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Roundtable on:

**Religious Identity, Belonging and Radicalization: Implications for International CT-PVE Programs**

Date: July 12, 2017, New York.

**Concept Note**

**Background**

Recently, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2354 (May 2017), featuring a Comprehensive International Framework to counter terrorist narratives. Though the resolution provides a broad range of concrete guidelines aimed at countering extremist narratives, it notes, among others, that a continued research into the drivers of terrorism and violent extremism is necessary in order to develop more focused counter-narrative programs. It also notes that efforts to counter terrorist narratives can benefit from engagement with a wide range of actors.

While there is clearly an international consensus and well thought-out approaches to countering and preventing violent extremism, there have been no high level discussions on Religious Identity and Belonging as a problematique or key variable in radicalization; neither have there been deliberations on approaches to challenging rigid religious identities as part of a de-radicalization, counter-terrorism or PVE process. Because religious identity is tied to transcendental regimes of meanings and belonging, it acquires far greater normative influence on 'believers' than other systems or modes of self-identity. The aim of the Roundtable is to provide a meeting place for broad discussions on this topic.

**Objectives of Roundtable**

Violent extremism in many cases is an expression of religious absolutism where religious adherents derive their identity or self-concept from beliefs that justify intolerance and violence against the religious Other. The mission of the roundtable is to create a space for relevant policy analysts, experts and practitioners to explore the interconnections between religious identities and violent extremism. It seeks to achieve the following objectives:

(a) To promote a more sophisticated understanding of religious identity as a key variable in

preventing violent extremism and inform a more integrative and holistic approach to CT and C/PVE.

(b) To create a forum for review of evidence from academic research/literature and cases from the field.

(c) To create a working or advisory group of academics, policy analysts, policy makers, international/intergovernmental organizations, civil society and religious leaders to work together to develop a more nuanced understanding of the issues as well as strategies for creating a multidimensional space for negotiating religious identities.

(d) Develop outputs that can inform international CT and C/PVE programs and initiatives.

### **Broad Discussion Topics**

Discussions will cover the following topics:

#### *(a) What we know about Religious Identity*

Discussions in this session will explore the differences between religious identity and other forms of identity (such as ethnic, gender or racial identities); factors that influence the formation/construction and strength of religious identity over time; theories and research evidence on how religious identities are acquired and expressed.

#### *(b) The nexus between Group Identity, belonging and the dehumanization of the religious Other*

Discussions in this session will explore gender identity issues; the concept of group identity and belonging and how dissimilar or religious Others are categorized, labeled, stigmatized and dehumanized. Discussions will benefit from projects undertaken in the field.

#### *(c) Approaches to transforming/negotiating religious identities and collectivities*

Discussions in this session will provide case studies of projects in the field that seek to bring religious communities together. Discussions can explore successful or unsuccessful cases of healing and inter-religious dialogue in divided, transition or post-conflict societies.

#### *(d) Bringing Religious Identity discourses into current CT & C-PVE programs*

Discussions will explore how discussions can contribute to current UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Plan of Action to PVE; frameworks for countering extremism; international good practices, codes and standards in C/PVE; UNSCR 2354, guidelines on countering terrorist narratives.