

Alina L. Romanowski
Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism
Remarks for 2nd Annual U.S. – AFRICAN UNION CVE Week

African Union Commission
Monday, October 29, 2018, 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

REMARKS AS PREPARED

- Good morning, everyone. I would like to thank the African Union and the U.S. Mission to the African Union for convening this conference and for inviting me to speak here today. The United States and the African Union have an unbreakable partnership in the battle against violent extremism.
- Today I'd like to talk about how the United States' global strategy for fighting terrorism worldwide supports countering violent extremism in Africa.
- We're at a critical moment in our fight against terrorism. We've achieved a number of counterterrorism successes in recent years—including the near complete liberation of territory from ISIS in Iraq and Syria with the help of many countries in the Global Coalition.
- But today's terrorist landscape remains more fluid, complex and diverse than ever.
- Battle-hardened terrorists are returning home from conflict zones or planning attacks in third countries. Homegrown terrorists – people who are inspired by ISIS, al-Qa'ida, and other terrorist groups, but have never set foot in any foreign conflict zone – are carrying out attacks using any means at their disposal.

- A recent report by George Washington University found that in the last three years, returned foreign terrorist fighters carried out only 18 percent of the attacks in Europe and North America.
- ISIS, al-Qa'ida, and their affiliates have become more dispersed and clandestine, using online safe havens to inspire attacks by distant followers. As a result, they have made themselves less susceptible to conventional military or law enforcement action.
- Countering terrorism is a generational fight, and the threat and how we counter it has moved into a new phase.
- Much of our approach to combating this evolved terrorist threat is outlined in the Trump Administration's new National Strategy for Counterterrorism, which the President endorsed and publicly announced on October 4.
- This is the fourth U.S. counterterrorism strategy produced since 9/11 and the first one since 2011. I would recommend reading the Strategy, which is publicly available at www.Whitehouse.gov.
- The Strategy reflects today's terrorist landscape and articulates a counterterrorism approach that is sustainable and enduring, but also increasingly efficient, prioritized, and less reliant on U.S. capabilities alone.
- The Strategy makes clear that in combating terrorism, the United States can't go it alone. Terrorism is a global threat, and all nations have a role to play in countering it.

- While the United States will remain a global counterterrorism leader, we will continue to strengthen our international partnerships to ensure a broad and coordinated approach to counterterrorism.
- We are also prioritizing the allocation of U.S. resources and encouraging allies and partners to assume a greater share of the burden. As part of this strategy, we will be working closely with our allies and partners to encourage them to use their unique resources, relationships, and reach in countering and defeating global terrorist organizations. We will look to partner with willing and able allies to overcome shared security challenges.
- The Strategy places great importance on prevention efforts. Among the six lines of effort detailed in the strategy, one is exclusively dedicated to terrorist radicalization and recruitment.
- As part of this comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, we work to improve the capacity and professionalism of security forces, particularly in border security, forensics, investigative capacity, and intelligence gathering. We also assist efforts to strengthen criminal justice systems, reform detention practices, promote the rule of law and respect for human rights, and bolster civil society.
- The strategy notes, specifically, that we will “champion and institutionalize prevention and create a global prevention architecture with the help of civil society, private partners, and the technology industry.”
- For the U.S. Government, our civilian counterterrorism efforts will always include our traditional law enforcement tools, such as investigations, prosecutions, and updates to laws to more effectively target the threat.

- Tougher border screening and more robust information sharing are also critical components of the counterterrorism toolkit. In fact, the United States currently has 72 information sharing agreements with international partners.
- Sanctioning of terrorist financiers to stem the flow of financial support and cut off their access to the international financial systems are also critical tools.
- But, let me bring all this closer to where we are today, at this conference in Africa.
- Across Africa, our most critical CT tools are helping partners build their civilian counterterrorism expertise.
- We do this by focusing on CT and CVE strategies, enhancing border security, cutting off terrorist's access to finances, strengthening law enforcement criminal justice capacity, and engaging local communities.
- Through training and equipment, consultations, and mentoring, we help civilian law enforcement officers, investigators, prosecutors, judges, and civil society better address terrorist threats across the continent.
- We can build on our CVE efforts at the local, national, and international levels. For example, in East Africa, we can focus on countering al-Shabaab through preventive efforts, such as working with youth and marginalized populations.
- In West Africa, we can focus on countering groups such as ISIS-Greater Sahara and Boko Haram, by working with local communities and governments, and developing their capacity for

strategic messaging that specifically counters recruitment narratives.

- We realize that we must do more than identify foreign terrorist fighters, prevent them from traveling, and remove them from the battlefield. By then, it is too late.
- We must also address the drivers that attract these individuals and prevent them from getting into terrorist pipelines in the first place. Our efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism aim to address these challenges.
- The United States recognizes that a key component to defeating terrorism around the globe is working with our partners to develop sustainable community-based solutions to prevent radicalization.
- Engaging local communities and strengthening community cohesion is at the heart of many CVE efforts. Local communities often serve as the first line of defense against terrorist recruitment by developing the capabilities to identify those who are on the pathway to terrorism, and empowering communities to intervene accordingly.
- Another important part of CVE is countering terrorist ideology that resonates with people around the world. We must work with local voices to provide an alternative to the falsehoods propagated by terrorist recruiters and to counter terrorist messaging campaigns, many of which originate in distant countries and are propagated on the Internet.
- CVE is also about rehabilitating former terrorists – not all, but those who can be rehabilitated – and successfully re-integrating them into their communities.

- Across, Africa we have supported work from prevention to rehabilitation.
- These efforts include supporting particular ministries to develop and implement CVE strategies and plans for community outreach. It includes fostering partnerships between leaders in law enforcement and women community leaders to recognize signs of possible radicalization in effective but sensitive ways. And it includes training local civil society groups to develop and disseminate their own alternative narratives and messaging content.
- Local governments and institutions play a critical role in these efforts. These groups have deep ties to the communities they serve and are often best positioned to address the drivers that create opportunities for terrorist organizations to operate.
- We have seen programs designed to build resiliency in rural communities and prevent terrorist activity by improving relationships between local populations and the security forces protecting them.
- We have funded programs that help vulnerable communities and security actors develop and implement communication and crisis response plans, with training on how to best protect populations from terrorism.
- Building the capacity of local actors is an essential element of any good CVE program. Let me highlight the great work that The Strong Cities Network is doing as an example.
- This network of 125 cities supports local governments finding local solutions to address the drivers of terrorist radicalization and recruitment in their communities. This network has a diverse set

of cities across the globe, such as Diffa, Mombasa, The Hague, Stockholm and many others. U.S. cities include Anaheim, Atlanta, Chattanooga, Denver, Los Angeles, Louisville, New York, and San Diego, just to name a few.

- Working together with our friends, allies, and partners around the world, we must enhance our efforts to address the underlying issues in vulnerable countries and regions that lead some to choose terrorism, such as weak or undemocratic governments, corrupt law enforcement, human rights abuses, inept justice systems, lack of community cohesion, and few opportunities for youth. These are the very conditions terrorists exploit for recruitment and radicalization.
- It is not enough to say that we are against terrorism; we have to address the issues that fuel it.
- The United States engages in a wide range of CVE efforts through diplomacy and programming. On the diplomatic front, we are engaging foreign government partners to examine their practices. We are assisting countries with high levels of terrorism to better understand the drivers of this behavior and embrace opportunities to mitigate and reduce the appeal of terrorism.
- Working with the United Nations and regional bodies, including the African Union, dozens of governments across the globe are developing rights-respecting, comprehensive P/CVE “national action plans” to guide their policies and programming.
- Through the Global Counterterrorism Forum, or GCTF, the United States – working with the Co-Chairs Morocco and the Netherlands as well as other countries – has led the development and ratification of numerous good practices on CVE.

- These good practices are available through the GCTF’s “Toolkit,” which includes more than 20 good practice documents, recommendations, and practitioner guides developed for addressing the full lifecycle of radicalization to violence—from the incipient stage at the front end to how to rehabilitate former offenders on the back end.
- The material can be found in multiple languages on the GCTF website, at www.gctf.org, as well as through a mobile app. These documents provide voluntary guidance and illustrative programming on community policing and CVE, education-based approaches to CVE, and the role of family members and women in radicalization prevention.
- At the GCTF Ministerial in September 2018, two good practices documents were endorsed as a result of U.S. co-led initiatives. Both of these documents, on addressing the challenge of returning families of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and on addressing homegrown terrorism, include non-binding guidelines on preventing and countering violent extremism, and effective rehabilitation and reintegration of FTFs. You can also find these good practices on the GCTF website that I just mentioned.
- We also support implementation of these good practices in partner countries. One of these initiatives is Hedayah, the UAE-based CVE Center, which helps coordinate prevention efforts through research and programs in the region.
- We join numerous other countries in supporting multilateral CVE efforts such as the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, or GCERF. GCERF is a multi-stakeholder global fund that works with local partners at the government and civil society level to strengthen community resilience to violent extremism.

- Here in Africa, GCERF is presently active in Kenya, Mali, and Nigeria.
- For example, in Mali, GCERF helped to set up 132 village committees in the Mopti region. The ten-member committees are on constant watch to monitor activity of newcomers to the village, alert others of signs of recruitment and radicalization to violent extremism, and act as a liaison with local authorities. One imam proclaimed: “The project has deployed an ‘army’ without conventional weapons. The weapons are observation, communication, and awareness-raising, and are more formidable than the ammunition of classical armies.”
- In Nigeria, in a GCERF capacity building workshop on community policing attended by 130 men and women in Plateau State, participants took the initiative to establish Inter-Voluntary Security Networks with local authorities. Over 1,000 young men and young women who had been identified as vulnerable to radicalization to violent extremism graduated from vocational trainings. Women in Plateau and Nasarawa States then decided to set up cooperatives that will facilitate their access to loans.
- We are always looking to expand our partnerships in unique, creative, and successful ways. This event – the 2nd Annual U.S.-African Union CVE Week – is one such example. Together, we are mindful that we are not just working to stop the ongoing violence by groups like Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, ISIS, and al-Qa’ida, but to prevent the next wave of terrorist groups like these from ever even emerging.
- Thank you again for the opportunity to speak here today and share the United States’ perspective on shared terrorist threats. It’s important for all of us to focus our efforts on civilian sector and

law enforcement tools. This includes everyone here today—from non-governmental representatives to member states of the African Union.

- I am sure you will have an exciting conference discussing CVE in Africa, exchanging experiences, and finding new solutions to this generational challenge. Terrorism is an ever-changing threat, and we need to adapt along with it together.
- I look forward to working with you and learning from the vast wealth of experience here in this room as we join together to counter terrorism and make this world a safer place for all of us.