

## **Christians and Muslims cooperate to Overcome Violent Extremism**

**“No to violent extremism, yes to peace and joint action. No to legitimization of terrorism by misinterpreting religious texts and yes to counter-narratives emphasising the correct teachings of each faith.” This plea is an outcome of the “Interfaith Consultation on Violent Extremism” in Nairobi, Kenya on 5 March 2016, organized by Globethics.net East Africa.**

Thirty-six scholars and experts with Christian and Muslim background from academic and religious institutions in Kenya explored ways and means to overcome violent extremism. Decisive counter-measures are urgent and essential, in view of the repeated attacks and killings in Kenya, East-Africa and elsewhere, and the ongoing recruitment of young persons for ISIS and Al Shabaab. The objectives of the consultation include a critique of the erroneous justifications of terrorism and violence as end-time war -from the common perspective of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam); and an exploration of ways and means through which scholars can engage in the discernment of re-constructive discourse towards mutual appreciation rather than mutual condemnation. The consultation included presentations, plenary and group discussions.

*Root causes of violent extremism* include injustices, poverty in urban areas; religious and political hate-speeches; distorted information about religion; degradation of resources such as land and water; marginalization; hopelessness; crises of identity and belonging - especially among young people. Radicalisation and violent extremism are misuses of religion and cannot be justified by misquoting and misinterpreting sacred scriptures.

*The keynote speakers* from scholars and practitioners with Muslim and Christian background included Rev. Dr. Sam Kobia, Senior Advisor on Cohesion, Peace, and Conflict Resolution, Executive Office of the President of Kenya and member of the Globethics.net International Board, Prof. Jesse Mungabi, University of Nairobi, Dr. Ali Mustafa, BRAVE Initiative, Prof. Christoph Stückelberger, Founder and Executive Director of Globethics.net, Geneva, Prof. Philomena Mwaura, Kenyatta University, Dr. Richard Baariu Mutura, Pan African University, Dr. Elisabeth Nduku, Catholic University of Eastern Africa and Director of Globethics.net East Africa.

The speakers cited examples of resistance to violence and of positive counter-information among young persons through the Muslim initiative BRAVE; and of peace-making in the Mount Kenya region. Abuse of religion to justify violent extremism was highlighted as a phenomenon throughout three millennia in the history of Abrahamic religions; but the presenters also emphasised other explicit references to non-violent response in the same sacred texts. Young people, especially marginalized, need unwavering support in their search and quest for identity and belonging as Kenyans, Africans and believers and in their longing for secure employment.

*Manifold recommendations* for educational, governmental and religious institutions and interreligious cooperation have been elaborated during the consultation, as means to sustainably overcome violent extremism in the long term. Recommendations include:

- Formulate and promote counter-narratives on non-violent solutions, rooted in Christian and Muslim faith and African heritage;
- Support positive messages and train young messengers to show to young peers alternatives to joining terrorist groups;
- Condemn the abuses of religion to justify violence, revenge and destruction of life through literal and out-of-context interpretation of holy texts. Christian, Muslim and traditional African Religion must not be used to kill in the name of God;
- Cooperate between denominations and religions to build “peace without borders” as response to “terrorism without borders”;
- Protect sisters and brothers of other religions as much as of their own (impressive example of young Muslim women who protected young Christian women in a terrorist bus attack in Kenya);
- Support victims of terrorism and their families;
- Preaching to Christian and Muslim communities ought to be contextually relevant, dealing with current social needs and concerns;
- Support and protect young people who return from terrorist camps to be re-integrated;
- Convince peers not to join terrorist groups;
- Improve prior access to intelligence and security information in time for preventive action;
- Cooperate internationally to promote peace;
- Develop information and sensitisation campaigns for educational institutions by ministries of education.

Globethics.net East Africa will convene a follow-up international conference on 25 October 2016 at the AACC conference Center in Nairobi/Kenya.

For further information contact

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