

Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove)

African Union

Context

Violent extremism is a global issue. Whether it has political, ideological, racist or religious roots, the problem of youth radicalisation affects African and European societies in the same way. The common response of using coercive hard power to counter violent extremism has only limited effect and comes at a high cost, both financially and in terms of human lives.

Preventing violent extremism (PVE) and building social cohesion globally 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.

Religious leaders and organisations often play a vital role in local communities, particularly in remote areas, and are, therefore, potential key partners in the approach to PVE. Youth activists are also often already involved in community work and deeply engaged in strengthening social cohesion and PVE.

Against this background, the African Union Commission's Directorate of Citizens and Diaspora Organizations (AUC-CIDO) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) have jointly launched the iDove pilot project, using innovative youth-led approaches to highlight the soft power of religion in PVE.



Young participants at iDove Forum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Quick Facts

Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
Implemented by	Sector Programme Values, Religion and Development
Bilateral GIZ programme partner	Support of the African Union (AU) in the prevention and management of violent conflicts and peace consolidation in the context of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)
National partner	The Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) of the African Union Commission
Project region	Africa
Sector	Peace and Security
Duration	August 2016 – November 2019

Objectives

- Provide an innovative youth-led approach.
- Draw on the soft power of religion.
- Foster intra- and interfaith dialogue.
- Initiate a strategic countermovement in order to prevent violent extremism.
- Promote mutual respect and understanding based on intra- and interfaith, interreligious and intercultural values as core principles.
- Set up a platform of exchange and learning for youth working on PVE and building social cohesion.
- Use digital components to counter the recruitment of youth into violent extremist groups.



iDove logo

Our approach

Religion is often exploited to legitimise violent extremism, particularly among young people. Nevertheless, religion is not the main cause of radicalisation. Actual or perceived social grievances and injustice as well as political, economic and social exclusion are some of the many contributing factors behind violent extremism. By building on existing initiatives and supporting young people's engagement and ideas, we aim to develop non-violent approaches to problem solving that strengthen social cohesion and create a forum for exchange and learning.

The first phase of iDove began with the Intercontinental Youth Forum held in Addis Ababa in February 2017. Forty young leaders in PVE, comprising representatives of civil society organisations, policy-makers, scholars and creative arts experts, were selected from a pool of over 4,000 applicants from 24 African and 8 European countries. The young leaders and activists, called 'iDovers', exchanged ideas with scientists, religious actors and with former radicals who subsequently disengaged. By creating innovative frameworks for PVE, the participants acquired a sense of ownership and common identity around being an iDover. This uniqueness of the iDove brand has informed all activities planned and executed under its umbrella to date.

A rich dialogue between youth leaders during the Intercontinental Youth Forum led to a diverse range of unique local initiatives, including four small-scale projects, which were selected and given financial support. The projects cover communication, virtual and community initiatives, such as media training, capacity building, arts and sports, and are currently being implemented in Mali, Kenya, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Alongside the small-scale projects, the Intercontinental Youth Forum also laid the foundation for a series of local

workshops that aim to empower youth to play an active role in PVE and in building cohesive communities. The workshops are conducted by iDovers themselves in different communities in Africa and Europe. A pilot course to train the trainers was held in the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa in February 2018. Six iDovers and a selected group of PVE experts discussed how best to deploy soft power approaches and interreligious dialogue in the context of PVE initiatives. A manual was developed for the training.

One key factor in PVE is knowledge. Knowledge about radicalisation and recruitment processes, knowledge about one's own culture and religion, and knowledge about how to find help. An idea therefore emerged to raise awareness of violent extremism and radicalisation processes using a playful, positive and informative approach through the medium of a web app. In early 2018, iDove started working on the concept of a so-called serious game, which can be played on computers and smartphones.

The second Intercontinental Youth Forum is scheduled to take place in West Africa in the second half of 2018. The focus will again be on violent extremism among young people both in Europe and Africa. This time, however, special attention will be paid to the border regions and marginalised areas where the youth are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.

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As at	June 2018

GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

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