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UN & Multilateral Efforts and Civil Society Engagement on Counterterrorism and Preventing and/or Countering Violent Extremism in South-East Asia

A Landscape Assessment

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CONTEXT & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Southeast Asia regional landscape assessment is intended to inform the scoping report on Independent Civil Society–UN Counterterrorism Engagement, conducted by Global Center on Cooperative Security and Rights & Security International. The landscape assessment was informed by the South and Southeast Asia Regional Consultation on Civil Society–UN Counterterrorism Engagement in Bangkok on 11-12 July 2023.

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ABOUT US

Initiatives for International Dialogue

The Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) is a Philippines-based advocacy institution promoting human security, democratization and people-to-people solidarity. IID conducts policy advocacy and campaign programs on Burma, Mindanao, Southern Thailand, West Papua, and East Timor.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Southeast Asian region has long been faced by multiple and overlapping issues of state repression and violence, political violence, and insurgency. Using nuanced and multi-faceted approaches to address these complex, interlinked, and multi-faceted issues is critical for achieving lasting peace and security in the region. However, **military-first analysis and hard approaches, including counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and repressive national security strategies, have more often exacerbated marginalization, corruption, mal-governance, impunity, and existing social conflicts.**

The region's diverse communities have long been involved in complex internal competition, however, colonization and its legacies deepened existing differences and animosities. Following the end of the colonial era and the rise of modern nation-states, although state-constructed identities emerged, social divisions persisted and political majorities adopted strategies of minoritization, assimilation, divide-and-rule, discrimination, and erasure in their nation-building endeavors. In general, emerging national elites across Southeast Asia chose to consolidate power around a single dominant ethnic majority. Paradoxically, these efforts to establish an ethnic- and race-based social order have generated and continue to fuel tensions and conflicts.

The legacy of colonization and divide-and-rule tactics, combined with the adoption of similar strategies by post-colonial governments, has given rise to two interconnected yet distinct categories of conflicts.

The first involves **struggles for self-determination and ethno-nationalist liberation**, as seen in regions like Timor-Leste, Aceh, Bangsamoro/Mindanao, West Papua, Patani/South Thailand, and Burma/Myanmar.

The second type encompasses **entrenched racial, cultural, and ethnic divides** intertwined with xenophobia, discrimination, and intolerance.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge the dominant role of political, religious, and military elites that captured state power and exploited these identity-based conflicts purportedly in the name of national security, unity, and social cohesion. When minorities demand their self-determination and other rights, their actions are used to reinforce the necessity of a securitized state and to justify extreme national security measures. In recent years, we have witnessed a rise in intolerance in countries like **Burma/Myanmar, Indonesia, and Malaysia**, driven by the weaponization of religion and race for narrow political gains. While in **the Philippines**, the rhetoric around anti-communism has resurfaced. This dynamic, in turn, has undermined democratic institutions, the overall civic space, and the innate pluralistic nature of these societies.

Following 9/11, there was a surge in international efforts under the banner of a “Global War on Terror”. Southeast Asia was touted as the second frontier of global jihad, and so Southeast Asian countries and international partners and security organizations increased their cooperation to share intelligence and strengthen counterterrorism (CT) capabilities.

Global CT got a second wind after the rise to prominence of the Islamic State or Daesh (IS/ISIL) in 2014 and through the repackaged Preventing and/or Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) framework developed in 2015.¹ Amidst the push and incentives from terrorism and the normative frameworks and technical interventions of **United Nations** (UN) bodies and amidst national governments' concerns, interests and use of fear-based rhetoric around renewed threat of transnational extremist violence, P/CVE became the dominant catchphrase and programming lens in the region.²

The sweeping analysis, discourse, and programs around the so-called global trend of "violent extremism" displaced more nuanced peacebuilding and conflict transformation approaches to the endogenous drivers of political violence in Southeast Asia. This refocused public and civil society attention and resources to the CT and P/CVE agenda³ aligned with the state's meanings of peace and security as law and order. The overused, poorly defined, and malleable meanings of 'violent extremism,' 'radicalism,' and 'extremism,' in turn, led to simplistic generalizations, overreactions, abuse/misuse, poorly targeted and repressive actions, and violations of human rights and freedoms.⁴

With this backdrop, this paper aims to:

- 1** Provide an **overview of the impact** of prevalent CT, P/CVE, and related national security measures on and **engagement** of civil society organizations (CSOs), non-government organizations (NGOs) or non-profit organizations (NPOs) in Southeast Asia;
- 2** To **map the UN and other multilateral (and bilateral) efforts** on CT & P/CVE that underpin or reinforce these national

laws and strategies, repressive and harmful state behavior and systemic rights violations;

- 3** To **identify key and future areas of engagements** in either disrupting, reforming or transforming completely this CT & P/CVE agenda in the global, regional and national/local levels.

The authors drew from the **Asia & the Pacific Regional Civil Society Consultation in March 2023**⁵ and the **South and Southeast Asia Regional Consultation in July 2023**⁶ and pored through online sources, policy documents, and existing literature, to write and complete this landscape analysis.

II. Impact of CT & P/CVE on Human Rights, Peace, and Overall Civic Space

Over the last 20 years, the United Nations, including the **Secretary-General, UN Women, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights** (OHCHR), and the **Special Rapporteur on the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism**, have documented the ongoing and deepened misuse of counterterrorism and related national security measures **against** civil society and the downstream harms of securitized approaches to peace and security, human rights, and development issues.

This trend is connected with, first, the lack of a clear definition of terrorism or violent extremism; second, the heightened exploitation of CT measures in the aftermath of 9/11; and, third, the growing national frameworks that lack accountability mechanisms and oversight, especially from civil society and affected communities.

In the Southeast Asian region, the CT & P/CVE legislative and regulatory frameworks often suffer from being vague and broad, “often compounded by further restrictive measures under overlapping or complementary frames to suppress threats, such as “insurgency,” “sedition,” “opposition to the people’s authorities,” “prejudice to public safety,” and/ or the “undermining of national integrity” and “security measures that date back to the colonial era.”⁸ It is therefore important to look at and analyze not only the specific laws and policies labeled as CT or P/CVE but rather look at the web of repressive security policies justified under the banner of “national security”. And it is important to situate these within a backdrop of the rise of authoritarian tendencies, and ongoing conflicts across the region.

These expansive CT & P/CVE frameworks have repeatedly been utilized to justify the repression of civil society, the shrinking of space for civic engagement, and instances of human rights violations. In the Southeast Asian region, the impact of CT & P/CVE, and related national security measures, can be grouped into **six** (6) areas:

- 1** States (ab/mis-)use terrorism and VE designations to repress and eliminate political opponents and dissidents, to consolidate power, and to justify state violence.
- 2** States authorize, condone, or endorse arbitrary detention, extrajudicial violence, and judicial harassment as part of CT & P/CVE implementation, resulting in an entrenched culture of impunity and significant due process and fair trial violations.
- 3** CT & P/CVE laws and policies provide a convenient pretext for surveillance and control of information & cyberspace, furthering the crackdown of dissidents and civic space and spread of government propaganda, dis/mal/misinformation, and hate speech and incitement to violence.
- 4** Robust counter-terrorism financing and sanctions restrict the work of civil society organizations, particularly those working on human rights defense and humanitarian response in emergency and crisis situations.
- 5** CT & P/CVE measures exacerbate intersectional inequalities and perpetuate discrimination, disproportionately affecting women, children and youth, and LGBTQI+, as well as ethnic and religious minorities and indigenous communities.
- 6** CT & P/CVE measures endanger peacebuilders and humanitarian workers and ultimately obstruct peace and transitional justice processes, deepen injustices, and prolong existing conflicts especially related to economic disenfranchisement and to land and resource control.

III. CSO Landscape: Profiles of CSOs Engaged in and/or Affected by CT & P/CVE

Key Civil Society Actors

Prior to the introduction of P/CVE in the region, there has already been an ecosystem of regional peacebuilding, transitional justice, and conflict/atrocities prevention organizations, networks, and platforms in place working on addressing factors of political violence and armed conflicts—including hate speech, intolerance, and terrorism-related violence—across Southeast Asia. Some of them are:

- **Initiatives for International Dialogue** (IID, est. 1988)⁹
- **Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute** (MPI, est. 2000)¹⁰
- **Centre For Peace & Conflict Studies** (CPCS, est. 2008)
- **Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict** (GPPAC) - Southeast Asia (est. 2005)¹¹
- **Southeast Asia Human Rights and Peace Network** (SEAHRN, est. 2010)¹²
- **Asia Justice and Rights** (AJAR, est. 2015)¹³

These organizations have, for the most part, successfully **resisted the external push on P/CVE framing and language**. They instead **insist on their peacebuilding and transitional justice lenses endogenous to the region** and their practice built and sharpened across decades of work and learning with partner communities.

Since 2015, CSOs involved in P/CVE and CT programs drastically mushroomed, given the entry of P/CVE and CT-oriented funding and agenda-building. The **Southeast Asian Network of Civil Society Organizations** (SEAN-CSO), established in 2016, was the first regional CSO network working on P/CVE and CT and is anchored by Deakin University based in Australia.¹⁴ The fact that the first regional gathering of this supposed CSO network was held inside the Australian embassy in Jakarta points to the material interest and leadership of the Australian government in CT & P/CVE mainstreaming in the region.

Further, the four countries included in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) – and also identified as priority countries by UN¹⁵ and key bilateral and multilateral champions of CT & P/CVE – are also the ones with the broadest civil society involvement in CT & P/CVE programs, given the core agenda of civil society engagement under P/CVE's banner of “a whole-of-society approach”.

These countries are*:

- 18th** **The Philippines**
- 24th** **Indonesia**
- 26th** **Thailand**
- 75th** **Malaysia**

**Based on the 2022 Global Terrorism Index*

The Philippines has numerous and diverse set of non-government organizations (NGOs) engaged on P/CVE, such as **Program Against Violent Extremism (PAVE)**, **Action for Advancement and Development in Mindanao (AFADMin)**, **Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy (PCID)**, **Teach Peace, Build Peace (TPBP)**, **Zamboanga-Basilan Integrated Development Alliance, Inc. (ZABIDA)**, **Gagandilan Women Mindanaw, Integrated Resource Development for Tri-People (IRDT)**, **Moropreneur, Inc.**, **Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG)**, **International Alert (IA)**, **Balay Mindanaw**, and the **Al Qalam Institute of the Ateneo de Davao University**, among others. Early adopters of P/CVE in the region and first to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) in Asia, the Philippines is the only country in Southeast Asia where the **Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF)** – in their words: “first global effort to support local, community-level initiatives aimed at strengthening resilience against violent extremist agendas” – has a portfolio. GCERF is now in the second round of its funding cycle and currently has six (6) partners – **Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS)**, **Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID)**, **Mahintana Foundation Inc.**, **Teach Peace Build Peace (TPBP)**, **Initiatives for Dialogue and Empowerment through Alternative Legal Services (IDEALS)**, and **Ecoweb Inc.** – with their own respective sub-grantees.

Alongside the Philippines, **Indonesia** is a priority for multilateral and bilateral technical and financial support for its national CT & P/CVE programming and has a broad set of CSOs working on P/CVE. **Civil Society Against Violent Extremism (C-Save)**, **Fahmina**, **Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP)**, **Institute for International Peace-Building, Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) Indonesia**, **Peace Generation Indonesia**, **PUSHAM Surabaya**, **PUSAD Paramadina**, **Division for Applied Social Psychology Research**, **Habibie Foundation**, **Wahid Foundation**, and **Center for Detention Studies**, among others.

Some CSOs engaged in P/CVE in **Thailand** are **Duay Jai Group**, **“Hearty Support”**, **Saiburi Looker**, **Buddhist Network for Peace (B4P)**, and **Patani Forum**, among others. While in **Malaysia**, there is the **Southeast Asian Regional Center for Counterterrorism (SEARCCT)**, **Pertubuhan IKRAM Malaysia (IKRAM)**, **CSO initiatives in Sabah**, **IMAN Research**, **Initiative to Promote Tolerance and Prevent Violence (INITIATE.MY)**, and **Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM)**, among others.

The list above is not exhaustive, yet it provides a snapshot of the various CSOs either involved directly in projects packaged as P/CVE or

received support under P/CVE funding portfolios, or are engaged with their respective governments in their national CT & P/CVE programs and processes. Given however the fundamental problem and contentions in the definition of what constitutes “violent extremism” and “terrorism,” categorizing CSOs actors' involvement in CT & P/CVE remains contentious.

Different Level of Programming and Strategies

The Asia Foundation developed a useful framework (to map and group CSOs engaged in CT & P/CVE programming) that can help us understand strategies that are favored by states and multilateral entities championing the CT & P/CVE agenda. This is useful as well in mapping strategies and actors that are either more aligned with or critical of the state's dominant CT & P/CVE agenda, shaping the nature of their relations with state and multilateral actors and, in turn, their level of access to resources from and space to engage. It should be noted as well at the onset that these categories are not mutually exclusive and most often organizations employ activities falling under two or all of these categories.

The Asia Foundation paper categorized CSO work vis-a-vis P/CVE into three (3):

- 1** Those involved in **Macro-level programming or strategies addressing underlying structural inequalities** and related issues such as poor governance, poverty, and marginalization, including a transitional justice and reconciliation (TJR) pillar on guarantee of non-recurrence;
- 2** Those involved in **Meso-level programming or strategies addressing social cohesion issues**, like social and political marginalization, in conjunction with other dimensions such as perceived persecution or lack of justice, including TJR pillars on right to truth, justice and reparation; and
- 3** Those **Micro-level programming or strategies targeting more narrowly towards at-risk communities** and individuals.¹⁶

Who are Engaged versus Who are Affected

Applying this framework, in terms of (spaces for) engagement and participation, **CSOs working on micro-level programming and strategies** “are most closely associated with government security agencies,”¹⁷ and have the **most access to and more active in formal spaces of engaging CT & P/CVE**. These organizations often identify as **“P/CVE practitioners”** and are primarily focused on strategies around deradicalization, especially among youth and identified “vulnerable sectors”; counternarratives, and strategic communications, especially online; early warning and community policing, and rehabilitation, and reintegration.

On the flip side, **CSOs that focus on root causes of violence and are involved in macro- and meso-level programming and strategies** are **most impacted by the harms of CT, P/CVE, and related national security policies**. These are the development, peacebuilding, and human rights organizations that have long established work on addressing underlying structural inequalities, injustices, and related issues such as poor governance, poverty, and marginalization, long before the introduction of CT & P/CVE frameworks, programming, and funding. This section of civil society at the forefront of the harmful impact of CT & P/CVE includes **dissenting individuals/organizations and activists, minority/ized and indigenous peoples groups and organizations accompanying and advocating with them, land rights defenders, lawyers and legal practitioners, and community peacebuilding and humanitarian organizations (including faith-based groups)** engaging non-state armed groups and accompanying conflict-affected communities.

Beyond these CSOs, **teachers and (youth) students, universities and schools (including madrasahs), workers and students returning from overseas and the Middle East, and journalists and media workers** are also at the receiving end of discrimination, harassment, surveillance and repression from CT & P/CVE. These civic actors and sectors are in a category by themselves as their functions do not involve any CT & P/CVE programming or policy advocacy directed to shaping or influencing CT & P/CVE policies, instead are pulled into the web of the “whole of society approach” as **either implementing partner for deradicalization, community policing, and counter-messaging initiatives, or target “vulnerable sectors” to radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism**.

IV. Key United Nations, Multilateral and Bilateral Efforts on CT & P/CVE

International and Regional Frameworks Shaping CT & P/CVE efforts in Southeast Asia

The past two decades have involved extensive global CT norm creation and lawmaking, with the international community often erring towards overreach. Although the international community previously tended to adopt narrow, sector-specific counter-terrorism treaties, since 9/11, the UN Security Council has taken a more active role in demanding countries to adopt sweeping legislative and executive actions to prevent and suppress “terrorism” and over time “violent extremism”¹⁸ — notably in the absence of globally agreed definitions of these terms. These developments have reshaped the internal architecture and priorities of the United Nations and other multilateral organizations, and led to a proliferation of new transnational CT entities – many with selective membership and expanding regulatory scope – including the **Global Counterterrorism Forum**, **Financial Action Task Force**, and **Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism**.¹⁹

Two key guiding frameworks for interventions of UN bodies, and even other multilateral and national state actors on their CT & P/CVE efforts are the:

UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy²⁰

Adopted on 8 September 2006, reviewed every two years.

Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism²¹

Adopted in 2016. In particular, this became the basis for the roll-out of national action plans around the world, including Southeast Asia, “with UN agencies playing a central role supporting [and funding] national governments to produce these strategies.”²²

On the regional level, the major CT framework is the **ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT)**.²³ In response to the rise of P/CVE framing, ASEAN either adopted or supported various joint statements signifying a renewed attention to terrorism and violent extremism and support for P/CVE as early as 2015.²⁴

- 1 In September 2017, the **ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism and Manila Declaration to Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism** was adopted.
- 2 To materialize the goals and policy articulations of the ACCT and Manila Declaration, the ASEAN developed a **Plan of Action²⁵ and Workplan²⁶ to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (2018-2025)**²⁷
- 3 The **Counter-Terrorism Working Group (WG on CT)** within ASEAN’s Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime led the development of the plan of action in consultation with 19 other ASEAN sectoral bodies.

The WG on CT is the permanent mechanism²⁹ for monitoring the implementation of the plan of action via an annual meeting and producing a corresponding report of findings.³⁰ These annual reports are not publicly available, making it difficult for outside parties to monitor implementation measures.

The **ASEAN's Plan of Action** identifies four priority areas for further cooperation between member countries:

- Prevention of radicalization and violent extremism
- Counter radicalization (CR) and deradicalization,
- Law enforcement and strengthening of national legislation related to P/CVE and CR; and
- Partnership and regional cooperation.

Under its deradicalization strategy, the Plan of Action identifies the following as “root causes” of VE and aims to address them: “narratives, propaganda, and ideologies.” Notably, the Work Plan elaborates in detail how ASEAN member states and institutions can achieve the Plan of Action outputs and supports the “engagement and partnership with civil society, non-governmental organizations, academics, think-tanks, religious leaders, and the media in preventing and countering radicalization and violent extremism.” Aside from **Indonesia's** reported engagement with civil society in the development of its NAP, however, there is limited evidence of how the 2019-2025 ASEAN Work Plan has been implemented by member-states.

At the national level, UN bodies were active in championing, supporting, and funding the development of the **National Action Plans on P/CVE in CVE in the Philippines** (adopted in July 2019),³¹ **Indonesia** (adopted in January 2021),³² **Thailand** (adopted in September 2022),³³ and **Malaysia** (in the pipeline).³⁴ The UNDP in the Philippines also accompanied the regional government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARM) to develop its own regional action plan, although the latter insisted on distancing from CT & P/CVE language and adopting a more positive and culturally sensitive language for the ‘Bangsamoro Convergence Framework on Community Resilience.’³⁵

Thailand also stepped away from the CT & P/CVE language and instead called their NAP ‘Guidelines for the Mutual Coexistence amidst Social Diversity.’

Several countries in the region have specific statutes that criminalize terrorism, whereas others have specific provisions on “terrorism” and related offenses within their broader criminal or penal codes. The definition of “terrorism” varies widely across different legal systems in the region. All jurisdictions in the region criminalize not only terrorism-related activities but also attempts and conspiracy to commit terrorist acts. In addition, vague, overbroad, and undefined legal terms such as “opposition to the people’s authorities”, “undermining of national integrity”, and “intimidation of the general public” are common and legitimize governments to charge civil society actors with the intention of or support for terrorism. Laws and policies on emergency powers, defamation, and foreign funding regulation are also interpreted broadly and applied adjacently to these CT laws.

Recent UN Efforts and Multilateral Actors on CT & P/CVE

The **UN's Regional Programme for Southeast Asia and the Pacific 2022-2026** has a dedicated **Terrorism Prevention Sub-Programme** aimed towards “enhanced prevention and countering of terrorism including terrorism financing and the spread of violent extremism” in the region, through “strengthened capacities, policies, legislative and cooperation frameworks to respond to terrorism and terrorism financing cases” and through “strengthened resilience against violent extremism among vulnerable communities.”³⁶

The UN's flagship P/CVE effort in the region is the **STRIVE Asia Programme**, a joint EU and UN partnership in Central, South, and Southeast Asia and anchored by the **UN Office on Counterterrorism** (UNOCT), **UN Office on Drugs and Crime** (UNODC) and **UN Development Programme** (UNDP), dedicated towards "(1) capacity to develop and implement PVE national action plans, (2) enhancing role of law enforcement actors, (3) local resilience of at-risk communities.³⁷ The STRIVE Programme Phase II objectives in Southeast Asia are focused on ASEAN, and on **Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.**

Among the regional and national UN bodies and teams, the **UNODC** leads the bulk of the programming on CT & P/CVE. Beyond active accompaniment and support on developing National Action Plans, the focus of UNODC programming varies from country to country based not only on the local nuances and needs but also priorities and dynamics with the host national government and the funding priorities of key governments funding their CT & P/CVE programs.

UNODC projects in the **Philippines**, for the most part, still cover counternarratives and deradicalization but have also shifted more to community-led policing and criminal justice and prison reforms.³⁸ On the other hand, in **Indonesia**, where it appears UNODC has the longest and most established CT & P/CVE programming in the region, the interventions are focused on targeting identified "vulnerable groups" and on management, rehabilitation, and reintegration of (former) "violent extremist offenders (VEOs)", violent extremist prisoners (VEPs), and children associated with VE groups.³⁹ Notably, in March 2020, the UNODC, alongside Indonesia and Japan, led the **Bali Call of Action**⁴⁰ for the Implementation of the "UNODC Roadmap on the Treatment of Children Associated with Terrorist and Violent Extremist Group" launched earlier in 2019 as part of the UNODC end VAC - Global Programme to End Violence Against Children.

A seeming departure from the usual programming of the UN in **Indonesia** is the **Guyub Project** (2019-2022), an inter-agency effort, led by UNODC with UNDP and UNWomen and supported by the UN Human Security Trust Fund, which sought to apply human security framework on P/CVE intervention in pilot areas in East Java mobilizing national CSOs, like **AMAN Indonesia, Peace Generation Indonesia, PUSHAM Surabaya, PUSAD Paramadina and Wahid Foundation.**⁴¹

There are **almost no recent UNODC CT & P/CVE efforts in other Southeast Asian countries**, with one-off activities in **Thailand and Malaysia.**⁴² Partially and on the surface, this is due to other SEA countries' lower ranking in the Global Terrorism Index. Beneath the surface, on one hand, the post-colonial history of Southeast Asia makes many governments in the region, for better or for worse, hesitant to norms, frameworks, and interventions perceived to have been developed and imposed from outside, especially regarding peace and security. On the other hand, some countries such as **Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam**, refuse to admit any risks of violent extremism that requires international assistance, as this may paint the current regimes as weak. These governments do not see the need to adopt CT and P/CVE language and strategies as they are still able to wield colonial-period national security laws to impose discipline and suppress dissent, while denying any possibility of civic engagement with national security discourse; Adopting international P/CVE frameworks might also increase scrutiny on their hard security approach to achieve the so-called 'harmony-in-diversity' with ethnic and religious minorities. Lastly, regimes such as the **military junta in Myanmar** are illegitimate and embrace the decades-long history of appropriating the language of CT and P/CVE to suppress ethnic development and opposition movements, hence do not have any credentials to engage with international CT or P/CVE programs.

Other UN bodies, like the **UNDP** and **UN Women**, will at times take the initiative or will frame some of their work under P/CVE framing and language. A bulk of UNDP's programming in Southeast Asia is on counter-messaging and counter-narratives.

EXAMPLES

ExtremeLives Initiative⁴³ is UNDP's flagship digital advocacy project in South and Southeast Asia, aimed at an intended audience of people identified as vulnerable to VE narratives.

Moreover, UNDP also partnered with tech companies like TikTok for its **youth influencer program – Creators for Change (2018 and 2020), United Creatives (2021), and Creators Forward (2022)** – to mobilize content creators to reach young people in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand on alternative and positive messaging to counter hate speech and harmful online content.

In Indonesia, they collaborated with Islamic scholars to disseminate alternative messages to counter the appeal of violent extremism online and offline.⁴⁵

In the **Philippines**, UNDP is a key P/CVE champion and player with an expansive portfolio from supporting the country's NAP P/CVE, to engaging religious and faith-based organizations, return and reintegration programs for VEOs, training on early warning and response to radicalization, hate speech and online deradicalization, and mental health and psychosocial support interventions.⁴⁶ In fact, it was UNDP, and not UNODC, that took the lead in accompanying the Philippine government in crafting its NAP, as well as the Bangsamoro regional government in its own regional action plan.⁴⁷

It is important to point out that **UN programming on human rights oversight over counterterrorism remains almost non-existent in Southeast Asia, with one initiative focused on the Philippines.**

Pursuant to a Human Rights Council Resolution,⁴⁸ the three-year **Philippines-UN Joint Programme on Human Rights** was established in July 2021 to improve the capacity of Philippine institutions to protect human rights in both its anti-drugs operations and its new counter-terrorism legislation and strategy.⁴⁹ Earlier, various national human rights organizations, however, criticized the HRC for settling on mere technical cooperation and capacity building instead of “creating a commission of inquiry to investigate the thousands of extrajudicial killings,”⁵⁰ and for “allowing the Philippines to... window-dress its appalling human rights record without any tangible progress or scrutiny.”⁵¹ The Joint Programme is anchored by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) in the Philippines and involves the OHCHR, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNOCT, and UNODC. Two civil society organizations, **Nonviolent Peaceforce** and **Sulong Peace**, are formally engaged in the human rights and counterterrorism aspect of the program.

Finally, other multilateral and bilateral actors on CT & P/CVE in the region are the **European Union**,⁵² **Japan**, **Australia**, **the United States**, **Hedayah**,⁵³ and the **Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering** (APG). All Southeast Asian countries are members of the APG, an intergovernmental organization and Financial Action Task Force-style regional body. Its mission is to ensure effective compliance of member states with international standards against “money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing related to weapons of mass destruction.”⁵⁴

V. Civil Society Participation in CT & P/CVE, Potential Risks and Tension Points

Terrorism is an arena dominated by the military and intelligence sector, and is often considered a realm of state and national security and of “emergency politics” rather than “normal politics.”⁵⁵ In the realm of normal politics, issues are debated, negotiated, and resolved using established democratic processes and procedures. While issues that are securitized, including those under counterterrorism and P/CVE, are reframed as issues requiring immediate, confidential, and exceptional actions, justifying bypassing of regular processes and legal constraints. Therefore, in turn, information and access to policy spaces on CT & P/CVE remain out of the reach of oversight and engagement by civil society and communities.

While the degree and nature of CSO engagement on CT & P/CVE vary across countries and contexts, the direct participation of civil society at international, national, and regional levels in CT & P/CVE policymaking and agenda-building remains very limited and often conditional.

Most of the engagement of civil society is limited to the **development of national action plans**, and most favored are individuals and organizations whose work and aims more closely align with the state’s language, analysis and political agendas on CT & P/CVE.

INDONESIA Civil society was able to timely engage and build a robust mechanism through the **Working Group on Women and P/CVE**, led by **AMAN Indonesia**, to shape the gender dimensions of the strategy.⁵⁶

PHILIPPINES The Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the UNDP went further to engage some civil society actors in their development of **NAP’s Monitoring and Evaluation system**.

However, overall, such as in the **Philippines**⁵⁷ and in **Malaysia**,⁵⁸ there remain fundamental criticisms on the diversity of the CSOs consulted in the NAP development and monitoring, the openness of the process and agenda to focus on root causes rather than simply radicalization and recruitment, and meaningfulness in integrating civil society and community inputs, especially the concerns and dissenting voices of affected sectors.

The other area where CSOs are involved is in the **implementation**, owing to the “whole-of-society” framing under P/CVE. Although this helped open platforms for civil society actors, there are **risks and dangers of tokenism and instrumentalization of civil society**, especially when the terms of engagement and the fundamental agenda have already been set to support and promote governments’ CT & P/CVE Agenda.

First, prevention under P/CVE is often framed as “prevention of radicalization and recruitment, rather than prevention as addressing the roots of violent conflict,” and,

Second, the states’ and military actors’ dominant ‘whole of society’ lens is “not based on recognition and respect of plural approaches in addressing the multifaceted nature of violent conflict, but on the belief that the rest of society should follow and be mobilized to implement a military-led strategy on addressing conflict.”⁵⁹

While **individuals and organizations opposing government abuses of CT & P/CVE and advocating for human rights, oversight, and accountability, are generally marginalized** from these discussions and ultimately subject to varying levels of repression. This translates to a lack of updated knowledge within civil society and the wider public on the existing web of CT & P/CVE policies and programs in place, and to a limited understanding of the extent that the UN and multilateral policies affect human rights and peace and security situations at the national and local levels.

Moreover, while some civil society and human rights organizations may be active in more known human rights and accountability mechanisms of the UN, such as the **UN Special Procedures** and the **HRC's Universal Periodic Review**, there are still limited analysis and documentation in these oversight spaces on the link between these human rights violations and abuses at the national and local level, on one hand, and the ecosystem of CT & P/CVE frameworks, programs, and actors in the international, regional and national levels. Even when the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism has been proactive in exposing and building the evidence based on the risks and harm of CT & P/CVE, UN bodies directly involved in CT & P/CVE programming sparsely report on first-degree and second-degree impacts and harms, or much less admit that UN efforts may have been shaping or enabling abusive state behavior.

As a consequence, CSOs lack information, capacity, and funding to analyze and weave the thematics, mobilize around issues of and collectively push back on harms of CT, P/CVE, and securitization, and participate in regional and international CT policy spaces, if there are and they are even open.

Overall, despite their talk on a “whole-of-society” approach, states and multilateral bodies including the UN, for the most part, treat civil society as mere implementers or deodorizers of CT & P/CVE agenda, rather than as leaders and experts in their own right.

Finally, P/CVE becomes a point of **fragmentation among CSOs**, between those engaged and aligned with governments' CT & P/CVE agenda and those impacted/harmed; and **distrust by affected communities against CSOs implementing P/CVE programs**, with the former perceiving the latter as informants or agents of the government and the military. These dynamics illustrate the ways in which the CT & P/CVE agendas contribute to fractionalizing and undermine greater solidarity, coordination, and mutual aid among civil society and with their partner communities.

VI. Conclusion: Priority Areas for Future Engagement

To ensure a system of accountability and meaningful CSO engagement from international to local, what we need to build is not simply CSOs networks that are often siloed across regions and fields, or global CSO networks that do not proactively support and develop national and regional capacity, input, and leadership and are again dominated by international Euro-American-centric INGOs. Rather what we need to build is an **ecosystem of mutual learning and support among CSOs and people's movements, from international/UN Headquarters to regional, national, and local levels**—where we aim to further understand the bi-directionality of CT and P/CVE norm- and policy-making at the international and UN HQ and in the domestic and member-state levels, and where we aim to build, support and harness each other's strengths.

Further, **our basis for CSO participation** whether at the UN, regional/ASEAN, or national level **should not be simply towards "improving on and strengthening CT & P/CVE strategies, but rather for the ultimate pursuit of genuine peace and justice, human rights, and collective liberation.** This should guide whether or not our participation is being tokenized or instrumentalized toward cementing hard, harmful, and patriarchal security analysis and approaches. In practical terms, this means UN programming, especially in post-colonial and post-conflict contexts like Southeast Asia, should engage and center itself on the expertise and leadership of local peacebuilders and mediators, transitional justice and reconciliation actors, and inter-religious and -community dialogue conveners.

If our collective participation is not appropriately framed on the basis of shared values around anti-oppression, do no harm, and solidarity, efforts to strengthen engagement with the UN and member-states on CT & P/CVE are tantamount to or are a slippery slope to buying into narratives of terrorism, radicalism, and extremism defined by state and elite power.

Some of our key immediate policy objectives as civil society groups engaging the UN system are:

- 1 To enable proper oversight, safeguards, and accountability mechanisms to prevent mis/abuse of CT & P/CVE language, policies, and programs for repression and human rights violations, and;
- 2 To hold governments, private entities and corporations involved into account for violations committed and harm caused in the CT & P/CVE context and for state-sponsored terrorism.

Ultimately, our strategic goal should be **demilitarizing and de-securitizing the UN system and member-states.** One urgent step towards this is to **wind down funding to the UN's CT regime and redirect it towards peacebuilding, transitional justice and reconciliation, human rights, and equitable development and to locally-owned, feminist, and transformative approaches that address the roots and conditions of violence and conflict.**

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