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## First Senior Level Regional Course for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) for the West Africa region

Accra, Ghana, 04–07 July 2022

### Press Release



As part of their joint Framework Programme for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (2020-2023) the **African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (CAERT/ACSRT)** of the African Union and the **Peace and Human Rights Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (PHRD/FDFA)** organized the “*First Senior Level Regional Course for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) in West Africa Region*” at the Labadi Beach Hotel, Accra, Ghana, in response to requests submitted by the authorities of several countries in the region. This First PVE Course for West Africa was organized with the support of the **Human Security Research Centre, Ghana (HSRCGh)**.

With the Support of the Human Security Research Centre, Ghana



The main objective of the Course is to promote the preventive approach as a response to growing violent extremism activities in the West Africa region. While the enforcement measures only deal with the symptoms and the consequences of the violence as well as perpetrators, the preventative measures, instead, tackle the root causes of issue by trying to understand what motivate people to join violent extremist groups and what could lead them out, and to work at transforming the multiples and complex causes of violence. The Course, therefore, seeks to stimulate thinking on this preventative approach to violent extremism and to build participants' capacities, and encourage them to consider what could be useful in their specific national and regional context.

Through the presentation of various specific tools and sharing of concrete success stories, challenges and good practices, the Course's programme is designed to take participants through a series of modules allowing them to better grasp what the drivers of Violent Extremism are (economic, political, social, and cultural factors) and the motivations to join Violent Extremist groups. What are the hallmarks of a preventative approach and how to shift from a purely security approach to a Human Security centred one? How can dialogue become the central tool of the prevention of violence? And what role can the various stakeholders (political actors, defence and security forces, justice actors, vigilante groups, women, youths, the media, community leaders, researchers, the private sector) take in their respective capacities as well as together, to make this preventative approach prevail and be the base for a society living together at peace.

During the opening session, **Mr. Idriss Mounir LALLALI**, Ag. Director of ACSRT gave remarks on behalf of the African Union Commission (AUC). He thanked the Government of the Republic of Ghana for the acceptance to host the first course and the support the country provided for the successful organization of the course. Mr Lallali depicted violent extremism as multi-faceted and extremely diverse phenomenon, making it difficult to be predicted by one variable. To this end, he indicated that the ACSRT as the Technical Counter-Terrorism Agency of the African Union believes the enduring solutions to the evolving violent extremism situation lies in enhanced community resilience and human security response approaches including, employing dialogue at all levels for conflict resolution. He, therefore, called for the collective action and cooperation of all countries to ensure the scourge of violent extremism is adequately eliminated from the African continent.

In delivering his opening remarks, the Deputy Executive Director of Human Security Research Centre, Ghana (HSRCGh), **Mr. Rodger ALLOTEY**, who read a speech on behalf of the Executive Director of the Centre, observed that local and International interest in preventing violent extremism was growing, and so was the interest in information sharing, training, cross-border exchanges and sharing of resources and expertise, as well as the involvement of local community authorities and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). He stressed the need for a whole-of-society approach to dealing with the menace and was certain that course participants would return to their various fields of practice, better equipped with the capability to both advocate for, and generate context specific, Human Security based responses to societal structural deficits that adversely affect women, youth, and marginalized groups.

Speaking on behalf of Switzerland, **Ambassador Philipp STALDER** started by recalling that the course is a step in a long journey, which started in 2016, when a Swiss program for the prevention of violence was launched, based on a vision shared with the UN Secretary General, that prevention is the priority of priorities. He also recalled that Switzerland is convinced that the key to preventing violence lies in dialogue, in the ability to collectively address the problems that confront us within a society, as well as in the ability to seek solutions together where each person finds his or her place while respecting the other's. As in all things, the way things are done is as important, if not more important, than the means we use. The result depends on it. Dialogue is transformative. The desired result is peace.

**Dr. Mohammed Ibn CHAMBAS**, Former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for United Nations Office West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), said innovative approaches were required to nib terrorism and violent in the bud in the subregion. He noted that military action per se was not sufficient guarantor of national security. Therefore, he suggested that the response to violent extremism should be carried out with a blend of kinetic militaristic approach and a Whole-of-Society preventative measures that takes into consideration the vulnerabilities of people by ensuring their resilience.

**Honorable Albert KAN-DAPAAH**, Minister for National Security of the Republic of Ghana officially launched the course and delivered a speech on behalf of the Government and the People of Ghana. He welcomed the participants to Ghana and Accra and expressed the government's appreciation to the AU, through the ACSRT as well as the PHRD/FDFA, for the decision to organize this first course in the country. According to Mr Kan-Dapaah, major security threats posed by terrorism and violent extremism were more widespread than previously thought, transcending borders. He, therefore, indicated the course would create the necessary opportunity for participants to reflect on measures and strategies deployed thus far towards addressing the issues of terrorism and violent extremism. He further encouraged the course participants to share their unique experiences as well as good practices and measures that could be adopted across the region to degrade the capabilities of violent extremists.

The Course gathered, during four (4) days, more than sixty (60), including more than twenty (20) female, Decision-makers or advisors at managerial level in the areas of defence, security, intelligence services, justice, social affairs, Parliament, elected local government officials, NGOs, civil society, research centres (public and private) and public/private institutions involved in the generation of responses violent extremism from all the fifteen (15) States of West Africa. In addition, PVE Experts from the region and beyond also participated in the course to support module facilitation, including partners of the ACSRT, Experts from the HSRC Gh, and from the Initiative of Regional Conversations for PVE led by PHRD/FDFA.

At the end of the course, participants gained a deeper common knowledge of VE and terrorism issues, as well as other related types of violence and the drivers and causes that contribute to their occurrence and rise/decline. They were also exposed to dialogue, working with multiple stakeholders, and the human security approach as essential tools in the prevention and countering of violent extremism. A detailed summary report that highlights key findings and recommendations based on the discussions will be shared with the public in the coming weeks.