



International Workshop

"Together to Prevent Extremism and Promote Dialogue"

(Cairo - League of Arab States' Premises, 19-20 November 2017)

Organized by

UNESCO
Cairo Regional
Office

League of
Arab States

Al-Azhar Al-
Sharif

International
Organization of
Al Azhar
Graduates

Concept Note

1. Background

The idea to hold an international workshop under the slogan "Together to Prevent Extremism and Promote Dialogue" stems from the belief of the organizing partners that cultural diversity and inter-cultural dialogue are critical elements for achieving peace and sustainable development. This is indeed a top priority at a time when the world is witnessing terrorist acts being committed against the innocent in the name of religion. Terrorist groups seek to mislead, exploit and recruit young people to commit criminal acts by distorting notions and teachings of Islam such as "Takfir", "Jihad", "Hakimiah", and "Khilafa". Religious texts are taken out of their original contexts and misinterpreted, in sharp contradiction with the basic principles and messages promoted by religion to spread love, mercy and peace among all people.

In light of the above, the idea came to organize training workshops aimed at empowering young people and developing their cultural awareness and understanding of the religious teachings of Islam. The objective is to engage them in preventing extremism and to develop an ideological framework based on a true interpretation of these religious texts, and in accordance with the general principles and ideals of religion that prohibit bloodshed and call for freedom of belief and coexistence.

The planned international workshop will encourage participating young people to support multiculturalism and mutual understanding. It will help develop their inter-cultural competencies and understanding of extremism, which threatens human security, global peace and the achievement of sustainable development. This is especially needed in developing countries, which are most affected by these terrorist acts.

There is no doubt that the issues of diversity, citizenship, co-existence and acceptance of the other are among the fundamental values called for by all religions to build cohesive and peaceful societies. The basic assumption remains that dialogue with those who are different or do not share the same cultural, religious, or ethnic background - and even dialogue within the same culture - is an important pillar for preventing extremism and a necessary requirement for bringing peoples and cultures closer together in an environment of tolerance and mutual respect, regardless of consensus or differences in opinions.

Within this context, dialogue between groups belonging to different regional contexts has become a requirement of paramount importance for dealing with current challenges. Hence the need to organize this international workshop, which gives a chance for the youth to communicate, exchange experiences, and think together in a healthy and constructive manner in a world that is multi-religious and multi-cultural. This inter-cultural dialogue is an "antidote" against violence and extremism. The workshop offers a space of interaction and constructive dialogue between lecturers, trainers, and youth participants, as the most effective mechanism to prevent conflicts and resolve them, counter intolerance and extremism, and promote a culture of mutual respect and understanding. This is in addition to networking opportunities between participating youth and the organizers of the workshop.

At the initiative of the League of Arab States and in cooperation with UNESCO, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the International Organization of Al-Azhar Graduates, an international workshop

will be held under the title of **“Together to Prevent Extremism and Promote Dialogue”** during the period 19-20 November 2017.

2. Objectives

- Discuss the youth's notions of extremism and enhance their capacity for dialogue;
- Explain the drivers of extremism, raise the awareness of youth about this phenomenon and protect them against it;
- Disseminate moderate thinking amongst the youth and increase their awareness against discrimination, intolerance, and religious extremism;
- Provide young leaders with scientific and religious content;
- Promote networking between youth from around the world.

3. Focus Areas

- The use of religious texts to justify violence: topics to be addressed include “Takfir”, “Jihad”, “Hakimiah”, and “Khilafa”;
- Reasons driving young people to join extremist groups and slip into extremism;
- Dialogue as a means to diffuse extremism: historical and contemporary examples of cohesive and peaceful societies (e.g. Andalusia, Malaysia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and others).

4. Organizing Partners

The workshop is organized at the initiative of the League of Arab States and in cooperation with UNESCO – Cairo office, the Dialogue Center at Al – Azhar Al Sharif and the International Organization of Al Azhar Graduates. The workshop builds on on-going cooperation between the organizing partners in a number of areas including education, inter-cultural dialogue and sustainable development.

5. Participants

More than 50 young women and men from Arab and non-Arab countries will participate in the workshop. Participants are required to meet the following criteria:

- Be between 25 and 35 years old, taking into account the gender balance;
- Hold a university degree;
- Be fluent in Arabic;
- Be a member of a registered youth organization that is active in the field of preventing extremism and promoting dialogue;
- Be willing to use the knowledge acquired during the workshop to launch positive and effective initiatives in their communities.

At the end of the workshop, participants will be granted a certificate of participation accredited from the organizing partners.

6. Date and Venue

The workshop will be held over two days from 19 to 20 November 2017 at the League of Arab States’ premises in Cairo, Tahrir Square.

7. Programme

The workshop will run over two days. The first day will include plenary presentations, whereas the second day will be dedicated for parallel working groups. The language of the workshop is Arabic, noting that simultaneous interpretation into English will be available during the opening session.

Day 1:

- Opening session: Statements of the organizing partners;
- Presentations by specialized experts covering the various focus areas, followed by open discussions.

Day 2:

- Participants are trained in two working groups;
- At the end of the workshop, youth are invited to share their suggestions or ideas around the various focus areas.