



KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE NOVEMBER 29-30, 2023 IN-PERSON WORKSHOP ON
**YOUTH, GENDER, AND PREVENTING VIOLENT
EXTREMISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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YOUTH, GENDER, AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

INTRODUCTION

This in-person event, which took place November 29-30, 2023 in Bali, Indonesia, was the second event in the **Youth, Gender, and Preventing Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia** workshop series, organized by Pacific Forum and the US Indo-Pacific Command. The overarching goal of the series is to build relationships between grassroots organizations and security personnel that are focused on addressing extremism in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The series aims to connect civil society and security institutions, bringing together actors working to prevent & counter extremism (P/CVE) at the local, national, and regional levels. Key findings from this event are detailed below.

The Pacific Forum hosted a closed-door in-person workshop on Youth, Gender and Preventing Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia sponsored by the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Office of Women, Peace and Security (USINDOPACOM WPS). The workshop took place in Bali, Indonesia and gathered 30 defense and law enforcement personnel, Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) advocates, and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) civil society actors from across Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

1. Educate security personnel about the importance of integrating gender and youth into P/CVE.
2. Forge closer ties between security personnel and grassroots organizations.
3. Provide a platform for grassroots organizations to voice challenges, concerns, and recommendations directly to security personnel, fostering open and effective communication and knowledge-sharing.
4. Encourage knowledge-sharing between security personnel and grassroots organizations from different countries in Southeast Asia, allowing for regional cross-fertilization of knowledge.
3. Enable the creation of a comprehensive strategy that outlines collaboration between security personnel and civil society organizations going forward.

PARTICIPANTS

Participating Defense Force Branches

The National Counter Terrorism Agency in Indonesia (BNPT)

Malaysia Maritime Enforcement
Royal Malaysia Police

Philippine National Police
The Philippine Army

Participating Civil Society Organizations:

Malaysia:
Initiate.MY
International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation

Indonesia:
SeRVE Indonesia
Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

Philippines:
Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines

KEY FINDINGS

Gender and Extremism

The keynote speech emphasized how extremist groups capitalize on traditional gender roles and gendered needs to appeal to women and men. For instance, research has demonstrated that extremist groups in Southeast Asia use misogynist messaging to appeal to men. Extremist groups also use financial incentives that can lure men expected to provide for their families as part of their masculine role, as well as women widows who may struggle to access financial resources and provide for their families in the wake of their husband's death.

The remarks underscored the importance of considering gendered aspects of extremism to address its root causes. Gendered aspects include exploiting social expectations to recruit women and men to extremist groups, and early warning signs of extremism that have a gender dimension, such as increased rates of gender-based violence in local communities.

The introductory session also provided an overview of the May 2023 virtual conference on which acted as a precursor to the workshop.¹

Gender in Military Operations

Participants heard about the USINDOPACOM WPS mission to mainstream a gender perspective in USINDOPACOM internal and external policies and programs to develop inclusive security strategies that advance a free and open Indo-Pacific. USINDOPACOM shared research conducted by the Center for Naval Analysis (CAN) on women extremists that suggests women typically perform three roles in extremist groups: supporting (e.g., childbearing), enabling (e.g., recruitment), and operational (e.g., leadership). These roles must be acknowledged in devising successful P/CVE policies.

Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Voices

Youth advocates discussed key areas of overlap between the YPS and WPS agendas in the context of P/CVE. For instance, to achieve holistic peace and address root causes of instability and extremism, it is essential to ensure equal access to social, political, and economic justice, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Governments often use youth in tokenistic ways, rather than empowering them as meaningful decision-makers. YPS representatives advocated that it is essential for youth actors to meaningfully contribute to designing P/CVE policies to achieve more lasting outcomes and build trust between youth, the government, and security personnel. YPS advocates also discussed ways of effectively addressing extremism among youth, such as measures to expand digital literacy in the classroom and at home, and better mental health support for YPS advocates, who maintained that government initiatives to address drivers of instability at the community level help ensure a safe and prosperous future for the next generation of young people.

Civil Society Voices

Civil Society Organization (CSO) representatives discussed the role of their organizations in addressing extremism through youth and gender lenses to inform current activities of organizations, security forces, and government. They also communicated how they would like to collaborate in future as the YPS and WPS agendas can foster stability in an increasingly unstable world.

Organizational activities: We heard from several CSOs across the region that discussed the role their organizations play in addressing extremism, particularly through youth and gender perspectives.

¹ Previous key findings from the virtual event can be found here: <https://pacforum.org/event/youth-gender-and-preventing-violent-extremism-in-southeast-asia/>

- **SeRVE Indonesia:** This organization actively empowers women community-based organizations to be on the front line in preventing and handling violent extremism. SeRVE shared that they have developed a centralized community-based task force that monitors radical groups' cells within the community, protecting communities from the spread of radical beliefs and assisting families of women involved in terrorism. SeRVE also plays a significant role in facilitating the reintegration of former women extremists.
- **Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in East Java:** NU works to address extremism by educating local communities about extremism, with an emphasis on youth and women. NU has also formed a multi-stakeholder forum as well as a forum focused specifically on peaceful Islam, where women previously associated with extremist groups can discuss the peaceful nature of the religion. NU is especially eager to promote women religious leaders. NU also advocates for simple, straightforward dialogues and emphasizes understanding preventive measures.
- **INITIATE.MY in Malaysia:** As the sole organization in Malaysia dedicated entirely to P/CVE, INITIATE.MY concentrates on strengthening multi-sectoral responses to extremism. Their activities encompass training young peacebuilders through the "peace lab," community engagement and monitoring, and research and consultations with civil society and government.
- **Nonviolent Peaceforce in the Philippines:** This organization is dedicated to civilian protection and has programs working with community, security forces and local government for a holistic approach to prevent violent extremism. It actively engages in community-oriented policing. In particular, they focus on the impact of small arms and light weapons and the implications these have for interlinked threats related to organized crime, extremist networks, women, and young people.

Suggestions for strengthening collaboration between civil society and security personnel: Some organizations already work closely with governments and security personnel, while others are actively attempting to increase collaboration with security and law enforcement. CSO representatives discussed how security sector efforts could more effectively support shared objectives. In Indonesia, CSOs suggested greater data-sharing and communication regarding threats, especially at the community level.

In Malaysia, the first step to strengthening the relationship between CSOs and security forces is addressing the trust deficit between the two sectors, which stems from the fact that non-state organizations have historically been perceived as opposition by the state. It is therefore important to leverage existing government frameworks and National Action Plans (NAP), such as Malaysia's NAP on P/CVE, across different sectors and in building bonds between security forces and CSOs. Participants also recommended broader training on P/CVE for CSOs, given the small number of CSOs actively focused on P/CVE in Malaysia.

In the context of the Philippines, participants heard how it is important for governments and security personnel to work closely with grassroots organizations, as these organizations are pivotal to building trust between security personnel and local communities. Grassroots organizations can also provide support to vulnerable groups that may be stigmatized, listen to their experiences, and support their reintegration into the community.

At the regional level, speakers highlighted the importance of recognizing that the extremist landscapes in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines are inherently localized and any recommendations for action must also be context specific. At the same time, all participants agreed it is essential for P/CVE organizations to work together across different countries; a transnational challenge requires transnational problem-solving and information-sharing.

Bringing it all together

Participants engaged in small-group discussions in which CSO representatives and counterterrorism personnel were able to have candid discussions focused on each country.

Security personnel highlighted their efforts to improve gender equality and to incorporate gender and youth into P/CVE, such as by increasing women's representation in the military. Other personnel regularly consult with women to gather information about extremist activities in local communities. They also monitor gender-based violence as an early warning sign of extremism.

On partnerships between civil society and security personnel, discussions noted that bureaucracy and working in silos are key barriers to cooperation. Several participants emphasized the importance of enhancing communication between CSOs and security personnel and sharing more information. Across the three countries, certain security branches have been active in conducting initial consultations with CSOs that lead to long-term projects, especially in the Philippines. Participants highlighted ways of promoting sustainable partnerships, such as through monitoring and evaluation, and even by bolstering social relationships, for instance by staying connected through WhatsApp groups. Moreover, workshops like this hosted by Pacific Forum were seen as a useful method for building and sustaining partnerships. The discussion also focused on extremism-related issues that could be more effectively addressed through collaboration, such as online radicalization and extremism in local communities.

This key findings document was prepared by the Pacific Forum International Preventing & Countering Violent Extremism Project Lead, Jennifer Howe (jennifer@pacforum.org). This report reflects the views of the organizers; it is not a consensus document.

CSOs maintained that security personnel should consider existing national policies that promote WPS and YPS in designing policies; for instance, it was alleged that five percent of all defense budgets in the Philippines is allotted to gender and development (GAD).

The discussions also pointed to broader efforts to prevent extremism in Southeast Asia. For example, some participants emphasized the need to harness religious texts in counternarratives, whether in print or online. CSOs noted that governments do not use religious counternarratives frequently enough. It is also important to ensure that the perspectives of women religious leaders are included in these counternarratives. Participants also widely agreed that it is essential to proactively address threats outside the region that could lead to internal instability.

Indonesian CSO representatives additionally raised the need to invite former women and youth extremists to educate others on extremism, noting that engaging these stakeholders increases P/CVE practitioners' understanding of problems, challenges, concerns, gender dimensions, and motivations for joining extremist networks.

Importantly, groups on both sides suggested that to comprehensively address extremism, it is essential to invite a wide range of stakeholders to the table, beyond just CSOs and security personnel. Stakeholders such as relevant government agencies, religious leaders, educational institutions, community-level law enforcement groups, and indigenous representatives have important perspectives to contribute to the conversation.