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Women from Conflict Regions Ask U.S. Government for More Help to Confront Extremism

Greater Roles for Women in Pakistan, Lebanon, Bosnia and Rwanda Emphasized

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Jan. 22, 2010 – Representatives of government, media, nonprofits and academia from four conflict regions requested more support of their ongoing efforts to confront extremism in meetings this week with U.S. government officials. The 19 visiting professors, journalists, government spokespeople and nonprofit leaders—all of whom are women—emphasized that they are already demonstrating success in reducing extremism in their countries. This is the first time that such a large number of women from a variety of countries has gathered to discuss how to best address violent extremism and to advocate to U.S. government officials to champion their work.

The Pakistani, Lebanese, Bosnian and Rwandan leaders met yesterday and today with officials from the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, as well as a U.S. congresswoman and a U.S. senator, to request increased facilitation of their efforts, some of which are partly funded by the U.S. government. They shared stories including the successful de-radicalization of Taliban recruits in Pakistan, the tempering of sectarian tensions at the community level in Bosnia and Lebanon and the rebuilding of communities after genocide in Rwanda.

“Considering the number of explosive crises around the world, it is timely for the U.S. Congress and the Obama Administration to focus its attention on finding long-term, sustainable solutions to deep-rooted conflicts,” said Ambassador Swanee Hunt, chair of The Institute for Inclusive Security, which identified the women and brought them to the United States to advocate to policymakers. “One way to do that is to enhance the role of women in promoting peace and stability.”

In the course of internal deliberations and meetings with policymakers, delegates highlighted the ways they believe women can stem extremism. They pointed to women’s ability to bridge ethnic, religious, political and cultural divides, even during conflict. They discussed how women have their fingers on the pulse of their communities. And they emphasized that women—as authorities within local communities and within families—often have a large influence on decision-making, particularly by their sons and husbands.

The visiting leaders—ranging from scholars of Pakistani defense strategies to members of the Rwandan government—presented these recommendations to Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), as well as senior officials at the State Department (including Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Jack Lew), and the U.S. Agency for International Development, over the course of 18 meetings in Washington. The women also met with assistants to Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke.

Requests for increased U.S. cooperation ranged from new and regular meetings between U.S. intelligence services and women in conflict regions including Pakistan, to increased training of women leaders and university exchange programs with Lebanon. Other recommendations included expanded use of curricula promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence in Rwanda and engaging women in public information campaigns to reduce the flow and use of small arms in Bosnia.

“As a colonel in the United States Army who has served in a number of contingency operations and commanded a battalion in combat in Iraq, it was humbling to meet and speak with these incredibly brave women leaders from around the world,” said Colonel Pat Donahoe, a National Security Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government who met the visiting women during earlier events in Cambridge, Mass. “The courage and selflessness of these gifted women is evident in their fearless approach to solving some of the world’s most complex problems.”

The [specific policy recommendations](#) the women presented to US policymakers—each intended to overcome a specific barrier preventing women from more extensively moderating extremism—build on both academic research and the personal experiences of the visiting women experts as they have engaged with ideological, religious, and sectarian extremists over their careers. Dozens of academics and policymakers contributed to the recommendations, which focus on changes needed to increase the ability of women to promote tolerance and dialogue, even in conservative cultures.

The recommendations shared with US policymakers may be found on the website of The Institute for Inclusive Security:
http://www.huntalternatives.org/pages/8223_recommendations_for_moderating_violent_extremism_january_2010.cfm

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About The Institute for Inclusive Security

The Institute for Inclusive Security uses research, training, and advocacy to promote the inclusion of all stakeholders, particularly women, in peace processes. We work with a global network of well over 1,000 women leaders from more than 40 conflict regions. Our research gives policymakers new strategies to drive inclusion by examining tangible contributions of women peace builders. Our training provides leaders the specialized skills and knowledge to direct local, national, and international peacebuilding. Our advocacy to high-level policymakers promotes change that makes peace processes more broad-based, and thus sustainable.