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CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN event - Digital Study Visit to South-east Asia

3-4 March 2021, Online

RAN STUDY VISIT TO SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Key outcomes

The RAN digital study visit to Southeast Asia took place on 3-4 March 2021 and brought together 23 European and Southeast Asian practitioners (respectively, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines). The goal of the workshop was to share knowledge and exchange challenges and inspiring practices in the field of disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration (DRR) of violent Islamist extremist offenders. The Southeast Asian presenters and participants represented a wide variety of professional backgrounds, including law enforcement, prison and probation, civil society organisations (CSOs), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and academics as well as a documentary filmmaker, a victim initiative and a former's experience.

During these meetings, a particular focus was given to understand the role of human dignity in DRR, as well as the effective practical role of Islamic religious approaches and community approaches in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). The meeting also explored P/CVE practices relating to the use of films and victims to divert and disengage individuals from violent extremism in the Southeast Asian context.

The highlights of the discussions and recommendations are listed in this conclusion paper, with amongst others:

- Creating positive and safe prison environments with good prison conditions, well-trained, professional staff and **humane treatment of detainees** is vital for fostering positive change. Modelling non-violent communication and behaviour with inmates showing respect, dignity and empathy is key.
- A **multidisciplinary and multi-agency approach** in DRR offers the greatest potential for sustainable positive outcomes. This means building strategic partnerships between governmental and external organisations and offering individualised, needs-based interventions to terrorist offenders.
- Building and maintaining **long-lasting and trustworthy relations** with detainees and their community of care help cooperation and successful reintegration. Strengthening community policing and public-police collaboration are cornerstones of this process.

The paper will start by covering the highlights from the presentations and discussions, followed by recommendations building on the Southeast Asian experiences that are relevant for European practitioners. Lastly, the paper will share promising practices and further readings.

Highlights of the discussion

The topics that have been identified as important in the P/CVE field in the region are: multidisciplinary and multi-agency approach; treating detainees with respect and dignity; building and maintaining trustworthy relations; and the role of the media.

1. A multidisciplinary and multi-agency approach

Examples of best practices for multidisciplinary and multi-agency approaches were presented as key to long-lasting positive outcomes. The Malaysian law enforcement and prison system as well as the international organisations operating in Thailand and Indonesia reinforced the importance of a multidisciplinary approach where authorities and external partners work together. Building networks and strategic partnerships between governmental authorities, CSOs and INGOs as well as religious leaders, academics and researchers were identified as key. Different competencies can be benefited from the most if each actor's role is clear and there is a shared definition of success.

A multidisciplinary approach is process-oriented (from arrest until post-release) and it combines a variety of elements, such as:

- Security focus (effective threat and risk assessment, management and monitoring);
- Rehabilitation programmes that are tailor-made interventions based on individual needs;
- Vocational trainings and employment to help future employment;
- Reintegration efforts (including, for example, the facilitation of family relations as well as the involvement of the local community and relevant external organisations to prepare for and follow up on the release).

Tailor-made multidisciplinary interventions may include a variety of areas:

- Assessing and improving mental and physical health (e.g. providing psychosocial support, psychological counselling, cognitive-behavioural programmes, physical therapy, sports);
- Assessing and supporting deradicalisation (e.g. faith-based dialogue, critical thinking);
- Fostering positive social connections (facilitating family and community relations; providing skill development trainings to improve social and conflict management skills); and
- Providing educational and vocational training.

Most programmes in the region that work with a multidisciplinary approach offer an opportunity for inmates to work with their religious and ideological beliefs. These interventions aim to facilitate critical thinking to decrease dichotomous (black and white) views, and to question the rationalisation of the use of violence in the form of faith-based dialogues, theological guidance and reinterpretations of religious scripts in a non-violent way. In addition to that, Malaysian prisons offer programmes that focus on inmates' self-actualisation and self-management as well as on improving social skills. All multidisciplinary programmes place a high emphasis on providing education and vocational trainings. The government-funded initiative named 'Return Home Club' in Thailand was a good example of organising local peer support and vocational development programmes for released prisoners.

2. Humanising the perpetrator: Treatment with respect and dignity

Multiple presenters emphasised the importance of humane and respectful treatment of terrorist offenders. In several prison systems, emphasis is placed on professionalism, training staff, building a positive environment, and fostering social relations between staff and inmates. In Malaysian prisons, for example, the staff is trained to treat inmates with respect and dignity. They aim to build trust and a positive personal relationship with detainees. The Malaysian security services emphasise the importance for law enforcement workers to model non-violent communication and behaviour, and the importance of professionalism, active listening, and an empathic attitude when working with suspects and detainees. These approaches are known to increase cooperation, decrease the desire for revenge and are the first steps to building trust towards authorities.

Civil society representatives also highlighted the importance of seeing and treating their clients as human as well as building personal trust to facilitate genuine conversations to encourage positive change. The Indonesian Victims' Voices initiative, for example, empowers victims of terrorism to share their narratives with former terrorist offenders in direct interactions. Through sharing personal stories, the dialogue programme facilitates the emphasis of common human values and seeing "the other" as a human being to foster reconciliation and disengagement from violence.

3. Building and maintaining long-term relationships

The participants underscored the importance of building trusting and long-term relationships with detainees and with local communities of care for both authorities and CSOs for successful rehabilitation and reintegration. Relationship management requires setting various goals and foci in different phases. It has to be planned and maintained from arrest, pre-trial, through imprisonment, preparation of release and until post-release follow-up. The goal is to weaken the detainees' social ties to the extremist group and replace them with new, healthy opportunities to belong. Relationship management should include identifying and managing retaliation threats posed by the detainee's former extremist environment.

In prison, conscious efforts to build and maintain positive personal relations between staff and inmates contribute to greater compliance and greater access to information as well as a more peaceful prison environment. An integral part of the release preparation is the engagement of family members and the local community. The 'Letting Go of the Past, Embracing the Future' practice of the Malaysian Security Service provides additional support to families of detainees and instrumental support to the offenders after release. This type of involvement increases trust and open communication. Police-public collaboration, community policing and installing an "early warning system" in the community is vital. CSOs play an important role in the phase of preparation for release and post-release, both in helping the inmate as well as preparing the receiving community and creating a conducive social environment.

4. The role of the media

The negative impact sensationalist media coverages can have on rehabilitation efforts was identified as a challenge. A positive example, on the other hand, of using the media to create awareness was presented by the documentary 'Jihad Selfie'. The film was directed by Noor Huda Ismail, PhD, founder of the Institute for International Peace Building in Indonesia. The documentary shows the dynamics of push and pull factors of engagement and it gives an opportunity to discuss personal and cultural values and destructive masculinity ideals.

Recommendations

- Offering **individualised and multidisciplinary approaches** that are tailored to the offenders' needs is key to reaching sustainable positive outcomes. This approach includes the possibility to discuss religious and ideological beliefs in the context of a professional guidance or programme if this is the need of the individual.
- **Multi-agency cooperation** is important: building networks and strategic partnerships between governmental authorities, CSOs, INGOs, academics, religious scholars and researchers. Combining the different competencies with clear role definitions is key.
- **Involving family members and local communities** as well as local (religious) leaders is important for successful and sustainable reintegration. Strengthening **community policing** and **public-police collaboration** are cornerstones of this process.
- **Creating positive and safe prison environments** with good prison conditions, well-trained, professional staff and **humane treatment of detainees** is vital for fostering positive change. Modelling non-violent communication and behaviour with inmates showing respect, dignity and empathy is important.
- Deradicalisation programmes should be **evidence-based**. More data and evaluation are important. Better post-release monitoring is also necessary.
- Treatment approaches should be informed by **gender sensitivity** and **conflict transformation**.

Relevant practices

1. Noor Huda Ismail, Indonesia, documentary filmmaker, director of the documentary 'Jihadi Selfie': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADVpue36UL8>
2. Victims' Voices initiative, Indonesia: The Victims' Voices initiative pioneers a victim-centric approach to P/CVE by empowering victims of terrorism to become effective messengers for peace. It was started in 2012 to allow victims of terrorism to share their unique experiences first-hand to help promote peace and delegitimise justifications for terrorist violence. The initiative — spearheaded by a victim of a suicide bomb attack in Jakarta, and implemented in Indonesia — aims to guide victims of terrorism through the process of becoming effective messengers for peace and against violent extremism through CSO partnerships that work together with vulnerable groups in society. Through this initiative, a neutral platform has been created from which victims of terrorism can connect with and directly engage different target audiences across the country within a structured framework. This neutral platform is used to further facilitate direct interactions aimed at reconciliation between victims and former perpetrators of terrorist violence. In any and all of its activities, and at each process level, the primary considerations are the well-being and personal agency of the victims who choose to utilise the platform. In the Victims' Voices initiative's experience — through careful planning, incremental trust-building measures and sensitivity to local dynamics — stories of the survival, perseverance and forgiveness of victims, in concert with other credible voices, have combined to form unique and impactful narratives that emphasise common human values, acceptance of differences and harmonious coexistence. These are the foundational elements making up a victim-centric approach to developing alternative narratives and counter-narratives against violent extremism.
https://www.unodc.org/pdf/terrorism/Victims/From_Victims_of_Terrorism_to_Messengers_for_Peace_-_UNODC-ICCT_-_June_2020.pdf

Further reading

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