



iDove - Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism

# The 2nd Intercontinental Youth Forum

03th - 05th October 2018, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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## About iDove

In February 2017, the African Union Commission's Directorate of Citizens and Diaspora Organizations (AUC-CIDO) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) jointly launched the [Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism \(iDove\)](#) pilot project, using innovative youth-led approaches to highlight the soft power of religion in Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE).

iDove assumes that violent extremism is a global issue. Whether it has political, ideological, racist or religious roots, youth radicalisation is a problem that affects both African and European societies in the same way. Security interventions to address the problem are of only limited impact and come at a high cost, both financially and in human lives. PVE therefore requires a comprehensive 'soft power' approach that focuses on the root causes rather than on the symptoms of violent extremism. Sports, arts, cultural events and activities offer effective means of dealing with differences within a community. Innovative approaches in these areas foster mutual understanding and support cooperation between different social and religious groups.

Following this train of thought, iDove aims to:

- provide an innovative youth-led approach to PVE;
- draw on the soft power of religion;
- initiate a strategic countermovement to prevent violent extremism;
- promote mutual respect and understanding based on intra- and interfaith, interreligious and intercultural values as core principles;
- facilitate interreligious and interfaith dialogue as a nonviolent tool of political transformation in Africa and Europe;

- set up a platform of exchange and mutual learning for youth working on PVE and building social cohesion;
- use digital components to counter the recruitment of youth into violent extremist groups.

iDove explicitly focuses on youth, as it is the largest group directly affected by violent extremism. Unemployment and economic grievances, the socio-cultural impact of violent conflict, poor education and the use of religious narratives play a role in the recruitment of youth into violent extremist organisations. However, youth are a major resource for sustainable development, often acting as key agents for social change, economic growth and innovation. Their imagination, ideals, energy and visions are essential for future prosperity and stability. Thus, [iDove builds on existing youth initiatives and supports young people's engagement and ideas](#) in its quest to develop non-violent approaches to problem solving and to strengthen social cohesion.

Among the many activities launched under the iDove umbrella are the 1<sup>st</sup> Intercontinental Youth Forum – originally giving birth to iDove – the iDove Training and Training of Trainers, including a detailed manual and further teaching materials, as well so-called 'Small Scale Projects' planned and implemented by the iDovers<sup>1</sup>. The 2<sup>nd</sup> [Intercontinental Youth Forum](#), which took place at the grounds of the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> October 2018, heralded the second phase of iDove. Further activities planned in this current phase include the development of a 'Serious Game App' to prevent violent extremism and build social cohesion among youth and the implementation of two local iDove Trainings in Niger and Liberia as well as a Training of Trainers in the Balkan Region<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, please refer to the first iDove yearly report.

<sup>2</sup> For further information, please refer to the section 'Way Forward' in this report.

# The 2nd Intercontinental Youth Forum

## Theme of the Conference

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Intercontinental Youth Forum focused on the occurrence of Violent Extremism among youth in both Europe and Africa with emphasis on **border regions and marginalized communities**.

Research has shown that youth living in areas of marginalization are particularly vulnerable to violent extremist recruitment<sup>3</sup>. The Sahel Sahara Border Regions are a prime example, where the permeability of borders, economic marginalization and the absence of effective state control allows violent extremists to expand their networks in excluded border communities. Moreover, violence spilling over from neighbouring conflicts frequently turn border regions into epicentres of radicalized claims and cross-border militancy coupled with organized crime.

Europe offers a similar picture as we find that right-wing extremism and racial sentiments are frequently concentrated in rural and marginalized segments of society. This can be explained based on the widening gap between urban and rural areas, which fosters feelings of resentment and neglect rendering marginalized youth more vulnerable to extremist discourses. According to the European Council of Foreign Relations, there is a direct link between rural depopulation, unemployment and relative neglect of the EU countryside and the rise of right-wing populist parties in Germany, Austria, France and The Netherlands<sup>4</sup>.

The forum's goal was to shed light on the interplay between political and economic grievances, social exclusion and hinterland neglect and how these feature in youth radicalization in border regions and marginalized areas.

## Objectives

The specific objectives of the 2<sup>nd</sup> iDove Intercontinental Youth Forum were:

- **Exploring the topic** of Violent Extremism in border regions and marginalized areas in Africa and Europe; including understanding its drivers as well as **developing concrete project ideas to PVE** at the community level through interreligious and interfaith dialogue and cross-border cooperation
- **Engaging and empowering young activists in PVE** – in particular those working in border regions and marginalized areas – to create innovative and cross-border frameworks for PVE
- **Facilitating connections** between African and European iDovers to exchange ideas, learn from one another and develop joint projects

## Outcomes

Under the hashtag #YouthAgainstExtremism, **39 young people from 27 different countries in Africa and Europe** gathered at the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa from 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> October for the 2<sup>nd</sup> iDove Intercontinental Youth Forum. Among the selected participants were community activists, academics as well as artists and policy makers, some of which had already attended the 1<sup>st</sup> Youth Forum in February 2017 and have ever since been part of the iDove family. All chosen individuals have been active in PVE in their respective fields or have displayed a special interest in the issue.

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<sup>3</sup> Boukhars, A. (2015). "Corridors of Militancy: the Sahel-Sahara Border Regions". *Fride A European Think Tank for Global Action*.

<sup>4</sup> De Gruyter, C. (2016). "The revenge of the Countryside". *European Council on Foreign Relations*.

Next to building networks and exchanging ideas amongst themselves, the forum brought the iDovers in touch with a variety of experts on PVE and interfaith dialogue including academics working on questions of gender and radicalization, game and mobile application developers, individuals with personal experiences of radicalization who now work as PVE activists as well as other community workers, who empower vulnerable youth through local initiatives. In various panel discussions and breakout sessions, the youth and experts discussed 'hot topics' in PVE, youth radicalization in border regions and other marginalized communities and the role of youth in local and cross-border governance and cooperation. In hands-on workshops led by design thinking trainers, the participants further developed user-centred PVE projects leveraging new technologies and innovation. They were also given the opportunity to share experiences of their own project work in small groups of people with similar interests.

#### 1. Preventing violent extremism: 'hot topics' & current dimensions

Building on the lessons learnt of the 1<sup>st</sup> Intercontinental Youth Forum, the second forum picked up on pertinent issues in PVE or 'hot topics', namely, gender, recruitment and PVE trends. Dr. Katherine Brown from the University of Birmingham, discussing gender in PVE, pointed out that the role of women in violent extremist organizations is often misjudged due to our own gender biases. Describing women solely as victims carries the inherent danger of not taking the concerns and motivations of female combatants seriously, leading to ineffective prevention efforts. Also, the need to encourage female involvement in peacebuilding policy and initiatives was stressed.

Oomar Mulbocus, therapist and behavioural interventionist, spoke of the different stages of recruitment into violent extremist organizations drawing on his personal story. According to him, youth are 'rough diamonds' in

need of 'polishing'. It is on us to unveil their hidden potential. Finally, Marikki Rieppola, the Partnerships Coordinator of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, presented two local initiatives – one in Finland and one in Somalia – tackling PVE through interfaith dialogue and building social cohesion.

#### 2. Youth radicalization & prevention work in border regions and marginalized areas

The focus of the forum – PVE in border regions and marginalized areas – was inserted into discussion through the contributions of Dr. Marcel Ayité Baglo, the Director General of the Beninese Integrated Border Management Agency (ABeGIEF) and expert on border security and Dr. Theo Gavrielides, the founder and director of The IARS International Institute.

Discussing the contextual factors, specific to border regions in Benin, Dr. Baglo suggested: "poverty, marginalization, isolation and statelessness are the main contributors to crime and youth radicalization in border regions". According to him, radicalization in these areas is related to the lack of basic services; border areas are among the poorest and most deprived on the African continent and are extremely difficult to access. The absence of the state and basic social services like schooling, health centres, security and infrastructure fosters resentment among the youth who then seek justice through violent means. Accordingly, as Dr. Baglo stressed, the only way to successfully prevent violent extremism in border regions is by "solving people's problems" and restoring trust in the government and leadership.

Looking at the manner Europe deals with the issue of violent extremism, Dr. Gavrielides made the argument that current security policy and practice lead to further societal division and a deepening democratic deficit. Young people, he argued, need to be perceived as talents and opportunities and not approached as 'risks to manage'. It is his belief

that social cohesion can only be built from the bottom-up through youth-led initiatives and in partnership with all stakeholders involved. As he put it: “Europe needs hopes and ideals of young people more than ever.”

### 3. Getting down to work: tackling PVE through new technologies & innovation

In contrast to its predecessor, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Youth Forum had an explicitly interactive focus with the objective of having iDovers develop their own project ideas leveraging the power of new technologies. With the problem of online recruitment becoming ever more pressing, the participants were tasked with finding ways to utilize these very same channels to beat violent extremist groups at their own game.

To this end, the iDovers developed social media campaigns, mobile applications and board games in the framework of a Design Thinking workshop<sup>5</sup>. Design thinking is an increasingly popular methodology, which helps tackling complex problems through a solution-based and user-oriented approach. It is conducted in several iterative stages: Empathize, Design, Ideate, Prototype. Led through these stages by Design Thinking trainers and further guided by expert gamers, mobile application developers and social media campaigners, the participants teamed up and developed workable prototypes of innovative solutions to PVE. All project ideas were shared on social media under the hashtag #17inspirations. Please find some examples below.



**YOU'RE A HERO** is a board game that enables its players to deal with challenges coming their way by drawing on their own skill set while not being afraid of opening up about their problems and asking for support. To achieve this in a playful manner, each player is assigned an animal character as well as several skill cards, terrain- and challenge cards. The game combines analogous and with digital elements.



**#COOLIMAM** is a social media campaign intended to bring Islamic religious leaders and youth together and build trusting relationships between them. Through joint participation in social activities and online counselling sessions, religious leaders become more approachable to the youth, who will find their struggles taken seriously in their religious community.

<sup>5</sup> The workshop was delivered by Protellus Design Thinking Trainers. Please view <http://protellus.de/> for more information.



**OLIVE** is a mobile application targeting young people going through life crises. The app has multiple functions; it helps the user to find a mentor, to view successful cases of deradicalization and to connect with other struggling youth. It also has a gaming feature, allowing the user to playfully grapple with the topic of violent extremism.

#### 4. Sharing experiences, addressing challenges and filling the gaps

In line with the objective of iDove – to provide a platform for exchange and mutual learning – the forum was also dedicated to the participants sharing experiences of their project work with each other. Four former iDovers presented their projects, which had been partially funded through the iDove ‘Small-Scale Projects’ initiative. The projects were the Accountability Lab Mali presented by Moussa Kondo, Enhancing Youth Initiatives for Peace (EYIP) in Cameroon by Yong Merolyn Yafe, the Youth Bridge Project in the Democratic Republic of Congo by Passy Mubalama and Youth Against Violent Extremism (YAVE) in Kenya by Judy Mumba.

#### iDOVE SMALL SCALE PROJECTS

- > The **Accountability Lab Mali** sets up so-called Citizen Helpdesks in the Segou and Mopti regions to reduce the risk of youth engaging in religious extremism and mobilize young people for PVE. The helpdesk groups, composed of young volunteers, venture into different communities and gather information on community perceptions of extremism, security, community, coherence and trust and share this information with decision makers at local and national levels to inform PVE policy. Decisions on policy are then discussed within the communities and outcomes are

shared with local news anchors, who broadcast them in interactive radio shows.

- > **Enhancing Youth Initiatives for Peace (EYIP)**, Cameroon, provides unemployed youth with a set of tools to enhance their opportunities and transform them into peaceful agents of change. Starting from the premise that unemployed youth with weak economic prospects are more vulnerable to radicalization, the project supports 40 young males and females of varying religious backgrounds in seeking non-violent roles in their communities. To this end, the young people are provided with a crash course on software development, entrepreneurship and peaceful activism.
- > **The Youth Bridge Project: Preventing Violent Extremism through Art Competition** aims to prevent conflict and enhance social cohesion within communities in Goma and the territory of Nyiragongo in the Democratic Republic of Congo through art and performance. In an arts competition, young people from different ethnic groups showcase their talents, spread the values of tolerance and acceptance and sensitize their friends and relatives to the dangers of violent extremism and radicalization.
- > **The Youth Against Violent Extremism (YAVE)** project mobilizes youth in Lamu, Kenya to promote interfaith and interethnic tolerance through intra- and interfaith dialogue. In the context of a sensitization forum, young religious leaders and other youth look at how scriptures are used to propagate violence and hate in their communities. They learn to respect a variety of interpretations of religious texts and understand and respect each other’s religious and ethnic backgrounds. The ‘trained’ youth then goes on selecting villages to organize more forums to further spread sensitization for violent extremism and foster peaceful co-existence.

What all Small-Scale Project presentations had in common was an **emphasis on youth mobilization and empowerment** as core feature to prevent violent extremism. Making use of the multiplier effect, the projects built on the conviction that youth are the true agents of change. To paraphrase Moussa Kondo; it is crucial for youth to recognize that they are part of the community, not standing against the community. They are part of the

system and as such have to recognize their individual responsibilities. It was also recognized, however, that the security situation often keeps local projects from realizing their full potential, as youth are often reluctant to get involved fearing for their safety.



From left to right: Moussa Kondo, Merolyn Yafe, Passy Mubalama, Marikki Rieppola & Judy Mumba

Splitting up into smaller groups the participants discussed their own projects and offered each other advice in a more interactive setting. After presenting their project activities and achievements, the session culminated in collecting and grouping common

challenges as well as finding possible solutions together.

Common difficulties named were:

- Securing resources to carry out local projects including funding, as well as suitable infrastructure
- Conducting reliable and quantifiable impact evaluation
- Securing support of the public



iDovers coaching each other in their PVE project work.



## Lessons Learnt

From the fruitful discussions, exchange and active participation of the diverse group of iDovers arose some key learnings as to how best prevent violent extremism and build social cohesion from the bottom up.

Discussants, for instance, overwhelmingly lend support to iDove's claim that **religion is an important vehicle to PVE**. It was repeatedly stressed that even though religion continues to be successfully utilized by violent extremist groups to justify and legitimize their atrocities, religious actors such as faith-based organizations and religious leaders continuously prove to be vital to PVE work. During the opening ceremony, for example, Dr. Inge Baumgarten, Director of the GIZ office to the African Union, recognized the importance of incorporating religious discourse in policy development and international cooperation, specifically leveraging religion as a powerful source for sustainable development and peace.

Further, it was found that factors such as socio-economic inequality, (perceived or actual) grievances, repression, social injustice, political marginalisation, corruption and poor governance, often found in border regions and marginalized areas create an **enabling environment for radicalisation and violent extremism**. However, it needs to be stressed that these are contributing factors and no precondition to violent extremism. Radicalization may as well happen in the absence of these contextual factors.

Moreover, the focus on border regions and marginalized areas has proven to be a central issue with regard to PVE. Nevertheless, since border regions differ greatly from one another in terms of the degree of marginalization, the challenges young people are facing, the degree and nature of cross-border cooperation and so forth, it is important to discuss the respective regional and local context. Thus, to **avoid generalization** in the future it will be necessary to centre discussions on in-depth case studies. In a similar vein, to preserve the transcontinental character of iDove and maximize the learning benefits for the participants, it will be necessary to ensure that **as many perspectives as possible are included in discussion**.

Lastly, the forum has once again made apparent that **young people profit greatly from platforms such as iDove allowing them to engage in mutual exchange and learning**. Evaluating their experience, the participants overwhelmingly indicated that their most valuable take-aways stemmed from the personal connections they have made and exchanges they had with their peers. As the Chief of Staff of the African Union Commission, Mr. Wane El-Ghassim put it; "iDove was created as a youth led, bottom up approach to prevent violent extremism. It engages youth who are academics, policy makers, community workers and creative. iDove succeeded in transcending borders and continents to bring all the youth brilliant minds, to design effective and impactful solutions".

## Way forward

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Intercontinental Youth Forum was only the start of a multitude of activities planned in the second phase of iDove.

Firstly, with the finalization of the iDove Training Manual, [iDove Trainings and Trainings of Trainers](#) will be carried out in regular intervals, starting this year with local trainings in Niger and Liberia. With the objective of empowering youth to play an active role in preventing violent extremism and building social cohesion in their communities, the trainings are integral to the iDove project. A Training of Trainers taking place early 2019 in the Balkan region, will allow for more trainings to be conducted in Europe as well as Africa and further spread the message of iDove.

Secondly, building on the prototypes developed during the forum, the idea of a '[Serious Gaming App](#)' will be further explored to raise awareness on violent extremism and radicalization processes in a playful, encouraging and informative manner. Serious games, if well thought through, are highly stimulating

and capable of processing information and capturing players' concentration span. If the game is convincing, users will distribute it themselves amongst their respective constituencies. The game should offer a first interesting encounter with the topic of (preventing) violent extremism and provide some background information to its users; thus, initiating reflection on the topic as well as possibilities of prevention and further critical reflection.

Thirdly, a concept will be developed of how to [better connect the iDovers](#) apart from physical meetings in the framework of trainings and forums. In that regard, the iDove team intends to give iDovers the opportunity to engage in continuous knowledge sharing through digital means.

Finally, building on the experiences and lessons learned of this year's forum, a 3<sup>rd</sup> Intercontinental Youth Forum is being planned for 2019.