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Resilient nations.*

MUSLIM RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND SCHOLARS ON COUNTERING, RESPONDING
TO AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA CONFERENCE

OPENING REMARKS BY:

MS. ROSA MALANGO,

UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR/UNDP RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE

MONDAY, 15TH MAY 2017 | **VENUE:** LAKE VICTORIA SERENA HOTEL, KIGO

**Hon. Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for East Africa Affairs,
Kirunda Kivejinja,**

**Our Chief Guest- Your Eminence Mufti of Uganda, Sheik Shaban Ramadhan
Mubajje,**

The President, Inter Faith Peace Corps, Imrana A. Umar,

Eminencies,

Royal Fathers,

Friend from the Media,

Colleagues from the UNDP,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Development Programme in Uganda and our Regional Service Centre for Africa based in Addis Ababa, I would like to welcome you all to the Pearl of Africa.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all of you here particularly those who have travelled from various part of the world to discuss how we can counter, respond and all together preventing violent extremism in Africa – a very important discussion for Africa and the world today.

Over the past decades, violent extremism has dramatically grown around the world including in Africa with a continued and growing presence of violent extremist groups causing an *“arc of upheaval and distress”* as described by former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

In Uganda, we saw violent extremism manifest in 2010 during the twin bombings at Kyadondo Rugby Grounds and the Ethiopian Village in Kampala which Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for. The bombings, that left 74 people dead, demonstrate the extent of the risk in this country to violent extremism.

The fact that violent extremism has been affecting Muslims and Muslim communities most, highlights the need for the engagement of Muslim religious leaders if we are to help communities that are vulnerable to the activities and operations of violent extremist groups. Communities need to be empowered to be a vital part of the solution to the growth of violent extremism, and to this end your leadership as religious leaders is imperative.

Violent extremism is currently contributing to a historic reversal of development gains and if it is not addressed today, it threatens to curtail Africa’s development prospects for decades to come.

The fight against violent extremism is a collective responsibility and as religious leaders, you are our key partners to enhance the response by religious institutions and communities to violent extremism.

Excellences’, Royal Fathers, Eminences,

Over the past few years, UNDP has been increasingly involved in Preventing Violent Extremism – PVE.

In January 2016, the UN Secretary-General presented his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism to the General Assembly which consists of three recommendations:

- *Setting a Policy Framework* for human rights and the rule of law to provide Member States with a platform to address violent extremism at the national and local levels;
- *Taking Action* by focusing on the areas of dialogue and conflict prevention; strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law; engaging communities; empowering youth; ensuring gender equality and empowering women; facilitating access to education, skills development and employment opportunities; and using strategic means of communication, such as the internet and social media to counter extremist narratives; and
- *Supporting Member States, regional bodies and communities through the United Nations* to address violent extremism not only in a coordinated manner but also in a context-specific and localized approach that reflects national realities.

In response, UNDP produced a regional strategy for Africa on “Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa.”

The strategy emphasises a developmental approach which is underpinned by a policy framework that calls for individuals and institutions to be consistently engaged so that they understand what drives and enables violent extremism in Africa. This will enable them to take part in addressing the root causes through a comprehensive and holistic approach.

The programme is being implemented in different countries which are divided into three categories. These include;

- “Epicentre”-countries (Nigeria, Mali, Somalia and Libya) where extremist groups are active;
- “Spill-over” countries where impacts are being felt (Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Mauritania, Niger and Tunisia) and;
- “At risk” countries which exhibit some of the underlying and root causes of violent extremism (CAR, Sudan, Tanzania, Senegal, Morocco and Uganda).

Strengthening a development response to violent extremism is a long process and we are only at the beginning of this journey. My colleague Mohamed Yahya from the Regional Service Centre will be sharing more about the programme during the meeting.

Preventing Violent Extremism remains important to UNDP Uganda which is why our programs are all geared towards promoting peace and empowering communities as well as the State. A few examples include our programmes in support of the rule of law, effective governance, gender and youth empowerment. We are engaging as part of the UN Country Team with traditional institutions in the promotion of peace and security. Through our Peace Security and Systems Resilience programme, we are supporting the development of a harmonised curriculum, integrated module for human trafficking, community policing, small arms and counter terrorism. This program also enables us to support the establishment of community response structures to address violent extremism/ radicalisation, the proliferation of small arms and to contribute to conflict early warning systems, border management and alternative livelihoods to the unemployed youth.

In addition, we are working with the Government of Uganda to develop a national Preventing Violent Extremism strategy. We are also involved in regional consultations led by IGAD to develop a regional PVE strategy – which will give all of us an opportunity to address this situation together as a region.

All our efforts are in line with Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which focus on, *“People partnering for Peace and Prosperity on the Planet.”*

Excellences’, Royal Fathers, Eminences,

As you all know, addressing the root causes of violent extremism cannot be done in isolation and through security engagement only. It’s for this reason that we’ll need a multitude of actors including national governments, regional organisations, faith-based organisations and religious leaders, as well as, civil society organisations, the media, community representatives and other development partners.

As the drivers and enablers of violent extremism are multiple, complex and context-specific, solutions should reflect these dimensions. To this end,

ownership and leadership at grassroots level in communities affected by and at-risk of violent extremism is key. Your role as religious leaders and scholars is crucial to ensure the success of a comprehensive approach led by national and local stakeholders.

As the crisis is regional, often ignoring state-borders drawn during colonial times, the Regional Service Centre and Country Offices of UNDP are exploring synergies, sharing experiences to learn from each other on how to improve the path to sustainable and inclusive development for resilient and peaceful societies.

Excellences', Royal Fathers, Eminences,

Let me conclude by reiterating how important the role of religious leaders and scholars across our continent is if we are to prevent and respond to violent extremism in Africa. African States are focused on pursuing ambitious development plans that provide an opportunity for new approaches to inclusive growth and community led economic transformation. Uganda is well known around the world for its progressive approach to refugee protection informed by national solidarity and community cohabitation. We are working with the government to improve livelihoods and access to vocational training by host communities, particularly the youth. Uganda is evidence of the importance of comprehensive solutions to peace and development to reduce risks.

I therefore thank you all for coming to Uganda to discuss this pertinent issue. I also thank our host, the government of Uganda, Sheikh Shaban Ramadhan Mubajje, Mufti of Uganda, and the International Interfaith Peace Corps for working closely with our Regional Service Centre for Africa and UNDP Uganda to organise this dialogue. I invite you to continue this conversation with your congregations and communities so that we are able to eliminate violent extremism from our continent and the world.

Thank you.