

KENYA COMMUNITY SUPPORT CENTRE REPORT OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ANTI-RADICALISATION AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN KENYA HELD AT THE REEF HOTEL ON 28TH-29TH NOVEMBER 2010.

This was the first national conference to discuss radicalization and violent extremism in Kenya. More than 100 participants drawn from Government, youth groups, women and religious leaders, Islamic scholars, local business and the diplomatic community attended the two day workshop whose aim was to exchange, develop and explore ideas on how to counter the growth of radicalization and political violence in Kenya.

Participants exchanged information and ideas on the causes of radicalization and efforts taken by private and public organizations to counter the growth of terrorism as well as improve security in the country. They also heard of different approaches that had been used by other countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada which have at one time been faced with the threat of violent extremism. Common amongst the experiences was the fact that the approaches were centered on people's participation, ownership and consultation. Communities were seen as equal partners who had a stake in promoting security and eliminating vulnerabilities that were likely to cause danger to their societies. The forum was organized in three sessions that was each followed by a plenary discussion of issues that had been raised by the panelists.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES AND CONCERNS ON THE CAUSES OF RADICALIZATION.

The first session aimed at identifying the causes of radicalization from a community perspective and how they same would be addressed. The panelists in these sessions involved a local youth and women leader, a religious leader and an Islamic researcher and lawyer. The panel was in agreement that radicalization is real and the community is charged with the responsibility of developing mechanisms of reducing vulnerabilities. To confirm the activities of radicalizers, one of the panelists Mr. Abdulmalik Ateku narrated his experience of how he had been recruited to join what he believed was a religious cause. He explained how he had been approached through a local religious leader and assured that he would be trained to become an Islamic preacher.

He explained that that was transferred from Mombasa to Nairobi where he underwent military and mind setting training and during that time, he was not at any time supposed to communicate to his family. He was only able to escape following a confusion that ensued after police raided their training school and arrested some of their senior trainers. Yet, life was not all rosy for him after the escape as police started trailing his movements and conducted arbitrary searches on him. The meeting also heard that, political manipulation, exploitation of religious affiliation, police laxity, unemployment, ethnic undercurrents and discrimination in acquisition of legal documents by local people was to blame for increased susceptibility to radicalization.

However, it was also argued that the youth were to blame for their increased exposure to radical elements and their activities due to their overdependence on parents, communities and religious leaders. The youth were accused of wanting quick fixes to challenges facing them and this made them more susceptible to extremists and politicians who wanted to use for their selfish religion-political gains. The government was also blamed for failing to fully address the plight of the youth especially through the devolved funding mechanism which was said to have totally ignored youth

participation. As a result, politicians who were patrons of these funds did not prioritize youth empowerment through the use of these funds.

It was also argued that religious leaders who recruited the likes of Ateku to join extremist violent groups were to blame for exploiting religion to further their interests. Participants were informed that leaders who claimed that there was a Jihad in Somali for instance were only interested in advancing a political conflict that had nothing to do with religion. Sheikh Juma Ngao of the Kenya National Muslim Advisory council (KEMNAC) explained that Islam did not support the killing of innocent women and children and thus violent radicalism like the one taking place in Somalia should be disassociated with religion

Another factor that was advanced for the increased vulnerability of the youth to violent extremism was historical marginalization. A Muslim historian Sheikh Stambuli Abdinassir said that there was discrimination even amongst Muslims themselves based on colour and class but said this could be addressed if the people embraced diversity and stopped antagonizing each other. Further he encouraged the local people to start organizing themselves in social and economic sectors and then demand for their rightful position in government.

These views were reinforced by the presentation of Mr. Ibrahim Lithome an Islamic researcher and lawyer who said that even though Islam was the first religion in the country, Muslims were yet to enjoy their rights as they had been denied citizenship and other rights based on their religion. According to him, government insensitivity when dealing with radicalism, religious misconceptions, and global conspiracy, are some of the other factors that fuelled radicalization. He however observed that Muslims had a duty to rise against marginalization by changing the way they perceived it. He said that self isolation, lack of strategic planning, blaming the government and not investing in development projects increased the vulnerability of the youth to be recruited by extremist groups.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFORTS AND RESPONSE - TO REDUCE POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND PROMOTING SECURITY.

This panel comprised of government and corporate representatives and aimed at addressing what these institutions had done do in a bid to counter radicalization. In the panel were the chairperson of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), Dr. Mzalendo Kibunjia, the Regional Commissioner North Coast Mr. Nelson Marwa and the Chairman of the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers Mr. Anthony Njaramba.

The NCIC chairman Dr. Kibunjia said that negative ethnicity was to blame and unless eliminated, security and political well being of the nation could never be achieved. He noted that even though the African continent had been partitioned to respective countries in 1885, ethnic groups would remain and there was need to promote co-existence of the nation despite the diversity occasioned by ethnicity. He maintained that to resolving conflict, dialogue was crucial and people should strive to create room for the same. He called upon citizens to take their civic duties seriously and ensure that they challenged themselves on what contribution they were making to maintain peace and security. He also urged the people to stop complaining and pointing fingers at others but forge a way forward as one country. Further, he advised people to foster respect to existing institutions

but at the same time cautioned that they ought to remain vigilante in identifying lapses that may come from the institutions.

The KAHC representative Mr. Anthony Njaramba said that the hotel industry had been involved at the forefront of countering radicalism because of the negative effects witnessed after the Kikambala Paradise hotel bombing. He said that tourism stakeholders were involved in civic education where beach operators were incorporated. These efforts were aimed at raising the awareness and create the necessary linkages both locally and internationally to help reduce the vulnerabilities. The hotel industry has as a safety measure constructed road bumps to hotels and put disaster management teams to counter radical initiatives.

The regional commissioner Mr. Nelson Marwa said the government had put several policy measures to create opportunities for the youth. They included such things as the development of vision 2030 that sought to transform the country into a newly industrialized middle income country providing a high quality of life for all its citizens in a clean and secure environment.

He also explained among others about the public sector reform program, the creation of the ministry of youth affairs and sports that was established to champion the mainstreaming of youth agenda in all the sectors of the economy. Devolved funds, police reforms, regional integration, and the new constitution were some of the other measures that would ensure that the youth participated fully in management of national affairs.

PRESENTATION OF COUNTRY COUNTER-RADICALIZATION STRATEGIES: DO THEY MATCH THE THREAT?

In this session representatives from three western countries made their contributions on how their respective countries were dealing with radicalization. They included Robert Jeffrey of the British High Commission, Mr. Cotton Andrei of the United States Embassy Nairobi and Etienne Savoy of the Canadian Embassy in Nairobi.

In their presentations it was clear that radicalism is not a religious issue but was fuelled by peer and influential leaders. The key strategy in dealing with radicalization was through a four pronged approach dubbed prevent pursue, protect and prepare initiative.

Mr. Jeffrey of the United Kingdom said that because of the porous nature of Kenyan borders, extremists' activities were more likely and these put the country at a risk. He said to be able to counter radicalization there was need enhance public safety, build community confidence and have the people actively engaged in peace and security matters.

He said the UK uses counter strategies such as assessment of community tension, having early local consultation, enhancing individual networks and collaborations, ICT monitoring, Muslim contact unit, anti terrorism hotlines, educational establishment, and funding of youth groups.

The US representative Mr. Cotton Andrei attributed radicalization to personal factors like the lack of job, group dynamics, and community factors like disenfranchised and ideological factors. He said that in dealing with the same it was important to note that the provision of education, health care,

job opportunities, promotion of democratic governance etc was paramount. He said the US government had taken a key interest in Kenya because of the ongoing political reforms which were aimed at empowering Kenyans and ensuring their participation in the management of national affairs.

The Canadian government Etienne Savoy said that his country was dealing with issues of victimization through enhancing transition between first and third generations Canadian Somalis. He said the Canadian government had interventions to counter radicalization that measures that promoted inclusive institutions, developing socialism that embraced diversity and ensured promotion of the identity of the Canadian nation.

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The government was urged:

- Recruit Muslims in the Government intelligence department just like it has happened in the US. This would promote a sense of inclusiveness in the management of public affairs.
- Provide the necessary environment for the creation and expansion of industries so as create employment opportunities for the youth.
- Revive, support and embrace community policing strategy to counter radicalization.
- Ensure equitable and proportional representation in all aspects of the government
- Reduce corruption and negative ethnicity in government institutions.
- Reform bureaucratic processes on the acquisition of important legal documents e.g. identification cards, passports etc.
- Government should apprehend recruiters instead of punishing the youth who are lost and need guidance and counseling.
- The law enforcement agencies should embrace community participation in apprehending terrorists. Equally there should be a feedback mechanism to the community to avoid suspicion of corruption where suspects are freed and no information is shared on the action taken against them
- community should to be involved in identification and arrest of perpetrator of violent extremism
- The Police should initiate programmes to build trust and win community support in their approaches on human security

The youth were

- Encouraged to change their attitudes, take leadership roles, and stop despising some jobs.
- To lobby for leadership positions by fully participating in the democratic process.
- Even though the youth are a vulnerable group prone to radicalization, it was observed that the solution also lie with them.
- Youth should embrace the rule of law and participate in building safe environments by reporting suspicious people, perpetrators of violence, and terrorists and initiate mechanisms in partnership with government institutions to deter terrorists from operating in their locations/districts.

Religious and other community leaders

- Embrace unity in diversity and capitalize on the efforts of the national cohesion and integration commission.
- Shun the formation of factions that are a stumbling block in curbing radicalization.
- To map the movements of the youth and if they suspect change of behavior they need to bring the youth forward for advisory and counseling.
- Muslims scholars should come forward and together help address the issue of terrorism.
- Help Bridge the gap between leadership and the youth.
- There should be more deliberate move by the corporate world to do affirmative action and give more opportunities to the local people e.g. sponsoring university students through corporate social responsibility.

KECOSCE was urged to

- Organize more community dialogue forums with the youth and elders to help explain and curb the spread of radicalization and violent extremism in the coast.
- Initiate programmes that bridge the gap between government, law enforcement officers and communities.
- Support community initiatives to create awareness and deter terrorists from operating in the localities.
- Lobby Government to develop National Counter Radicalization Policy to support this initiative
- Lobby Government to adopt draft community policing policy and strengthen the work of community policing forums to reduce/monitor presence of suspicious people.
- Organize follow up meetings with key stakeholder to implement recommendations of the conference.
- Support youth livelihood initiatives to raise youth incomes and reduce dependence of youth on politicians, local leaders, recruiters etc.