Research Main Findings
and Recommendations

GENDER EQUALITY AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN LIBYA

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Libyan women's wide participation in the popular uprising that toppled the Gaddafi government led many to believe that the revolution would bring empowerment for women. Instead, Libyan women have faced growing restrictions on their freedom of movement, everyday violence and policing in public spaces. Violence against women's rights activists and women leaders has also increased.

Gender-regressive ideologies are rife in Libya, and not confined to violent extremist groups. Support for such ideologies is not limited to men. Some Libyan women have also supported and joined gender regressive groups, sometimes in exchange of protection from the widespread insecurity that has plagued the country.

UN Women has recently partnered with Monash University Gender, Peace and Security and local researchers from different parts of Libya to produce research across four regions in Libya to explore the link between gender inequality and the spread of violent extremism.

Key findings of the research include:

- Hostile sexist attitudes toward women and support for violence against women are strongly associated with support for violent extremism. The survey revealed that supporting or condoning violence against women is the only statistically significant factor positively associated with support for violent extremism. In other words, people who support violence against women are much more likely to support violent extremism;

- Gender power relations and the subordination of women to men are exploited by violent extremist groups in their recruitment strategies. They also use financial incentives to recruit men and women, playing into gender norms of men's breadwinning and leadership, and women's economic vulnerability and dependency. Women are

also recruited through forced marriages and kinship ties: women who are subordinate or related to extremist male relatives are more likely to be recruited by those relatives;

- Family laws and legal provisions that condone women's subordination may legitimize extremist ideologies and facilitate recruitment to violent extremism;

- Traditional and online media, including social media are important channels for spreading extremist ideologies and recruiting men and women;

- While there is no correlation between religiosity and support for violent extremism, the increase of religious schools has been associated with spread of intolerance, extremism and discriminatory gender ideology. Religious schools have increased due to weak state school systems and oversight. Women-only koranic study groups are the main recruitment places for women radicalization in Libya;

- Attacks on women's rights actors is an early warning sign of extremist violence. Large numbers of women leaders have been victims of violence, killings and

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disappearances in Libya since beginning the uprising, including by extremist groups;

- Women play formal and informal roles in countering and preventing violent extremism as well as advocating for women's rights in Libya, but their efforts are under documented and under supported. Those who stand up for their rights and resist violent extremist groups face threats of violence including extortion, blackmail, and smear campaigns by these groups.

Recommendations:

- Promoting gender equality is potentially the most powerful tool to counter extremist violence;

- Security actors should recognize the link between gender-based violence and violent extremism. Violence against women, including gender-based domestic violence, is an indicator and early warning sign of violent extremism;

- National and international actors seeking to empower Libyan women leaders to engage in peace and security processes need to ensure adequate protection for them;

- Gender-sensitive reforms of the security sector are needed, including the provision of protection for women politicians and women's rights defenders;

- Local women's initiatives to prevent of violent extremism need to be better documented and supported;

- National policy makers seeking to prevent and counter violent extremism could benefit from better oversight of schools and the introduction of gender-sensitive curricula, including in religious and koranic schools;

- Efforts to prevent violent extremism need to address women's financial dependency on men through employment and income-generating opportunities and training including for women who are particularly vulnerable to violent extremism: widows, divorcees and victims of violence;

- A counter-narrative using traditional and online media channels in Libya is imperative to limit gender stereotyping and extremist propaganda and to promote gender equality and women empowerment;

- Ending gender-based discrimination and women disempowerment in family and marriage laws is critical to combat the recruitment of women and their families to extremist violence.

Research Objectives and Methodology:

To date, no general or region-specific theory on violent extremism has considered the role of gender identities, dynamics and ideology in the spread of violent extremism, and whether there are gender differences in the recruitment and mobilization of violent extremisms and its impact. In light of this, this research project sets out to build evidence-base knowledge to guide efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism .

The research engaged 810 people and was conducted in four sites in different sub regions of Libya: Adjabiya, Benghazi, Tripoli and Sabha. The field research data was collected during fieldwork undertaken by Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre's Libyan research partners - a team of Libyan academics led by Dr Oum Elezz of the University of Benghazi, from October 2018 to March 2019.

The survey was carried out between March and June 2019. It aimed to triangulate field research findings and analyze the relationship between attitudes toward gender equality and women, and support for violent extremism.