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A close-up photograph of two hands, one appearing to be in a dark, possibly black, sleeve or glove, with the other hand visible. The hands are positioned as if one is holding or supporting the other. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface.

**Key principles and
recommendations**
for the management
of violent extremist
prisoners and the
prevention of radicalization
to violence in prisons



Managing violent extremist prisoners: fundamental issues

- Prisoner radicalization is not in itself a threat to the prison administration or society if not connected to violence. Not all radicalization is negative or a precursor to violent extremism. Only a very small number of radicals actually become violent extremists.
- Prison administrations should ensure the secure and safe custody of violent extremist prisoners; prevent radicalization to violence within prisons; seek to ensure that prisoners disengage from future violence; and prepare those being released for their reintegration into the community.
- Good prison management and necessary reforms constitute a fundamental basis for the effective management of all prisoners, including violent extremist prisoners. Stand-alone interventions for violent extremist prisoners which are implemented in isolation of the broader prison context are unlikely to yield positive results.
- The challenges posed by violent extremist prisoners must be addressed in full compliance with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and other relevant international standards and norms, including from a gender perspective.
- Any efforts in prison to address violent extremism must not lead to undermining fundamental human rights to which all persons, including violent extremist prisoners, are entitled, including the freedom of thought, religion or belief, and the absolute prohibition of torture.
- Appropriate security measures must be implemented that maintain a proper balance between physical, procedural and dynamic security elements. All prisons holding violent extremist prisoners should have in place a structured prison intelligence system consistent with national legislation and international standards.
- Prison administration should cooperate with other law enforcement and criminal justice agencies concerning the violent extremist prisoners held in their custody. Intelligence and other relevant information should be shared across agencies.
- Prison authorities have an obligation to ensure that prisons are safe places, where prisoners, staff, service providers and visitors can go about their daily business without fear for their physical well-being. Maintaining control in prison through situational and social control methods is fundamental to ensuring safety and order.



Managing prison staff and other resource persons working with violent extremist prisoners

- Prison staff have an obligation to protect, maintain and uphold the human dignity of all offenders, including violent extremist prisoners. Prison staff who are to work with this challenging category of prisoners should be carefully selected for their integrity, humanity, professional capacity, personal suitability and ability.
- Prison administrations should have a clear policy to encourage suitable individuals to apply to work in prisons holding violent extremist prisoners. The conditions of service for those staff should reflect the challenges and importance of their role.
- All staff should receive specialist training for working with violent extremist prisoners. Furthermore, prison administrations should take appropriate steps to ensure the personal safety of staff who work in prisons holding violent extremist prisoners, both while on duty and while outside of the prison, including their family members.
- Prison staff should maintain high levels of professional standards and ethics at all times when working with violent extremist prisoners. Appropriate support mechanisms should be put in place to enable staff to cope with the stress of working in prisons holding violent extremist prisoners.
- The staffing level for each prison should be set at the level required to ensure the security, safety and stability of the institution. It is essential that sufficient staff are appointed to guarantee security and safety, as well as to ensure the implementation of constructive regime activities, including disengagement interventions.
- Sufficient specialist staff, such as psychologists, social workers and faith leaders, should be appointed to lead disengagement interventions. Other resources, such as victims and victims' advocates, former violent extremists, family members and significant others, members of the community, and non-governmental organizations may play a significant part in the successful delivery of disengagement interventions.



Assessing and managing the risks posed by violent extremist prisoners

- Upon admission of a violent extremist prisoner, a thorough, evidence-based risk and needs assessment should be undertaken by specially trained staff. As opposed to doing so only upon entry, the assessment of risks and needs of violent extremist prisoners should be carried out on an ongoing and regular basis.
- The assessment and management of pretrial detainees should take into account their specific vulnerability, which may also include a particular susceptibility to the efforts of violent extremist recruiters. However, prison administrations must also be aware that any intervention including pretrial violent extremist prisoners may have an impact on their respective court cases, which may discourage participation.
- Structured professional judgement should be used in making the assessments of violent extremist prisoners. Assessment tools specifically tailored to identify individual risks and current levels of radicalization to violence, as well as the risk of undertaking future violent extremism-related activity, including post-release, should be developed and used according to the national context and capacities. Such tools should also consider the risk of others being radicalized to violence.
- Each violent extremist prisoner's assessment should identify the personal and contextual circumstances which contributed to his or her (alleged) offence, and which are likely to contribute to such offending in the future. The findings of this risk assessment should be used to identify the prisoner's needs and interventions that will assist the prisoner in disengaging from violence and to enable the prisoner's social reintegration.
- All violent extremist prisoners should be (a) separated according to gender, legal status, and age; (b) classified according to the information gained through the risk and needs assessment; and (c) categorized according to the appropriate level of security they will need to be held in. Violent extremist prisoners should be held in the least restrictive setting necessary for their safe and secure custody.
- Consideration should be given as to how best to house violent extremist prisoners within each prison system. The suitability of separation, concentration, dispersal or integration approaches (or a mix thereof) will depend on specific factors within the country, including the size of the violent extremist prison population, the prison infrastructure and the capacity, the size and skills level of staff, as well as the resources and capacity to deliver disengagement programmes.



Prison-based disengagement interventions

- Underpinning the approach of disengagement interventions should be the concept that if an individual can adopt radical beliefs and attitudes that lead to violent extremism, that individual can also abandon the use of violence through changing those beliefs and attitudes that justify its use.
- No single model of disengagement is universally applicable. To be effective, efforts must be highly tailored to the country and culture involved, the individual prisoners participating and the environment into which the former violent extremist prisoners are ultimately released.
- Disengagement-related interventions may consist of a variety of activities including: psychological counselling and support; cognitive-behavioural programmes; social work interventions; faith-based debate and dialogue; education; vocational training; creative therapies; physical therapies (e.g. yoga, sport, exercise); family activity; and social, cultural and recreational activities.
- To be effective, disengagement and social reintegration interventions should further be gender-sensitive and address the varying experiences, as well as the specific obstacles and challenges which women may face.
- Taking due account of the availability of resources, the delivery of disengagement and social reintegration interventions for violent extremist prisoners should not have a negative impact on, but be accompanied by, the delivery of rehabilitation programmes for the “regular” prison population in order not to provide any “special group” status, which may result in hostility or other prisoners aspiring to be violent extremists.
- The goal of all the above-mentioned prison-based interventions related to violent extremist prisoners should be to change their behaviour so that they renounce the use of violence to achieve their objectives. This reflects the fact that having a radical belief system alone is not necessarily a threat to prison (or community) safety and security.
- Reporting on disengagement activity is an important feature to ensure accountability, to facilitate the adaptation of interventions, and as a foundation for evaluation. Monitoring and evaluating an intervention should equally occur to determine whether the goals were appropriate, the activities were efficiently implemented and the objectives were met.
- A key element for ensuring the continuous development of interventions, learning and advocacy related to the disengagement of violent extremist prisoners is independent research of the highest quality.



Managing the implementation of disengagement interventions

- An integrated case management system approach should be adopted for violent extremist prisoners, which uses a common framework, tools and language to assess, identify needs and monitor progress, and which updates the outcomes during violent extremist prisoners' imprisonment, transition to release and community supervision.
- All practitioners, including security, custodial, ancillary, supervisory and administrative staff members who do not have a direct role to play in delivering structured interventions, should contribute to maintaining conditions conducive to intervention delivery and to supporting progress in disengagement.
- Where available, an intervention team should include a multidisciplinary group of specialists who implement disengagement interventions, including: psychologists, psychiatrists, faith leaders, sports instructors, art therapists, social workers, vocational guidance officers, teachers and health-care professionals.
- For intervention team members to engage effectively with violent extremist prisoners, it is important that each intervention team has one or more members who speak the language of the violent extremist prisoners held in the prison in which they work.
- The specific duties of the intervention team should include: undertaking an initial assessment of violent extremist prisoners to identify risks, needs and appropriate interventions; completing and updating case file records; delivering interventions; participating in case conferences; completing reassessments at regular intervals; and using the materials, tools and equipment provided for disengagement interventions.
- The intervention team should work closely with the director of the prison in which they operate to ensure that the director is fully aware of intervention requirements and activities, and that those requirements and activities are appropriate to the security arrangements within that prison.
- At headquarters level, there should be a supervisory or management team that holds overall responsibility for establishing, overseeing the development, implementation and evaluation of interventions, as well as providing mentoring and support for the prison-based intervention teams.
- A single dynamic case file should be developed soon after a violent extremist prisoner's admission to the prison, which should be updated and modified as he/she progresses through the institution. Intervention team members should attend regular team meetings, participate in case reviews, and contribute to case conferences.
- Any institution implementing interventions will require a range of facilities including: meeting rooms (for one-to-one interviews and counselling); classrooms (for group work, presentations and lectures); worship facilities; vocational training and other workshops; sports and exercise facilities; and facilities for creative and arts therapy.
- Violent extremist prisoners should be informed about the purpose of the interventions and the way they operate. Staff members should explain to violent extremist prisoners that participation in the programme is voluntary. Appropriate incentives should be put in place to encourage violent extremist prisoners to participate in interventions.
- Institutions should consider various ways to show recognition for participation in, and completion of, interventions including graduation ceremonies, awarding certificates and medals and inviting family and senior representatives of the community and/or community agencies to attend.
- In order to gain public reassurance and understanding, regular work with the media should take place to explain the positive disengagement activity taking place in prison, the types and purpose of interventions being delivered and the positive impact that they can have on violent extremist prisoners.



Preventing radicalization to violent extremism in prison

- While there is limited empirical evidence which would suggest a significant level of radicalization to violence in prisons, a number of factors and grievances (actual or perceived) unique to the prison context may, under certain circumstances, render prisoners more susceptible to being radicalized to violence.
- Prison administrators should implement measures to prevent prisons becoming locations in which violent extremism can thrive and where prisoners can be radicalized to violence. Addressing prison conditions and overcrowding are an essential part of efforts to avoid that prisoners join a violent extremist group for protection or for the satisfaction of basic physical needs.
- Recruiters are able to spot, assess and encourage potential vulnerable recruits to join a violent extremist cause and use a variety of approaches to recruitment. Prison administrations should be aware that they do not necessarily have a high profile, and often seem to conform to the prison regime. Charismatic leaders, on the other hand, are able to exploit emotional triggers such as hatred, revenge and frustration, and to guide the formation of a group identity around shared ideological commitment to using violence in order to achieve goals.
- Where there is evidence that a prisoner has been attempting to radicalize other prisoners to violence, prompt and decisive action should be taken (e.g. restrictions on his or her association with vulnerable prisoners, supervision of interactions, or transfers to another prison wing or prison).
- A number of indicators in the categories of (a) expressed opinions; (b) possession of relevant material; and (c) behaviour/behavioural changes may suggest vulnerability to radicalization to violence. Prison staff will need to take into consideration how reliable or significant signs are and whether there are other factors or issues that could indicate vulnerability.
- If prison administrations consider that support to reduce vulnerability to radicalization to violence is required, they should devise an appropriate support package for the prisoner being recruited.



Preparing violent extremist prisoners for reintegration into the community

- In the vast majority of cases, violent extremist prisoners will at some point be released back into the community. Supporting the reintegrating of violent extremist prisoners into the community should therefore be a key element in any strategy for preventing and countering violent extremism.
- An individual release plan should be developed that identifies the violent extremist prisoner's reintegration needs and circumstances, and determines the type of interventions that the prisoner should access in order to maximize his or her chances for successful reintegration.
- Prison-based interventions should be put in place to prepare violent extremist prisoners for their release and re-entry into the community. The aim should be to move violent extremist prisoners to progressively less restrictive settings, based on periodic individual risk assessments.
- The social reintegration of violent extremist prisoners requires a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, with strong coordination among the different stakeholders involved, including civil society organizations, public institutions, the private sector, NGOs, families and communities. If relevant, psychological and religious counselling, employment assistance and/or support to the family should continue.
- Families can be vital partners in the reintegration process, and should be involved before the release of the violent extremist prisoner. Families can also play important monitoring functions after release. However, care should be taken to account for the fact that in some cases, the family can be part of the problem and hinder the disengagement process.
- In order to create a welcoming and enabling environment and with a view to reduce stigmatization, educating society and public opinion is necessary to create social awareness and try to break barriers and prejudices around former violent extremist prisoners.
- Consideration should be given to providing protective measures when there is credible information that a reformed violent extremist may face threats to his or her life, or the lives of family members, during or upon release from custody.
- Formal or informal monitoring and supervision post-release can be an effective method to deter or interrupt recidivism. Close supervision and guidance can support and reinforce any pre-release agreements or contracts the former violent extremist prisoner has agreed to upon release.



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Vienna International Centre, P.O. Box 500, 1400 Vienna, Austria
Tel.: (+43-1) 26060-0, Fax: (+43-1) 26060-5866, www.unodc.org