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HIPSIR* | HEKIMA INSTITUTE OF PEACE STUDIES AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

*Religious Extremism and Violence in Africa: Reviewing the
Practice of Intervention & Inter-religious Dialogue,*

Dates: 9-10 October 2018

Venue: Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR), Hekima University College, Nairobi, Kenya

CALL FOR PAPERS

Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR), Hekima University College, Nairobi, Kenya, invites paper presentations for the above conference. The deadline for submission of the abstracts is **15th August 2018**.

I. INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, Africa has been the theater of religious extremist acts of violence, which have claimed thousands of innocent lives with subsequent negative impacts on social and economic development. Countries from different parts of the continent such as Nigeria, Somalia, Libya, Egypt, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroun, Niger, Chad, Central African Republic, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, have been severely affected. In fact, many more countries could be targeted by the terrorist networks as there are more terrorist cells emerging.

Prominent among the groups that keep sowing havoc are Al Qaeda in Maghreb Region (AQIM), Al Shabaab in Eastern Africa, Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria and some parts of Cameroun, Chad and Niger. Apart from groups linked to Islam, a Christian rebel group known as The Lord's Resistance Army, which seeks to govern Uganda using the Ten Commandments, has been operative in Uganda, South Sudan, Central Africa Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo. Situations where political outfits are becoming links with extremist ideologies such as the case of the Allied Democratic Front (ADF) in Uganda are also cases of worry. In addition to the killing of thousands of people and destruction of property, these groups have created tensions between and among people of faith across the continent who had hitherto lived peacefully with specific majority being between Muslims and Christians. One of the most disturbing scenario is the entrenchment of violent extremist ideologies among the young people and children.

Whereas some politicians and scholars attribute such terrorist attacks to religious extremism, others approach the problem from a broader perspective and point to factors such as protracted injustices and marginalization of particular populations, foreign geopolitical strategic interests and resource-based conflicts under the guise of religious fundamentalism. To a great extent, in some places and cases, it has been observed that religion has been instrumentalized to justify some of these extreme acts of violence. The temptation therefore is to leave out religion and name terrorist acts as extremist violence. However, extracting religion entirely out of the equation reduces the violent extremist acts to criminal activities without stretching imagination towards probable solutions. It is important to note that inclusion of religion is vital to deconstructing the ideology behind religious extremism and/or situations where violent extremism, though may be of social, economic and political nature, may have religious backing.

The militarized approach to addressing the challenge of religious extremism, particularly radicalization of the youth, has not sufficiently borne fruit. There is need for a more radical shift in analysis, strategic response (both soft and hard approaches) and implementation of long term approach to addressing root-causes such as socio-economic marginalization, unemployment, victimization, uncoordinated response, and lack of effective regional strategy to addressing the problem. This becomes poignant especially as the trend of violent extremism is changing to engaging and using children more and more. The increasing use of children and especially girls in perpetuating these acts with 'religious' convictions point to the need of urgent, strategic and community engagement approaches. However, this demands for practical issues identification through, among others, academic engagement.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

The primary objective of this conference is to examine the strategies and responses applied to addressing religious extremism and violence, the extent to which they have been effective, the challenges they have faced and possible review of such strategies from political, security, economic, religious and socio-cultural perspective.

The conference also seeks to expound on the understanding of religious extremism, what it is and what it is not, clarify its dynamic and functions, pinpoint its actors and their motivation, identify major stakeholders and elucidate on its multiple consequences. To clarify this sub-objective further, the conference will address questions such as: What is religious extremism? What are the root causes? Who are the key actors and stakeholders? What are the ideological and religious justification and interpretation of religious extremism and violence? How does it differ from other ideologies that prompt violence? What is its distinctive character in the African context? What is the role of religious leaders, civil society and government officials in addressing religious extremism and violence? How does it affect the well-being of children? How does the engagement of children in peace building and conflict prevention interact with and influence the religious extremism? What is the correlation between situations of 'children on the move' or in 'forced displaced communities' and entrenchment of violent extremism especially those driven by religious ideologies? What are some of the existing child-related policies and their relationship with the prevention of religious violent extremism among the children?

III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. Review of strategies of response to religious extremism phenomenon: A comprehensive understanding of the religious extremism will not only help inform the academic scholarship, national and international policies and decision makers in dealing with the problem, it will also contribute to the lessening of prejudices and tensions among religious communities and nations and thus contribute to peaceful relations.
2. It is expected that the conference will shed light on the phenomenon of religious extremism through open debate across methodologies and subjects of inquiry from the interdisciplinary participants' forum.

3. The conference will also influence the approaches on child-related programmes and especially those that target social formation of children. Further, the conference will contribute to strengthening or reviewing (the existing ones) or developing (the new ones) policies and frameworks that guide engagements with and protection of children in the society
4. The results of the discussions of the conference will be published widely to policy makers, religious and civil society actors, peacebuilders and government officials. The papers presented at the conference will be reviewed and edited for publication in a special volume. There will also be conference proceedings for wider circulation.

The conference invites presentations on:

1. Applied strategies in addressing religious extremism and violence (REV)
2. Role of government in addressing REV
3. Role of civil society in countering REV
4. Instrumentalization of religion for violence
5. Religion and Militarism
6. Youth, adolescent and children vulnerability to radicalization
7. Economic factors in radicalization
8. Inter-religious dialogues as a tool for countering REV
9. Role of religious leaders in countering REV
10. It has nothing to do with religion
11. Supporting returned recruits of militant groups
12. Regional strategies for addressing REV
13. Government anti-terrorist policy and bill of rights

Selected articles will be published in an edited volume by February 2020.

IV.VENUE AND DATES

The Conference will take place at Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR), Hekima University College, 2-3 October 2018

Registration Fees

Staff and students from Hekima University College	Free
Faculty/Staff from Eastern Africa	KShs.3000 (\$30)
Students from East Africa	1000 (\$10)
Staff from East African Universities and Organizations	KShs.5000 (\$50)
Rest of Africa	US\$ 150
Rest of the World – Europe, America, Asia, etc	US\$ 200