

Thank you Mr Chairperson,

Your Excellencies and distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

This African regional high level conference on prevention of Violent Extremism highlights the importance of enhancing the resilience of young people from vulnerable communities. The intervention relates specifically to a question posed in **Session II: How can youth be engaged to prevent violent extremism in Africa?**

As Human Security Collective, a Dutch civil society organization working on the nexus between development and security **at home and in international contexts**, we work – amongst others – in the field of awareness-raising/education/learning-by-doing/peer-to-peer exchange – to prevent youth from radicalization.

More than any other generation, young people these days are **exposed online** to peers with the widest possible range of cultural backgrounds, beliefs, values and perspectives. This however, has not necessarily led to increased social cohesion. On the contrary, ‘information bubbles’ and ‘echo chambers’ reinforce **us versus them thinking/populism/hate speech, etc.**

It is therefore important to reach out to **teenagers who take part in anti-social group behaviour** through **role models/mentors.**

These mentors are trusted and respected by these teenagers as they are from the same vulnerable neighbourhoods. They model the sort of behaviour we want to see off and online – citizenship values, respect for diversity, dignity, nonviolent communication and empathy.

These mentors facilitate safe space for teenagers to talk about grievances, and together with teenagers they analyze what safety in their neighbourhoods looks like. It is about perceptions of safety by youth themselves, as **their insights are crucial in understanding the complexity of radicalization.**

These mentors implement creative and energetic activities together with teenagers and other community members that improve **social cohesion - as a way to re-humanize, re-socialize vulnerable group behaviour.**

In essence this type of role-modelling is about **embracing diversity to work towards a society that everyone feels they belong to, instilling the notion of global citizenship.** It is the interplay among youth and between youth and the larger community **and the change engendered by these relationships** that is at the core of this mentorship.

These **inclusive leadership skills** practiced by these mentors are much needed at **every level of intervention** we are currently discussing.

If you are interested in learning more, specifically about two tailor-made approaches on **mentorship in Tunisia and Kenya, in which good practices and lessons learnt are showcased, we welcome you at our side event tomorrow morning from 7.45–9.15 in Room 11.**

Thank you.

(check against delivery)