

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIEDRELEASE IN FULL

- 1 -

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN MALAYSIA

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.

Prior to the international focus on ISIL, the CT Regional Coordinator in Kuala Lumpur and the Malaysian Government (usually via Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT)) has increased coordination and cooperation on CVE. Youth and Terrorism is one of the seven flagships for SEARCCT and with the increased threat of ISIL messaging and recruitment, CVE engagement has been a highlighted component of the counterterrorism relationship. In collaboration, Embassy Kuala Lumpur and SEARCCT have conducted two regional workshops; the first focusing on Community Orientated Policing and the most recent on Countering Online Violent Extremist Narratives. We look forward to continuing this engagement, implementing the lessons learned and best practices, and assisting our regional counterparts to counter online violent extremist messaging.

The Malaysians have demonstrated an increased concern the use of the Internet and social media applications to teenagers and university students. In addition to arrests, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) monitor terrorist websites, including requests to block or shut down offending sites. 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. 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, we are happy to continue sharing best practices and provide support for the development of counter-messages indigenous to Malaysia.

The Malaysian Government, including through a CVE local grant with SEARCCT, has demonstrated a willingness to embark upon counter-messaging through direct

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

- 2 -

engagement at university campuses. However, we seek to encourage the Government to replicate this engagement with those who promote violent ideology online and provide a counter/alternative message to violence. CVE engagement with the Malaysian Government must reinforce that an effective counter-messaging strategy requires a holistic approach which may include non-traditional partners. This also includes partnering civil society organizations the government wouldn't routinely engage because of domestic politics. Neglecting these key organizations would greatly reduce the reach and receptivity of the message as the government may not be viewed as a credible voice.

Through the CVE Local Grants Program, CVE activities have focused on 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. Originally funded with FY2008 NADR funds, the "Building Community Resilience in Vulnerable Border Regions of Sabah" is the longest-implemented project for the CVE Local Grants Program and resulted in very tangible results for the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) by creating a sustainable platform to engage with its' constituent communities.

Malaysia also participated in the pilot ESF process for the CVE Local Grants Program. This resulted in CT/CVE supporting a two-year project which fosters networks of stakeholders to combat intolerance and violent rhetoric and ideology via dialogue sessions, bringing together members of the nation's ethnic and religious groups in guided roundtable discussions to promote tolerance. Participants will include vulnerable youth, community leaders, religious teachers, and members of civil society. To ensure sustainability, the implementer will set up an online platform to support engagement in activities promoting tolerance and also hold a follow-up session to train three participants from each roundtable session to develop and implement action plans to promote tolerance locally.

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED