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COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN INDONESIA

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is a pillar of the United State's strategic approach to counterterrorism, with the key goal to deny terrorism new recruits by reducing sympathy and support for violent extremism. In order to decrease the number of terrorist recruits, the CVE program outlines three lines of effort:

1. building secure and resilient communities where individuals are at-risk for violent extremism;
2. eroding support and legitimacy of violent extremist narratives and messaging; and,
3. building capable and responsive partners in host countries.

In collaboration with Embassy Jakarta, Consulate Surabaya, and AFP Medan, we seek to understand the underlying factors that drive radicalization in each locality. The mission routinely convenes an interagency working group with representatives from USAID, PACOM, and DOJ. The CVE interagency working group works to provide mission with analytic and programmatic resources and expertise necessary to inform programmatic approaches to address the local drivers.

With the increased threat of ISIL messaging and recruitment, CVE engagement is more critical and therefore, EAP and CT (as well as other interagency partners) look to partner more closely with the Indonesian government and other key stakeholders in the region. With ISIL recruitment in Indonesia, local Indonesians are discussing violent extremism openly and in some areas, openly countering ISIL messaging as anti-Indonesian. The government of Indonesia must capitalize on these conversations, directly counter ISIL messaging in both social and traditional media, and provide an alternative message. However, government messaging is not sufficient and in many cases, can hinder a well-crafted message. Therefore, it is critical to include all stakeholders to build community resilience against violent extremism throughout the region. Therefore, immediate and future CVE programming must work with civil society organizations as well as government stakeholders to identify the best approaches to counter violent extremist messaging and recruitment.

A number of Indonesian officials and civil society members participated in the November 4-6 Regional Workshop to Counter Violent Extremist Messaging Online. This was a preliminary step for the Indonesians to hear best practices from regional counterparts and counter-messaging practitioners. Social media and online forums allow violent extremists to establish relationships, provide violent ideology, and seek sympathy and support for the cause all for a relatively low cost.

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Governments can and should provide their own narratives that shape identities, relationships, and interactions among peoples and states. While we understand some governments struggle to directly challenge violent extremist messages and assert counter messages as well as provide alternate messages, workshops should continue to share best practices and provide support for the development of counter-messages indigenous to Indonesia.

Through the CVE Local Grants Program, CVE activities have focused on countering the terrorist narrative and providing positive alternatives for youth and other vulnerable groups. The CVE Local Grants Program, formerly the Ambassador's Fund for Counterterrorism, provides U.S. Embassies with the resources necessary to implement small, locally relevant projects that link at-risk youth with responsible influencers. Since FY 2008, the Mission has actively participated in the CVE Local Grants Program.

Most Mission CVE activities have focused on building the capacity of locally-based civil society actors to counter violent extremist messaging and recruitment efforts targeting youth and other vulnerable populations. Through CVE Local Grants projects, CT/CVE has promoted the voices of victims/survivors of terrorism throughout high schools in West Java; encouraged collaboration between religious organizations and local law enforcement to create messages that debunk, counter, or clarify inciting violent extremist propaganda; and fostered conflict resolution skills training amongst youth.

Victims of terrorism provide a powerful counter-narrative to the justification for, and appeal of, such violence. We are supporting a three year project that (1) supports victims to engage at-risk students at schools in identified hotspots of recruitment and radicalization to violence; and (2) engages with media to ensure that the victims' counter-narratives are disseminated to broader audiences. Another ongoing project hosts workshops with high school and university youth to provide an overview of the dangers of violent extremism and train youth on multi-media approaches to countering violent extremism. In addition, this project will work with social service ministries to coordinate with the Ministry of Human Rights and Justice to reduce the risk of recidivism of formers post-release. In order to properly manage these projects, the CT Bureau is paying for a CVE Coordinator to coordinate the Mission's CVE Programming.

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