



STRENGTHENING REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION AND CAPACITY IN SOUTH ASIA: WHAT ROLE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN COUNTERING TERRORISM?

17-18 October 2011

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KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. On 17-18 October 2011, the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation and the International Peace Institute hosted a meeting on "Strengthening Regional Security Cooperation and Capacity in South Asia: What Role for Civil Society?" The workshop was sponsored by the Government of Denmark and brought together civil society representatives from across South Asia, experts on the region, and representatives from the UN to discuss the potential for greater engagement by civil society in preventing and combating terrorism in South Asia.
2. Participants considered how civil society contributes to countering terrorism and how interaction among civil society groups can help build confidence and improve security cooperation among states in the region. The meeting also explored the idea of regularizing cooperation among civil society organizations in the region and what the United Nations and other actors can do to help facilitate a collaborative process. The meeting was intended to help lay the foundations for a series of workshops beginning in 2012, at the Institute of South Asian Studies in Singapore, which will foster more focused discussions among civil society on particular issues identified by regional participants.
3. The workshop was structured to reflect the holistic approach articulated by the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which includes not only security responses to terrorism, to be undertaken with respect for human rights and the rule of law, but also broader measures to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. Speakers identified challenges to strengthening a regional response to terrorism in South Asia, and then examined ways that civil society can contribute to each of the four pillars of the Strategy's Plan of Action, in which states have resolved to take measures to:
 - address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism;
 - to prevent and combat terrorism;
 - build states capacity to prevent and combat terrorism; and,
 - ensure respect for human rights and rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism.

4. Additional sessions addressed ways in which civil society might help to prevent and combat violent extremism and terrorism and offer a counter-narrative to that promulgated by terrorists and their sympathizers.
5. Participants included a wide range of civil society representatives from throughout South Asia, including those working on security policy, human rights, media, development, and improving cooperation in the region. Additionally, UN officials representing the Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) were also actively involved.
6. The workshop was conducted under the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution. The following summary highlights some of the key themes identified during the discussions. It is not an official or complete record of the proceedings and does not necessarily reflect the views of all of the meeting participants or the project sponsors.

Session 1: Regional challenges and multilateral engagement in South Asia

7. Participants considered key challenges to strengthening regional security cooperation and capacity as it relates to counterterrorism. They discussed the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the role it ascribes civil society, and its relevance to enhancing security cooperation in the region. Participants also considered efforts by relevant UN bodies to improve counterterrorism cooperation and law enforcement capacity in the region and how CSOs might contribute to those efforts.
8. Participants pointed out that nearly all South Asian states face terrorism in some form, fueled by nationalism, ethno-nationalist separatism, religious militancy, or a combination of these. A number of speakers highlighted the international dimensions of much of the terrorist violence in South Asia and stressed that regional counterterrorism cooperation and coordination are essential. Participants acknowledged, however, that there are significant obstacles to improving cooperation in the region.
9. Lack of political will was identified as a key obstacle to greater regional cooperation to counter terrorism. Failure to implement the Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and its additional protocol related to terrorist financing was discussed as an example of the challenges in this regard. A number of participants suggested that this lack of political will was at least in part because some states continue to view terrorist groups as valuable instruments of foreign policy and a means of exerting influence. Active and even passive support for terrorist groups by states was identified as one of the key obstacles to deepening counterterrorism cooperation in the region.
10. Participants also highlighted the legacy of mistrust between many states in South Asia as a significant obstacle to counterterrorism and security cooperation more broadly in the region. A number of attendees identified the historic mistrust between India and Pakistan as the greatest challenge, but participants also highlighted other regional tensions that pose challenges to

cooperation. It was argued that South Asian states are relatively new to the Westphalian system, and the arbitrary borders demarcating these states had led to irredentist disputes that have damaged relations between states in the region. Critical and essentially technical areas of cooperation on counterterrorism issues, such as border control and countering terrorist financing, it was noted, are often stymied by this history of distrust and suspicion.

11. Participants noted that regional actors, notably the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), early on adopted a number of relevant regional instruments but have struggled with their implementation. Despite declarations regarding the need for greater collaboration among states on issues related to border security, mutual legal assistance, and law enforcement, cooperation has been slow to materialize.
12. Some participants argued that the most promising way to overcome these issues was through confidence-building exercises. Consequently, some suggested pursuing a “building block approach” in which a few like-minded states within the group work together on issues of mutual interest rather than waiting for all eight members to move forward on a common agenda. Others disagreed, arguing that an approach that includes all states in the region is preferable, because so many issues related to security are interlinked in the region. These approaches, it was noted, could be pursued in tandem and do not have to be seen as mutually exclusive.
13. Some attendees were more optimistic than others about regional cooperation in South Asia within the SAARC framework. It was noted that counterterrorism has recently been placed at the top of the SAARC agenda, which some took as a promising sign of momentum to overcome past unwillingness to cooperate on counterterrorism. Another speaker pointed out that there has been greater cooperation between India and its neighbors because of India’s rapid economic growth, which they felt was likely to increase in the future.
14. Given current tensions in the region, however, participants observed that the United Nations has a potentially important role to play as a neutral convener and partner. The UN Strategy was thought to provide strong international legitimacy for a comprehensive and integrated approach to counterterrorism. The Strategy, it was noted, provides an important framework for both improving practical counterterrorism cooperation as well as addressing more fundamental underlying political, social, and economic issues. In addition, it also provides an important entry point for the involvement of civil society in counterterrorism. One speaker also observed that the UN could help strengthen the normative framework of South Asia’s regional convention on terrorism.
15. A number of speakers observed that civil society could play an important role in building confidence between South Asian states to strengthen cooperation in the region. They identified ways that civil society could build regional cooperation through Track II and “Track One and a Half” approaches. For example, the efforts by the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation and CTED to bring together law enforcement officials of different countries in the region was cited as an example of the positive role that civil society and multilateral organizations can play in

fostering professional counterterrorism cooperation in South Asia. The value of establishing a parallel process for civil society was highlighted.

Session 2: Addressing conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism (Pillar 1)

16. One of the main achievements of the Strategy is its emphasis on addressing so-called “conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.” Using this as a point of departure, participants discussed the underlying factors that create an enabling environment for terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia and how the work of CSOs contributes to addressing these conditions.
17. Among the conditions identified by the participants as “conducive to the spread of terrorism” were: regional conflicts; widespread poverty; weak governance; corruption; violations of human rights and civil liberties; “breaking of the social contract;” weak criminal justice systems; economic inequality; financial incentives; tribal customs and political dynamics; and the neglect of rural and ethnic grievances. It was observed that terrorist and militant groups are effectively exploiting local grievances to recruit members.
18. A number of attendees also mentioned the impact of western counterterrorism policies such as the “the War on Terror,” in fueling radicalization in South Asia and contributing to regional tensions. Counterinsurgency tactics used in US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, such as night raids and over-reliance on military force has exacerbated public resentment of international actors and counterterrorism initiatives. In a number of areas, a failure to understand local culture in US military operations was thought to have created a deep schism between US forces and the Afghan people. One speaker observed that because of the limited understanding of local culture and sensitivities, the US and other western powers had little role to play in “winning hearts and minds.” Others viewed the non-military activities that fall within a “hearts and minds” approach to counterinsurgency, such as development work, as the responsibility of trusted local actors with a vested interest in the community.
19. CSOs, it was noted, are key to building cultures of peace to prevent and overcome conflict. One participant noted that civil society organizations often play a key role in facilitating national reconciliation after conflict, including addressing the effects of terrorism and other violent tactics on societies. For example, in Nepal, civil society was thought to have played a role in mentoring and institutionalizing the peace process after the Maoist insurgency.
20. The history of colonialism has contributed to public and government wariness of the “counterterrorism” label on their activities. One participant recalled that colonial powers had sought to suppress independence movements and “restore public order” under the rubric of countering terrorism, leaving many South Asians hesitant to support counterterrorism activities, especially if they are perceived as fulfilling the agenda of a foreign power.
21. It was noted that the reasons individuals choose to become terrorists include pull and push factors. Pull factors refer to the material, ideological and social appeal of terrorist networks; push factors refer to sociopolitical forces that alienate people from mainstream society. Most of the

conditions in the Strategy can be identified as “push factors,” such as weak adherence to the rule of law and violations of human rights; ethnic, national, and religious discrimination; political exclusion; socio-economic marginalization; and poor governance.

22. Radicalization was viewed by many participants as a serious problem in South Asia. This issue, they noted, is given little attention by states in the region, which focus more on a “capture and kill approach,” as one participant put it, than a preventative approach. Some madrassas that teach militant interpretations of Islam were singled out as contributing to this challenge. Although several regional governments have encouraged madrassas to diversify their curriculums to include secular subjects like English and computer science, it was noted that this did not automatically correlate with less radicalized students. However, participants cautioned against equating madrassas with violent radicalization, as many students go through the system without engaging in violence as a result. Another participant observed that poor public education poses a more significant challenge, as only a small fraction of students attend madrassas.
23. To highlight the valuable role that can be played by CSOs, several participants presented their experiences in working to address violent radicalization by exposing the deficiencies of terrorist narratives in the context of local culture and traditions. In this area, CSOs were thought to be well placed to play a more active role than governments or international agencies. The imperative to remain credible and visibly independent from governments and international donors was emphasized by several speakers. One participant argued that such programming could benefit from more data, research, and analysis on what drives individuals and groups to join violent extremist groups.
24. Some participants argued that state support for terrorists groups, either through omission or commission, had to be addressed. One speaker observed that even where states are not complicit, they are not doing enough to target these groups.
25. In addition to helping address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, it was observed that segments of civil society do at times contribute to fomenting terrorism in the region. Participants cited in particular cases of the media justifying terrorism and defending repressive policies of the state. Others pointed out that the public in some states have at times supported paramilitary groups, despite known human rights infractions on their part, in the interest of order and public security. However, participants cautioned against overstating the involvement of CSOs in inciting violence in the region, since this could be used a pretext by states to clamp down on civil society.

Session 3: Preventing and combating terrorism (Pillar 2)

26. Participants discussed the role of CSOs in working with governments to develop and implement measures to prevent and combat terrorism as well as the challenges these measures sometimes pose for civil society. They identified a number of obstacles to preventing and combating terrorism in the region including, in particular, the limitations of the state to carry out these tasks. It was pointed out that many states in the region were still in the process of political evolution and

had not yet achieved the monopoly on violence associated with the Weberian state. Consequently, in some South Asian states there are “states within the state” such as powerful, fairly autonomous intelligence or military agencies like the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Pakistan or powerful state-sponsored paramilitary forces. Participants also cited the dangers of the state abrogating its responsibility to provide security. In this regard, the Taliban, which had begun as state-sponsored force to establish the rule of law, was cited as a cautionary example.

27. The high levels of poverty and the limited resources of many states in the region were identified as an additional limitation to effective counterterrorism cooperation. A number of participants reflected strong regional concerns that foreign governments and donors would divert aid and resources from vital development efforts towards counterterrorism initiatives, thus fueling greater suspicion and wariness among CSOs about the intentions of counterterrorism actors and the effects of their policies.
28. Cutting off support networks for terrorist groups was identified as a prerequisite to preventing and combating terrorism, which is difficult in any region, but especially in a region where so much economic activity takes place outside the formal financial sector. Several participants noted the role of diaspora communities in knowingly or unknowingly financing terrorist and criminal groups. The possibility of diaspora communities being radicalized in the West or Middle East, and the impact of that transformation on the home communities in South Asia, was also highlighted. For example, in one case, charitable contributions to Green Crescent, in Manchester, had reportedly been diverted towards building a stockpile of weapons discovered in a madrassa building in Bholā, southern Bangladesh.
29. There was general agreement that combating terrorism in the region relies heavily on military force. A number of participants stressed the need for greater balance between the “hard” security-oriented responses and “soft” responses that focus on preventing terrorism. For example, education was discussed as an area that could be strengthened by the state to prevent terrorism.
30. Attendees shared a number of ways that civil society could cooperate with the government to prevent and combat terrorism. Participants stressed the effective role that civil society can play in raising awareness of the threat of terrorism and in facilitating understanding between governments and local communities, between civilians and the military, and within government itself.
31. Despite some successes of civil society in this area, there was general consensus that “preventing and combating terrorism” is viewed by states in the region as solely their responsibility, making them wary of partnerships. Indeed, several speakers felt that civil society had played little role in preventing and combating terrorism because of a lack of political will to include CSOs in this area. Participants agreed that there was a certain level of mistrust between civil society and states which hindered more effective cooperation. One speaker noted that the involvement of civil society in counterterrorism is an emerging phenomenon that will take time to accept.

32. Participants stressed the need to build trust and improve the relationship between states and civil society. A number of suggestions were offered to overcome this mistrust, including changing the mindset of the state towards counterterrorism as a solely military issue; ensuring that civil society organizations remain neutral rather than being associated with a specific political party; and increasing communication between states and civil society in order to identify and articulate how they are working towards a common goal. A number of participants suggested establishing national and regional umbrella groups or networks to raise awareness of what CSOs are doing and how they contribute to effectively countering terrorism and violent extremism, so that CSOs can better interface with the public and the government.

Session 4: Strengthening the role of women, the media, and survivors in countering terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia

33. Breaking down and challenging the narrative of terrorist groups was emphasized throughout the workshop as an area for greater involvement from civil society in the region. This session aimed to capture one way that civil society can contribute to these efforts. Participants viewed two documentaries made by civil society organizations highlighting the impact of terrorism on victims: *Victims of Terrorism in Charsadda*, produced by the Initiative for Public Security, Pakistan, and *Killing in the Name*, produced by the Global Survivors Network. These videos illustrate ways in which CSOs can contribute to countering the narrative of terrorists by giving victims of terrorism a human face and exposing the tragic impact it has on individuals, families, and communities.
34. Both of the videos aim to dissuade those vulnerable to terrorist recruitment from joining terrorist groups and persuade terrorists to think about the consequences of their violent actions. Since the stories in both documentaries capture the views of individuals from communities on behalf of whom terrorists purport to be fighting, their messages are meant to be particularly persuasive to those considering carrying out acts of violence.
35. One participant was wary of the portrayal of women in these documentaries, arguing that they perpetuate stereotypical roles enforced by patriarchal cultures. The speaker noted that these documentaries often capture the impact of acts terrorism on wives, mothers, and children, who are portrayed as indigent if a male provider is killed by a terrorist act. However, in response, it was contended that the protection of women, children and the family structure resonates strongly with audiences in the region and can serve as a strong deterrent against terrorist recruitment.
36. It was noted that the creativity and resourcefulness of terrorist groups to get their message out and recruit new members, using the internet and media, was not being met by a sufficiently strong counter-narrative, and that governments and international organizations tend to lag behind terrorist groups in exploiting relevant technology. This was recognized as an area for greater involvement of civil society in South Asia.

Session 5: Strengthening state capacity (Pillar 3)

37. Participants discussed the work of CSOs in South Asia to help build counterterrorism related capacities of states and ways to build the capacities of CSOs themselves. Participants distinguished between two categories of responses to terrorism: the “hard security” responses was said to include tasks such as stopping terrorist funding, enacting counterterrorism legislation, and collecting and sharing intelligence, and the “soft” responses were said to address the underlying social factors, such as under-development, poor education, and unemployment, which might contribute to violent extremism and boost recruitment for militant groups. Participants seemed to agree that counterterrorism in South Asia relied too heavily on the harder approaches and tactical measures, whereas successful counterterrorism required a more strategic approach that also incorporated “softer” measures.
38. In addition to the disproportionate emphasis on “hard security” responses to terrorism in the region, speakers pointed out a number of other shortcomings in states’ responses. The failure to deliver on basic measures to prevent terrorism, such as checking borders and disrupting terrorist funding was seen by some as an area for greater commitment from states. One participant noted the important role of international donors to assist states in strengthening such capacities.
39. CSOs were seen as having a particularly significant contribution to make in terms of strengthening the capacities of state institutions, including the judiciary, legislature, and political parties, to ensure a democratic and balanced response to terrorism. It was noted that the contributions of CSOs to Security Sector Reform has attendant benefits for improving the capacity of those institutions to respond effectively to terrorism. It was also observed that due to such experiences, CSOs were well placed to play an oversight role and ensure greater accountability and responsiveness in the security sector.
40. Participants suggested additional ways that civil society could play a role in promoting the holistic approach to counterterrorism articulated in the UN Strategy. For example, through efforts to improve governance; conducting research to understand the underlying causes of terrorism; shaping the discourse of non-violence and addressing recruitment and radicalization; promoting tolerance and diversity; empowering young people; and promoting education and job training.
41. It was pointed out that CSOs have an important role to play in preventing terrorism because they are often more in tune with local populations and well placed to play a role in early warning of an attack. Therefore, a number of areas for partnership were highlighted between civil society and the government to develop effective operational responses to terrorism. This included assisting governments in working with local communities to provide enhanced public security and civilian protection, and promoting greater transparency, accountability and adherence to the rule of law within the security sector.
42. Several participants noted that a disconnect between the political elite and broader citizenry in South Asia had weakened governance and institutions of state in many countries. One speaker observed that politics in South Asia is not about fundamental rights and inclusion, but instead a

means of accessing patronage and levers of coercion. Therefore, as another participant noted, civil society groups should be cautious that by strengthening the capacity of the state they are not increasing the coercive power of the state to use against its own citizens.

43. A number of participants pointed out the difficulties for CSOs in building the capacity of the state when their own capacities are very limited. The UN Strategy, while recognizing the contributions of civil society to counterterrorism, only addresses capacity building in the context of states and not civil society. Some mentioned the serious need to enhance civil society capacities in the region. One way to achieve this would be to persuade governments to provide support for their programming, as CSOs can help expand the ability of governments to provide vital services to people (such as BRAC in Bangladesh) and also help strengthen the state-society relationship. As noted previously, civil society also provides an important oversight function which supports the strengthening of democratic governance.

Session 6: Ensuring respect for human rights and rule of law (Pillar 4)

44. Participants discussed the work of CSOs in the region to monitor state implementation of international counterterrorism and human rights frameworks, track human rights abuses committed in the context of countering terrorism, and raise public awareness and understanding of human rights issues as part of an effective campaign against terrorism.
45. Overly broad legal definitions of terrorism and their abuse by authorities in many states were considered to be a source of serious human rights challenges. A number of participants noted that these can and have been used to restrict political dissent and infringe human rights and civil liberties. Speakers mentioned the Anti-Terrorism Act in Pakistan, which allows the government to circumvent basic due process and has been used to detain individuals on charges unrelated to terrorism. The Prevention of Terrorism Act in the Maldives was also given as an example of legislation that offers an overly broad definition of terrorism that may be prone to abuse. Consequently, a number of participants pointed out the need to reach an international consensus on the definition of “terrorism” to prevent its misuse.
46. From the UN perspective, the discussion examined the evolution of the Security Council’s approach and the gradual mainstreaming of human rights in the counterterrorism discourse. UN Security Council resolution 1963 (2010) was recognized as an opportunity to pursue more of the comprehensive approach to counterterrorism reflected in the UN Strategy. It was noted that upholding human rights in states’ counterterrorism policies is not only an international legal requirement but is also essential to effective counterterrorism.
47. One speaker brought forward the question of whether human rights are universal or culturally relative. It was pointed out that some groups working to empower women and promote education in Afghanistan had been criticized for “going against the grain of local cultures.” However, there was not much acceptance of the cultural relativism argument among the participants. One speaker argued that the claim of cultural relativism was put forth mainly by governments as a justification for failing to observe human rights norms.

48. Participants noted the critical role of civil society in monitoring state compliance with international human rights instruments. Some success stories, such as human rights groups successfully advocating the government of Pakistan to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and ending summary executions were highlighted. Participants also discussed the role of civil society in drawing attention to abuses by state security forces and raising awareness of impunity of government officials and security forces. It was recognized that monitoring states' compliance with international human rights obligations, such as the examples above, while critical, can also create an adversarial relationship that makes cooperation more difficult.
49. Attendees also considered the positive role of civil society in drawing attention to human rights abuses carried out by terrorist groups and militants. Discussions focused on building grassroots responses to these abuses, as occurred in 2008 when a video of a member of the Taliban flogging a woman went viral and led to international outrage. Acts of terrorism, it was noted, violate victims' most basic human rights, and building campaigns against these actions was also considered an effective area for CSOs, as discussed in Session 4.
50. The diversity of objectives and activities of civil society groups was raised and a number of speakers pointed out that civil society is not a monolithic entity. Participants acknowledged that some segments of civil society in South Asia actually work against human rights. It was noted that certain civil society groups and segments of the media promote an "anti-rights" agenda and in some cases even actively incite violence.
51. Media freedom was viewed as essential to a healthy civil society, and while the media was assessed as "vibrant" in South Asia, there were a number of obstacles to a free press in the region recognized during the discussion. This included harassment, censorship, and in cases of armed conflict, as in Sri Lanka, limitations on freedom of movement. One speaker noted that in some South Asian states, media outlets seen as abetting terrorists were censored, while in others, this was a more selective process. In Pakistan, for example, it was observed that the government had censored separatist groups but not violent Islamist groups.
52. It was noted that the media should take measures to ensure that it does not provide information to terrorists as attacks are taking place, as occurred in Mumbai. In some states this has led to attempts at self-regulation or the development of codes of conduct for an industry that is rapidly evolving, in particular because of the growth of private media outlets. A number of speakers highlighted a need for more independent voices in South Asian media and the need to build the capacities of existing independent news outlets.
53. Participants also discussed the impact of extra-regional factors on human rights in the region. Drone strikes were highlighted in particular as increasing anti-American sentiment and fueling radicalization in the region.
54. Several speakers noted that the UN could build a bridge between civil society and governments. Future plans for CTED to focus increasingly on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1624 to help states combat incitement to terrorism, were seen as providing

opportunities for governments, civil society, and key stakeholders to interact and ensure that human rights are upheld in counterterrorism efforts.

Session 7: Strengthening the role of civil society

55. Following up on this workshop, the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation plans to partner with the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University in Singapore to hold a series of workshops beginning in the spring of 2012. These workshops will endeavor to promote greater cooperation among civil society organizations in the region and support their capacity to implement the Strategy in their respective countries, and, where suitable, support national implementation efforts.
56. There was widespread support for the proposed plans in principle. Participants offered numerous recommendations regarding the form and function of the process as well as other ideas for strengthening engagement with CSOs in the region on issues related to counterterrorism. Participants also suggested a number of topics which these workshops could cover, including education, media, counterterrorist financing/remittances, security sector reform, human rights, countering violent radicalization, and others.
57. Participants recommended identifying key organizations from each country that could act as focal points and/or a steering committee for the process. Several participants suggested creating an online network and establishing a repository of information about the relevant work of the civil society sector to help regularize these interactions. A number of participants emphasized the importance of involving not only think tanks, but also more grassroots organizations and educational institutions.
58. In identifying the key CSOs, a number of participants cautioned that labeling their work as counterterrorism, especially in the fields of human rights, development, and education was detrimental, or as one participant stated “the kiss of death.” Participants stressed that while it is important to involve such groups, one should not seek to label their work “counterterrorism” per se.
59. It was suggested that perhaps the first order of business would be to undertake a mapping of the relevant activities of civil society in the region as it relates to the UN Strategy. Each national focal point, it was suggested, could report on the relevant work of civil society in their respective countries and identify the most appropriate civil society participants depending on the topic(s) under consideration.
60. Participants stressed the value of UN participation in the proposed process. Some participants suggested it would be best for the UN to participate as an observer rather than a sponsor/convener of the process, but most agreed UN involvement would help build trust between governments and civil society. There was also support for involving states directly in the process in some capacity.

61. Participants also stressed that the process should be linked to the UN-led process on counterterrorism for government officials currently underway in the region. Specifically, it was suggested that representatives from civil society be given the opportunity to brief stakeholders in the formal UN-led process. Government experts, it was suggested, could also be asked to brief the civil society process on selected topics.
62. It was suggested that the organizers work with the UN to “market” the process to states in the region to ensure their support for the initiative to strengthen civil society. Participants noted that the UN Strategy, which encourages member states to engage with civil society, provides a basis for encouraging states in region to support the process.
63. The idea of creating local UN chapters in each country to engage with think tanks and universities as well as the possibility of appointing a special envoy to oversee implementation of the Strategy in South Asia were also put forth. In addition, it was observed that existing UN agencies operating in South Asia should increase their interaction with civil society, and that this interaction should inform the UN’s counterterrorism efforts, though not necessarily always labeling their work as counterterrorism.
64. Maintaining the credibility of civil society was generally agreed to be an important consideration in efforts to build CSO’s capacity. Several participants pointed out that people in the region are sensitive to CSOs thought to be funded by international donors, especially since local CSOs sometimes appear to be more accountable to foreign donors than to the local communities they aim to assist. Consequently, one speaker argued that civil society organizations should act democratically and transparently to ensure that they have the trust and respect of the people.

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