



Halabja Disabled Organization (HDO)

Report:

(Empowering Women Religious
Leaders: A Path to Peace through
Preventing Violent Extremism)

1. Background

In recent years, the city of Halabja has experienced a notable increase in violent extremism, primarily driven by ideological and religious factors. These extremist movements threaten the region's peace and security, promoting intolerance and undermining social cohesion. Various strategies have been devised to counter and prevent violent extremism to address this growing challenge, with a growing recognition of the crucial role played by religious leaders, particularly women religious leaders.

Religious leaders in Halabja wield significant influence, capable of shaping public opinion, providing guidance, and nurturing a sense of moral responsibility among their followers. Women religious leaders, in particular, bring unique perspectives and strengths. They often possess a profound understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics within their communities, enabling them to engage with individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies effectively. Furthermore, their roles extend beyond religious teachings to encompass education, community-building, and humanitarian activities, all of which contribute to preventing the appeal of extremism.

Recognizing the potential of women religious leaders in the fight against violent extremism, there is a pressing need to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and resources required to prevent radicalization and promote peace proactively. The "Training Programme for Women Religious Leaders in Preventing Violent Extremism" aims to address this need by offering a comprehensive and tailored training program for women religious leaders.

This training program seeks to empower women religious leaders with the tools and insights necessary to effectively engage with their communities and address the root causes of extremism. It covers topics such as conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, communication strategies and approaches to preventing extremism, and an understanding of the motivations behind radicalization. Additionally, the program provides practical guidance on recognizing signs of radicalization and facilitating interventions that promote tolerance and inclusivity.

By investing in the capacity-building of women religious leaders, this training program aims to harness their potential as agents of positive change. By encouraging dialogue, fostering understanding, and promoting peace within their communities, these leaders can significantly contribute to the global effort to prevent violent extremism and build a more harmonious and secure world.

Figure 1: Timeline of the activities leading up to the drafting of this report



2. Introduction

Within the "Peace Builders - Empowering Communities for Peace and Social Cohesion" framework, the Halabja Disabled Organization (HDO) conducted a transformative training program. Over the course of three intensive days, HDO provided specialized training for 30 women religious leaders (WRL), with each group comprising 15 influential women leaders from Halabja and its surrounding areas.

The primary objective of this comprehensive three-day training program was to enhance the capacity and knowledge base of these women religious leaders concerning critical matters related to peace, coexistence and preventing violent extremism. The program was designed to empower participants with the tools and insights necessary to promote peace within their communities actively. Specifically, the training focused on fostering an understanding of peaceful dialogue, strategies for achieving peace through dialogue and creating peaceful environments that consider individuals with disabilities.

This report aims to provide an overview of the training program conducted by HDO and to detail its impact on the participants, particularly in preventing violent extremism. The report covers the objectives and scope of the training program, participant feedback, and the key topics discussed during the training sessions. Additionally, it highlights the significance of understanding disability rights and their engagement in peacebuilding efforts as a pivotal aspect of fostering inclusivity and harmony within communities.



3.

Objectives and Scope of the Training Program

Module 1: Interfaith Dialogue Enhancement

This module equipped women religious leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in interfaith dialogue effectively. By the end of this module, participants had become proficient in dispelling stereotypes and defusing tensions linked to violence and extremism.

Module 2: Moral Guidance and Values

This module focused on empowering women religious leaders to impart moral guidance within their communities. The objective was to emphasize peace, compassion, respect, coexistence, and diversity. By completing this module, participants were better prepared to foster a culture of harmony and understanding.

Module 3: Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Participants learned techniques for resolving conflicts and mediating disputes in this module. The primary aim was to empower women religious leaders to promote dialogue, prevent violence, and contribute to peaceful conflict resolution within their communities.

Module 4: Theological and Religious Proficiency

The module aimed to strengthen the understanding of religious texts among women religious leaders. Doing so enabled them to counter misinterpretations and propagate a genuine vision of peace, tolerance, and human rights. The objective was to empower participants to serve as informed and authoritative voices within their communities.

Module 5: Disability Rights and Engagement in Peacebuilding: In the final module, participants explored topics related to disability rights and their engagement in peacebuilding efforts. Discussions included understanding the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in conflict-affected areas, strategies for inclusivity, and the role of women religious leaders in advocating for the rights and participation of disabled individuals in peacebuilding initiatives. The objective was to equip participants with the knowledge and tools to promote inclusivity and equality in their peacebuilding efforts, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are actively engaged, and their rights are upheld.

4.

Participant Feedback: Enhancing Skills for Preventing Violent Extremism

Participants expressed high satisfaction with the training program, citing its relevance and practicality in the context of preventing violent extremism. Their feedback highlighted various aspects of the training's impact on personal and interpersonal growth, emphasizing its significance in building a more inclusive and harmonious society while countering extremism.

Effective Communication and Ethical Negotiation:

Participants found the training on negotiation skills, effective communication, ethics, and human complexity to be an enriching experience. They learned the art of negotiation, including how to negotiate effectively, respect diverse perspectives, and treat others with kindness and respect. This newfound skillset is seen as essential in promoting open dialogue and understanding, key elements in preventing extremist ideologies.

Ethics and Moral Conduct:

The training emphasized moral conduct and critical thinking, enabling participants to navigate various situations with integrity and empathy. This ethical foundation is viewed as crucial for fostering a sense of inclusivity, fairness, and ethical communication practices, all of which contribute to preventing violent extremism.

Understanding Human Complexity:

Exploring the complexities of human nature and virtues has been eye-opening for the participants. Recognizing the value of diversity and kindness has deepened their appreciation for the intricacies of human existence. This perspective shift reinforces the importance of coexisting harmoniously with others, a fundamental aspect of preventing extremism.

Open-mindedness and Empathy:

Participants mentioned that the training taught them not to hastily pass judgment on individuals based solely on their own viewpoints, fostering a more empathetic and open-minded approach. This change in mindset is considered valuable in countering extremist tendencies rooted in prejudice and intolerance.

Contextual Understanding and Inclusivity:

The training has encouraged participants to approach texts and hadiths with heightened awareness of their original context and meaning. This approach promotes acceptance of differences in opinion, race, religion, and language, reducing the potential for extremism rooted in misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

Problem-solving and Proactive Mindset:

The training instilled in participants the discipline of investigating the root causes of problems rather than avoiding them or succumbing to hopelessness. This proactive and solution-oriented mindset is seen as a valuable tool for addressing issues related to extremism.

Engagement with Individuals with Disabilities:

The training on interacting with and supporting individuals with disabilities has provided a fresh perspective on fostering a peaceful and inclusive coexistence. Participants gained valuable insights into treating people with disabilities with empathy and respect, which is essential for countering discrimination and promoting inclusivity.

Advocacy for Disability Rights:

Understanding the rights of individuals with disabilities has been a significant focus, highlighting the importance of combating discrimination, raising awareness, and empathizing with their unique experiences. This knowledge empowers participants to support individuals with disabilities in fulfilling their rights and responsibilities, contributing to a more equitable society.

Inclusivity and Collective Efforts:

The training underscored the importance of collective efforts in helping and further supporting people with disabilities, emphasizing the need for family and societal awareness to create an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive, regardless of their abilities or challenges.



5.

Conclusion: Empowering Women Religious Leaders for Lasting Change

The "Training Programme for Women Religious Leaders in Preventing Violent Extremism" conducted by the Halabja Disabled Organization (HDO) has been a transformative endeavor that holds immense promise for the city of Halabja and its surrounding areas. The program's objectives and scope, as well as the invaluable feedback from participants, underscore its significance in preventing violent extremism and fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Through this training program, women religious leaders have been equipped with diverse skills and knowledge, enabling them to take on pivotal roles in their communities. These leaders have emerged from the program with enhanced capabilities in interfaith dialogue, moral guidance, conflict resolution, and theological proficiency. Furthermore, they have gained a deep understanding of disability rights and engagement in peacebuilding efforts.

Participant feedback has shed light on the profound impact of the training, not only in preventing violent extremism but also in promoting ethical conduct, open-mindedness, empathy, and inclusivity. These qualities are fundamental in countering extremist ideologies rooted in intolerance and prejudice. Moreover, participants are now better prepared to advocate for disability rights and champion inclusivity, contributing to a more equitable and compassionate society.

The journey towards countering violent extremism is ongoing, but the "Training Programme for Women Religious Leaders" marks a significant step in the right direction. By investing in the capacity-building of these influential leaders, we are investing in a brighter and more inclusive future for Halabja and beyond. We hope this program serves as a model for similar initiatives worldwide, demonstrating the power of education, empathy, and collective action in the pursuit of lasting peace and social cohesion.

