for food). Practically, they administer territories like a State (including granting small credits, as Boko Haram does), and are militarily organized like an army, with well-structured units and chains of command. Faced with them, States have democratic instruments which, in the long term and if they are well applied, will prove to be winning: anticipation, coercive action respectful of human rights and the rule of law, solid legal frameworks and institutions, prevention through action on the root causes and good governance.

The discussion that followed first emphasized the ability of the Ivorian government to control its security situation since the Grand Bassam attacks, despite a very disturbed regional situation and porous borders. The importance of large-scale youth employment and effective social measures was stressed, as well as special programs for children whose parents have left. On the other hand, it was pointed out that not all extremism is to be feared if we take the example of Mandela or Gandhi in their struggle against apartheid and England. Extremism is only really dangerous when it uses violence.

The second presenter addressed the drivers of VE. He began by pointing out that security force does not solve all problems because the development of VE is a continuously moving process. The reasons for modern rebellions do not meet generally accepted social norms. This is how Sankara revolutionized the political thinking of his time. On the other hand, the current situation in Burkina Faso is an example of a response without clear military doctrine (lack of coordination between the different components of the DSF fighting against VEs, lack of proportionality in the use of force), or politics: the population is asked to be "resilient" while the state and politicians are not resilient themselves. There is therefore much to learn from the armed groups, who develop their strategy on several levels: *military*, by being well structured, by forming and using commandos and by abandoning cantonments; *ideological*, by emphasizing the existence of master-slave castes and the religious referent; *political*, by opposing central power and rural power; *social*, by providing the necessary aid to the population; *economic*, by using the three border zones that Burkina has and by allying themselves with bandits and traffickers (motorcycles, weapons, gold, cigarettes, fuel, etc. ), *moral*, by leaving the population unresponsive to the overthrow of governments or by inciting them to participate in it. But is opposing them by creating large ethnic-based self-defence groups, such as the VDP (Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland) in Burkina Faso, the right response? The speaker did not think so: violence will increase, as will the risk of intercommunal war. Côte d'Ivoire also risks being threatened because neither ethnic groups nor armed groups have borders, whereas States do. Moreover, the weapons that are supplied to the VDP could very well end up elsewhere in the region.

In the discussion that followed, several people explained the **range of measures taken by the Ivorian government against VE**. "It is working", they said, but they fear that the violence is

coming from outside rather than inside the country, because people do not share the fear of the DSF as described in neighbouring countries. It was also pointed out that political governance in Côte d'Ivoire is not being questioned as it is in Burkina Faso. The creation of the VDP corps in neighbouring Burkina Faso, however, raised the concern of several participants who fear a lack of supervision and inevitable and perhaps serious outbursts.

**Political, economic, social, historical and cultural factors** influencing the development of VE were the subject of several presentations and discussions. First, it was pointed out that States often do not respect the contract that binds them to their populations. In particular, many local, regional or national authorities take advantage of their position to increase their personal wealth at the expense of other citizens, or manipulate communities for personal or political ends. Such behaviours are at the root of deep frustrations that can lead to VE. It was also mentioned that certain populations are particularly vulnerable because they are not well integrated into the social fabric and that poverty, the feeling of abandonment and marginalization can be the cause of existential crises. When justice is corrupt, when impunity is almost generalized, it is not surprising that a new moral order sweeps through the region. It questions our way of life and the importance of money in our lives. The following questions were asked repeatedly: Where are our ancestral values? How can they be harmonized with democratic and modern societies? How can we recover the sense of solidarity and sharing? What to do with our values when they go against security (e.g. the Gurma people for whom the denunciation of a family member is culturally absolutely forbidden)?

Finally, this first part of the course ended with the **presentation of international and regional approaches related to the PVE**. Reviewing the history of VE (Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, etc.), the speaker recalled the numerous laws adopted by the AU, the UN, ECOWAS and various other international organizations. He showed the influence of the United States (first Bush, then Obama) in the fight against terrorism and then explained the four pillars of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006) and the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015). He then showed the importance of addressing VE and the PVE from the perspective of what is actually happening on the ground and the reactions and actions taken by local authorities and affected populations. The concepts implemented at the international level must absolutely be rethought at all levels and adapted to each situation of violence. Moreover, the range of actors mobilized must be broadened to reach all those who suffer from violence.

An intense debate followed, which showed how far the understanding of VE has come in recent years, but also how far the discussions in seminars are from reality. It is a question of clearly defining the problems, identifying the essential actors, listing the needs and responding to the priorities expressed while considering the resources available. However, it was pointed out that administrative delays accumulate when a project is decided and that financial misuse is a real nuisance. Furthermore, in applying PVE, it is better to do nothing than to add fuel to the fire; the ban on motorcycles and on gold panning, for example, have pushed young people towards armed groups. In addition, there were some reflections on the need for an immediate military response prior to preventive actions. PVE takes time and measures, even if unpopular, must often be taken in a hurry. Let us take the necessary time, if requested, communicate as much as possible about the measures that will be taken and follow up on the decisions.

### **III. 2 PVE tools, including dialogue**

Several speakers then addressed the **human security and peacebuilding approach to PVE and the role of dialogue in PVE**. Noting that the State has the primary responsibility for the

response to VE, it was emphasized that despite this, the commitment of all actors in society was necessary. Faced with new threats in the world, human security brings a new analysis grid. It is fundamentally based on the respect and well-being of populations, and places the individual at the heart of living together and peace. It is based on participatory governance, decentralization and the strengthening of municipalities and departments. Counter-terrorism measures are the curative treatment for violent demonstrations. But as desperate individuals join armed groups, **the causes of violence must be addressed**. All actors are involved. Once the signals of extremism have been detected (this is the role of the intelligence services), the necessary measures must be put in place, especially for areas far from the capitals and close to the borders. Fighting against exclusion is central to the steps to be taken, especially since Côte d'Ivoire has the necessary resources to address these problems, by building resilience through local communities. **We, with us, nothing without us**, say the main stakeholders.

Moreover, violence does not come from nowhere, it is imposed when dialogue is broken or absent. It is essential to re-establish and support this dialogue, because **dialogue can solve problems** which, if not listened to, can lead people to turn to VE groups. It takes will and some money. Who votes and controls the budgets? Dialogue is a verbal communication between two entities, a meeting, an opportunity to seek common solutions to the problem. Dialogue is not a debate. We do not want to know who is right. It is not mediation or conciliation. It is about transforming our positions in order to reach something profitable and acceptable to all, to broaden the understanding of the causes of disagreement. It has a social and political role as a way of reducing tensions. Dialogue rebuilds trust even if it is not a search for consensus. Dialogue requires transparency, without a hidden agenda. Moreover, conflict or tension analysis is essential to understand the causes of the conflict and to ensure the inclusion of marginal actors. Dialogue can be civil-military, intercultural or intergenerational. It can even be with the violent actors, without legitimizing them, and see what they are asking for, see what can be shared. The dialogue with VEs does not always succeed. But the example of the United States, which finally discussed with Taliban, can be emulated. In the event of a conflict, experience shows that it is necessary to engage in dialogue very quickly, before the radicals become violent extremists. Often anti-terrorism laws pose a problem for contacts with VEs. If necessary, it is important to push the legislator to change the law and include forgiveness clauses for those who do not have blood on their hands, as was the case in Algeria. Also, the fact that VEs are increasingly led by local leaders facilitates dialogue with them. This is an opportunity to be seized.

Another central tool for PVE: **Education**. The presenter of this module insisted on the factors of vulnerability of children (general trivialization of violence, harassment, psychological violence, hazing, high schools open and exposed to all kinds of violence, teachers beaten by students) showing that the education process lasts for life. There is a lot of violence within families. School curricula and teaching materials are not adapted to the realities of the regions. Schools are overcrowded, as in the Far North of Cameroon, where there are between 150 and 200 students per teacher. Intergenerational conflicts are multiplying: at 18 years old, a young person wants to be autonomous while the father keeps everything in his hands and does not even want to offer a piece of land to his son. There is therefore a problem that forces the son to leave, especially because of the lack of available jobs. Moreover, customs are no longer adapted to the realities: early marriages are far from being abolished and women often have no say in the matter. When a woman is abused, her son wants to avenge her. On the other hand, the influence of the media is destroying the community because the public does not have the tools to judge social media. Psychologists are needed in education. Often, radicalization does not come from the school but from the families because of a widespread parental resignation.

Parents must collaborate with teachers. Young people want to stay at home, but they have no resources. In the Far North of Cameroon, there is a crisis of confidence with the State, which is normally the largest local employer. The State is absent, Lake Chad is shrinking and the populations are subjected to various forms of violence. They are lost and have to accept that Boko Haram is taking the place of the State, despite the violence.

**The role of research in PVE** was also discussed. For the speaker, academic research, always ambiguous and often disturbing, has three objectives: knowledge management, providing solid evidence to guide public policy and encouraging action. Research must be **participatory, inclusive** and always **dynamic**. Knowledge must be **co-created, flexible** and supported by **deep listening**. Analysis is no longer carried out by the researcher, but by all the actors who must be brought into dialogue to obtain a common diagnosis that leads to appropriation. A researcher is never neutral, but must strive to maintain an equal distance with all stakeholders and to step aside from the emotions of individuals. It is a transformative process based on a prior and clearly expressed intention. It is necessary to go as far as possible in the encounter, with armed groups for example, not to prejudge what they think and to encourage them to take part in understanding the phenomenon. In sensitive cases such as this, the research protocol must be no different: it should be based on transparency of objectives and methods, respect confidentiality clauses, treat all targets in the same way, avoid any judgment or accusations of intent, connect all positions, identify points of agreement and disagreement, and be able to restore what has been said while ensuring all possible guarantees. "It is a bit like walking on eggshells, but it is necessary."

### III. 3 The role of the different social actors for the PVE

Considering **the role of political actors (decision-makers, parliamentarians, local officials) in PVE**, the next speaker noted that the **State** is at the heart of all PVE mechanisms. Its role is not exclusive, but, by definition, it is the federator of initiatives, particularly in the adoption of various national strategies. Unfortunately, once adopted, these strategies are rarely implemented. States still have a strong tendency to reinforce the repressive aspect of their policies rather than promote other approaches to violence and to strengthen peace on their territory. A colossal task needs to be undertaken so that the power of dialogue and listening is recognized and that the presence of VEs on the national territory is not instrumentalized by the limitation of public freedoms. PVE is therefore everyone's business and a matter of peace. It is also the responsibility of **parliamentarians**. It is for them to avoid partisan disciplines; too often, laws are not discussed but imposed. They also have the task of maintaining a healthy oversight of the work and behaviour of the DSF and of promoting rules of criminal procedure and anti-terrorism laws that are consistent with human rights, yet they are often ignorant of the work of the DSF. Furthermore, where are the independent legislative bodies that seriously examine the budget allocated to the DSF? Another challenge is the role of **local governments, locally elected officials, and customary and religious authorities**. Today, decentralization does not exist in our countries: 99% of regional budgets are managed by the capital city. Yet it is important to strengthen the local level, because it is at this level that the solutions are found. In the debate that followed, it was said that when dealing with the violence of the VEs, we must use the same weapons as they do to make ourselves heard. The following questions were asked: How to practice respect for human rights in the face of the horror of the acts committed by the VEs? How to prevent national and local elected officials from leaving their constituencies when they are openly threatened? How to judge whether the death penalty is useful or counterproductive? Would a specific body of law allow for the judgment of VEs? To these questions, other participants argued that VEs have emerged from our societies, that their



demands come from our society, and that they are also humans, like us. They also underlined how difficult it is to get out of the power-opposition political duality, which favours the blocking of the parliamentary process, especially in the defence-security committees of parliaments.

This debate introduced the presentation that followed on the role of DSF in PVE, a vast subject placed at the centre of reflections on the relationship between the population and DSF and the joint provision of security. After showing that security management is turned towards VE manifestations and that it has not changed much since colonization, it was emphasized that the whole security organization of the States was built to protect the political head of the country and not the country itself. But at the same time, the ruling power has always distrusted the soldiers, reduced their number and their capacity for fear of coups d'Etat. Thus, the trivialization of a violence that treats citizens vulgarly and the rackets are not only brakes on the intelligence that the people could bring, but also a direct cause of VE. It is therefore necessary to get out of this archaic vision of security, to re-establish confidence, to turn this behaviour around by making DSF the true supporters of the population, whom they must serve. It is therefore necessary to multiply the frameworks for dialogue in order to give a population-centred and not a state-centred dynamic to the security of the nation. Civil-military actions, such as the creation of infrastructures, medical care, education or the sharing of sports activities, are essential to this approach. Because the root causes of VE are not military but due to misery, injustice and bad governance. It is important to increase these civil-military actions, which make up for the absence or inadequacy of the State, especially in outlying areas. They also serve as levers for the army's intelligence efforts, to erase the poor image of DSF among the population and to strengthen the ties between DSF and the population, in particular through community policing. There is also a need for structures dedicated to PVE within the DSF and, for their training, new curricula should be developed at all levels of the military hierarchy. The educational role of DSF was then widely emphasized and it was mentioned that in Côte d'Ivoire, impressive progress has been made in the relationship between the DSF and civilians. A lack of professionalism in communication remains to be addressed. Again, the value of dialogue was widely emphasized.

The general need for justice and the frustrations surrounding this area were widely discussed following the presentation on the **role of justice actors in PVE**. We are experiencing an attempt by VEs to pull us out of the rule of law, especially during counter-terrorism operations. As we have seen, the abusive behaviour of DSF encourages people join armed groups. So what can positive justice do for the PVE? First of all, by proposing a humane approach to the fight against terrorism in the search for evidence, in the neutrality of its judgments, in the efficiency of its procedures, in the rigor of its investigations, and in the respect of individuals, particularly by guaranteeing the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial. Secondly, by being firm against speeches that incite hatred and violence, by fighting corruption within the penal chain, by verifying the conditions of detention and the management of detainees, by respecting and properly welcoming families, in particular minors, and by informing victims of their rights and the course of the proceedings. Trials should be educational and useful. It was noted, however, that VE children pose specific problems that are not always easy to deal with in a balanced manner, that women (who are particularly vulnerable in these violent spaces) also pose specific problems, and that the dialogue between judges and the DSF needs to be greatly enhanced, as the background of the persons being tried is just as important as the act committed.

The next module of the course examined the **specific role of women in PVE**. As elsewhere, women are at the centre of societal life in high-threat areas. They are the foundation of the

community, but at the same time the main victims of social inequalities and the weight of traditions. They are the first victims of VE, but they are also willing to play different roles within the groups. Around Lake Chad,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the kamikaze attacks are carried out by women. So their relationships with VEs are multiple because most of those who go into the groups are in continuous contact with the mothers. The latter suffer and need to defend their children. In the Far North of Cameroon, "A Mother's Heart" association has organized itself to dialogue with those who have left. They have created a coalition with teachers, authorities, and the DSF to discuss the best way to bring the children back without putting them in danger. They use community radio and social media to pass on messages either directly or through songs. This process is not accepted by everyone: some women are not yet ready to allow the return of those who have disrupted family cohesion to this extent. But everyone realizes that women, who are so relegated to the background and who have so much trouble asserting themselves, are the ones who have the capacity to mobilize, the expertise and the knowledge of their children. There is an urgent need to enable them to deal with difficult situations despite the limitations of their social status and their lack of self-confidence. It was also emphasized that women play an important role with men, both DSF and VEs. "The night brings advice; he who sleeps alone cannot be advised!" But it is necessary to protect the sources of information. This PVE work, women must do it in group because everyone must be informed at the same level. This cannot be done on the sly. It is also necessary to ensure that the return of the children is well organized and that their welcoming is real and planned.

What can and should be the **role of youth in PVE**? What can be done to restore the confidence of young people, to make them independent, to give them a chance and to reduce intergenerational conflicts? What can be done so that they do not find in VE groups answers that neither the State, nor their family, nor society can give them? The debate surrounding this theme was intense because young people say that they are the first victims of society's disorders. The irresponsibility of parents (alcoholism, abandonment in education, lack of financial support for studies, lack of morality in view of the children) is opposed to the fragility of young people, their temptation to fall into violent action and/or drugs, their feeling of abandonment. Of course, young people are very different from each other and generalizations are useless when talking about a group that represents 75% of the population. But it is as a group that the State must approach them in public policies because their future, their education, their supervision require important budgets. Have they been granted? Are the politicians serious about dealing with all the turmoil that is brewing among the youth of our countries? Who are the dead in the attacks? Who are the main displaced people? Who form the bulk of VE groups? Who are kept away from classes because of the lack of open schools? The children, wherever they are, see and know everything. But how to talk to them? What language to use? How to make them understand that the DSF are at the service of the population and of the youth in particular? If these questions are not solved, if dialogue is not established among the community and the youth, what will the youth become?

When the course addressed the theme of **community participation and resilience and the role of customary and religious leaders in preventing VE**, it went right into the hierarchy of values that run through our societies. How and by what are individuals influenced? What does it take for a person to feel understood, valued and even loved? And to find the right place in society? It is through **dialogue** that they can develop and find harmony. The same is true for communities. Participation of all its members, young people, women and men, must be required. But how can true partnerships be created? Are the wisdom of the elders, the right of eldership, the joking relationship, the social codes, the community actions to educate about the dangers that threaten the group, the community policing properly assumed at the local level?

What innovative approaches can be devised? How to react to the tempting material and psychological offers of VEs? "When your neighbour's house is on fire, wet yours" says the proverb. So let's be practical, close to our communities and neighbours. The debate that followed was critical of traditional and religious leaders (who were said to be more concerned with their own interests than those of their community), but noted that the ancestral practice of conflict resolution had been completely lost and that respect for ancestors and the offering of fetishes were regulatory factors that are missing today. On the other hand, traditional values that do not promote resilience to VE, such as the common practice of omerta, must be deconstructed. Discussion spaces, whether traditional or new, should be encouraged when they are inclusive and intergenerational.

On the **role of media actors in PVE**, it was emphasized that they represent a fairly accurate mirror of society, its models and existing thinking. Previously, journalists mainly accompanied the activities of the State. Nowadays, international radio channels, supported by important private capital, provoke a proliferation of press bodies while the Internet imposes itself as a new space of infinite creativity. However, the production and development of media content all express an ideology, which they are not neutral. The example of the war in Ukraine shows it well. Entertainment, soccer, series occupy all the space to the detriment of the substance. Or the content is produced by literate people from the capital, for whom peace, PVE or security issues are of little importance. On the other hand, local radio stations deal with subjects close to the listeners, such as community development; they value cultural heritage, encourage inter-community dialogue and social cohesion. It is recommended that the DSF use these radios, or create their own, to get closer to the population. Especially since VEs are already experts in audio-visual communication and occupy an area that is little occupied by the State or the DSF. It is up to each of us to do the work, each in his or her sector can have access to broadcasting channels. This facilitates dialogue, especially when people cannot meet or travel. A problem arises, however, when anti-terrorism legislation limits dialogue on VE-related topics. This requires regulatory bodies that are effective but open to contradictory debates.

On the theme of **ending violence (violent extremists, militias, weapons)**, it was recognized that knowledge of the actors involved is essential. This allows for an easier approach to the possibilities of reconciliation and rebuilding trust between antagonistic groups. It also facilitates the implementation of appropriate DDR measures that can prevent recurrence and become a true PVE tool. DDR has three components: de-escalation of conflict, implementation of development projects, and reintegration of communities (not just individuals). Transitional justice, on the other hand, requires a real strategy because its implementation is difficult. Indeed, if human rights violations cannot go unpunished, a whole legal arsenal is needed, if possible with a regional dimension, to deal with the different members of the VE groups. The same applies to dealing with proxy groups (militias) during crisis recovery processes, as otherwise they may remain a real danger to communities. Finally, the issue of weapons recovery is always difficult at the end of a conflict. It is necessary to pay the utmost attention to them because their future circulation may endanger the whole region. In the discussion that followed the presentation, the feasibility and effectiveness of transitional justice was first discussed at length. Each situation has to be taken for itself as this practice is based on dialogue between the parties directly involved and can vary greatly from place to place. The creation of the VDP corps in Burkina Faso was also, and again, intensely debated. How to channel their enthusiasm? How to pay them? How to avoid their confrontation with each other? What to do with the justice they allow themselves to apply according to their own criteria? How to organize cooperation between them and the DSF? It was specifically stated that all countries in the region should

help Burkina Faso to resolve these issues by proposing regional solutions, because what happens there could someday have a direct impact on neighbouring countries.

### **III. 4 The role of environmental governance in the PVE**

Finally, the last theme addressed in the course, the **role of environmental governance in PVE**, showed that if States can control their environmental spaces, they will have taken a big step in reducing extreme violence. For these are directly coveted by both African VE groups and by the large multinationals of other continents (GAFA and WAH Weibo-Alibaba-Huawei, among others). Africa is becoming a battleground whose subsoil is at stake. Moreover, extremist groups are using the frustrations of the population and are attacking the Water and Forestry Department first. They have not presented themselves as predators (contrary to the appearance given by the State) but as organizers of environmental governance. The groups settle where there is wealth, gold, forests. And since gold miners know from experience how to handle explosives, they are found throughout the region, including in Nigeria. Therefore, if we fight crime, we fight VEs. But we also know that, in this environmental field, "certain powers" are in the pay of terrorists. There is too much vagueness, too many connections in this matter, and all this is dangerous for Côte d'Ivoire as well as for the other countries in the region. Moreover, transhumance issues affect all countries in the region, including Côte d'Ivoire, and unilateral decisions concerning transhumance (strict limitations and the creation of ranches, as in Benin, for example) can have negative effects on the entire Sahel. The measures taken are sometimes worse than the absence of measures, as we have also seen with the ban on motorcycles and gold panning. Why not go through dialogue and information sharing rather than acting in a hurry?

### **IV. Conclusion**

This national course on PVE in Côte d'Ivoire was, like the previous ones developed by the joint program of the ACSRT and the Swiss FDFA, a success. The reactions of the participants were unanimous: the community of people aware of the importance of PVE and its implementation in public, professional and personal policies was enriched. Everyone understood that **PVE is a process**. It is not made up of distant concepts or objectives: it is a matter of understanding how to act here and now. This course allowed us to bring back to life these strong words of the former Ivorian president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny: "**Peace is not an empty word, but a behaviour**".

## Appendix 1 - Useful References

- **Plan d'action du Secrétaire général des Nations Unies pour la prévention de l'extrémisme violent (24 décembre 2015) / Plan of Action of the United Nations Secretary-General to Prevent Violent Extremism (24 December 2015)**  
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- **1999 Convention de l'OUA sur la Prévention et la Lutte contre le Terrorisme / OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism /**  
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- **2002 UA Plan d'action pour la prévention et la lutte contre le terrorisme / AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism**  
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- **2004 Protocole à la Convention de l'OUA sur la prévention et la lutte contre le terrorisme / Protocol to the 1999 AU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism**  
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- **2014 Charte africaine des valeurs et des principes de la décentralisation, de la gouvernance locale et du développement local / African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development**  
Français : [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36387-treaty-0049\\_-\\_african\\_charter\\_on\\_the\\_values\\_and\\_principles\\_of\\_decentralisation\\_local\\_governance\\_and\\_local\\_development\\_f.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36387-treaty-0049_-_african_charter_on_the_values_and_principles_of_decentralisation_local_governance_and_local_development_f.pdf)  
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- **2014 Rapport de la Présidence de la Commission sur le terrorisme et l'extrémisme violent en Afrique / Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa**  
Français : [https://au.int/sites/default/files/speeches/25397-sp-cps.455.rpt\\_terrorisme.nairobi.2-09-2014-2-0.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/speeches/25397-sp-cps.455.rpt_terrorisme.nairobi.2-09-2014-2-0.pdf)  
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- **Plan d'action de politique étrangère pour la prévention de l'extrémisme violent du Département fédéral des affaires étrangères (DFAE) de Suisse (avril 2016) / Switzerland's Foreign Policy Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism (April 2016)**  
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## Appendix 2: A word from the partners

### The African Union, its benchmark and the ACSRT

The African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) was established as a structure of the African Union Commission in accordance with the provisions of Section H, paragraphs 19-21 of the AU Plan of Action for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa (2002). The objectives set at the time of its creation were to assist African countries in building and strengthening their capacity to prevent and combat terrorism, as well as to act as a monitoring and warning tool and to complement international action by strengthening cooperation among African countries in these areas. Subsequent decisions by AU political bodies extend this mandate to the prevention of and fight against violent extremism.

The AU Commission, through the ACSRT, is working to:

- Strengthen the capacities of States to prevent and combat terrorism and violent extremism, (strategies and Plans of Action, training, advice...);
- Promote better institutional interaction and coordination at the national and regional levels and better development of the Early Warning Mechanism;
- Improve the policy and legal framework for the prevention and fight against terrorism and violent extremism;
- Conduct and promote research on terrorism and violent extremism issues.

This course, by promoting a multidimensional approach, based on the concept of "Human Security" to eradicate VE and terrorism in the member states of the African Union, is in line with this mandate of the ACSRT.

### Swiss FDFA's PVE program

Following the adoption of the United Nations Plan of Action for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (2016), the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) has made this topic a priority (\*). The Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) is the FDFA's competence center that implements its priorities in the areas of peace and human security.

It launched a program for PVE back in 2016, which has since undertaken a range of advocacy, dialogue and training activities in favour of this prevention approach focused on the causes of violence and the alternatives that can be provided. It also mobilizes its experts to carry out activities with its partners on the ground.

The initiative includes about forty meetings, during which some 2000 personalities from various professional backgrounds from North, West and Central Africa met.

The objective is to provide an informal space for multi-stakeholder dialogue on the prevention approach, to highlight and strengthen positive initiatives that represent concrete alternatives to VE, and to contribute to the capacity building of actors involved in PVE in their roles and within their communities.

**The African Union's ACSRT is a partner in the initiative and has collaborated with the Swiss FDFA to launch this framework training program for the PVE.**

(\* Swiss FDFA adopted a Foreign Policy Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in April 2016 - <http://www.news.admin.ch/NSBSubscriber/message/attachments/43587.pdf>)