

## **BUILDING ON THE GCTF's ROME MEMORANDUM:**

### **Additional Guidance on the Role of Psychologists/Psychology in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs**

**Note:** This document will be submitted to the GCTF and to the UN's Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute to provide additional guidance to GCTF members and other countries who are attempting to incorporate the Rome Memorandum into their own programs. This document summarizes the conclusions/findings of the expert workshop convened by Hedayah and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) in Abu Dhabi, May 8-9, 2013. The list of participants in that session is below. **The participants have not, however, endorsed this document.**

## **GOOD PRACTICES**

### **Setting Program Goals**

- Governments must set realistic goals for the rehabilitation programs for violent extremist offenders, recalling that even in non-terrorist cases, there are many incidents of recidivism, and we should expect likewise in these types of cases. Programs should have explicitly outlined short-term and long-term goals, ensuring that these goals are also consistent with one another.
- The goals for rehabilitation should be set by those in charge of the rehabilitation program in consultation with a variety of actors, including psychologists.
- Not every inmate should be a candidate for a rehabilitation program. There are inmates who are too extreme, and whose views are too hardened and rigid to be considered, though countries should make these decisions carefully and methodically.
- Expectations should be set realistically for rehabilitating “lone wolves,” who have different personality types, motivating factors and personal needs than terrorists who are part of broader organizations. Their need for approval and close human connections is often far less, and as such, their violent extremist beliefs and behavior can be more difficult to reverse.
- Countries should consider naming their rehabilitation and reintegration programs and its participants with monikers that carry less baggage, and make it easier for the inmates (and others) to begin to perceive themselves differently.

### **Building a Relationship of Trust**

- Psychologists must build relationships of trust with the inmates to have psychological breakthroughs; this can take real time and effort. On the part of the psychologist, treating the detainee with respect and as a fellow human being is the first step in this process. This can make a big difference, particularly because the detainees are often expecting to be treated harshly by the state. It can help create cognitive dissonance,

and begin to break down the inmate's rigidly held views. Psychologists should not be discouraged by detainees' unwillingness to talk or meet with them at the outset, and should expect that this will be a long-term process.

- Where possible, countries should try to ensure continuity in the psychological counseling for inmates, and have the same psychologist(s) remain with the detainee throughout. A lack of continuity can make it far more difficult to build trust.
- Prison staff and other actors in this process should also be encouraged by the psychologists to treat these prisoners with respect to reinforce the building of trust.

### **Role of Academia**

- It is important to have a continual circle of feedback between academics and practitioners in this area. The practitioner's efforts can be informed by academic research and insight, and the academic work should be informed in turn by what is and is not working in a real-life setting.

### **The Importance of Regular Assessments**

- To measure the success of the psychological interventions, it is important to conduct a baseline psychological assessment at the beginning of the treatment, and then again at regular intervals throughout. Often, the assessment over time will inform the baseline assessment as more information comes to light. Regular assessments can also help inform decisions for managing the detainee in prison and guide prison officials on determinations of whether the detainee is ready to be released. It can also help prison officials assess what the post-release plan should be, both in terms of ongoing monitoring and conditions, and psychological care. Whenever feasible, assessment of inmates exposed to a rehabilitation program should be compared to similar assessments of a control group which has not been part of these types of programs.
- Prisons should use a variety of tools to measure the risk presented by the inmate, including specialized tools designed to measure risk for terrorist inmates. The general risk tools for violence can provide misleading assessments for terrorists, often understating the potential for violence, since these inmates may not possess the same types of psychopathologies that general, violent criminal offenders may have. Prisons should attempt to use a mix of tools, including those that rely on observational insights and reports and those that survey the inmate themselves to ensure that they have adequately identified the criminogenic risks and needs.
- It is important to use standardized assessment batteries that allow comparisons between rehabilitation programs in different countries; these should be supplemented by assessment tools tailored to the specific conditions and cultural context.
- Establishment of trust with the detainees is also critical in setting up the assessment process. It is important to convey to the detainees that assessment research does not put them at risk, and in fact is designed to understand their needs and respond to them to the greatest extent possible. Countries may also want to communicate that the assessors are not attempting to exploit the detainees' cooperation for their own ends,

and that the detainees will be given feedback about the results of the assessment if they are interested.

- Ideally, the person performing the assessments should not be the same person who is implementing the interventions.

### **A Team Approach**

- Psychologists must be in rehabilitation programs as part of a closely knit team, and not as an independent actor. The rehabilitation of the detainees must be a holistic, group effort, with all elements of the program integrated effectively and complementary to one another. Psychologists should make a particular effort to develop close relationships with the correctional officers, who are with the inmates 24/7 and will be able to provide the psychologists with important windows into the detainees' mental condition. It is vital that positive engagement and agreed upon approaches are reinforced by all actors involved.
- The teams involved in rehabilitation programs should be cross-disciplinary in nature – but equally important to have the right personnel in terms of titles, is having the right competencies involved. Countries who do not have trained psychologists could consider alternative ways to satisfy this threshold, for instance by providing relevant training to existing prison staff.
- Those in charge of the prison rehabilitation programs must also be the ones to determine how to integrate psychologists into the programs, with input from the psychologists, to ensure that the psychologists are incorporated effectively into a comprehensive, well thought out team approach.
- Prison leadership and prison staff all need to receive training that enables them to understand the role and importance of psychology in a rehabilitation program.
- To prevent counseling practices from becoming too intense and demanding for the psychologists and to ensure that the intervention remains a collective effort, regular feedback sessions with superiors or colleagues are especially useful.

### **Segregating Inmates**

- Prisons should consider separating terrorist group leaders and influential ideologues from other inmates, for a variety of reasons. First, terrorist group leaders/ideologues may continue to maintain influence over the followers, and make it more difficult for them to move away from terrorism. Second, the leaders/ideologues may be able to radicalize other non-extremist inmates, especially in overcrowded settings. And finally, segregating leaders may give them more of an opportunity and the psychological space to reconsider their own ideology; leaders will be unlikely to do so if those who looked up to them are in such close proximity.

### **Tailoring Rehabilitation Programs and Interventions**

- Rehabilitation programs should be tailored for individual inmates, where possible. A one size fits all program will not be sufficiently effective. Understanding why

individuals joined a terrorist group is particularly important in determining what the overall rehabilitation effort should focus on. Risk assessment and criminogenic needs should help guide the specific type of interventions.

- For example, a former terrorist leader will require a different strategy than a foot soldier. For terrorist leaders/key figures, their psychological needs were often being fulfilled by the status they had in these groups; it is key to find a way to address this need in their new life, to prevent them from returning to a life of violence. At the core, fulfilling the individual's need for significance is key.
- It is vital that prison management and other actors allow for flexibility in the programming and allow for lapses in behavior that sometimes may occur as part of the progress to meaningful disengagement and desistance.

### **Reducing Stigmas for Reintegration**

- The community stigma about terrorists can often hinder a detainee's reintegration. The detainee can be regarded as a threat by some members of the community, while others may regard him as a sell-out for renouncing his former terrorist affiliation. Psychologists must work to overcome these stigmas to increase the odds of success.
- Countries should promote success stories from their rehabilitation and reintegration programs. This can have a number of positive effects, including: increasing the political will for these programs; increasing the prison staffs' eagerness for these programs and willingness to put maximum effort in; make communities and families more willing to encourage their detainees to go through it; put less of a stigma on detainees when they emerge; and make inmates more willing to participate in these programs.

### **Timing is Everything in Psychological Interventions**

- Timing is everything in terms of interventions. There are certain windows where the detainee will be most open to change, and the psychologist should be attuned to that fact and adjust the treatment accordingly.
- There are several primary issues at play with terrorists psychologically. They have grievances, have identified a culprit for the grievances, and have justified violence on moral and instrumental grounds. Changing the first two are hard, but addressing the third is the most necessary; ensuring that the detainee no longer is willing to use or support the use of violence as a means to address their grievances is the ultimate key to success, and is also the most achievable goal. Psychologists should focus at the outset on changing this (i.e. the individual's behavior) as opposed to beliefs. Changing and challenging the ideology should be the focus at stages where the psychologist determines that the inmate will be more likely to be receptive to these types of messages. From an ethics standpoint, this approach is also easier to justify as in most countries it is the use of violence which is criminalized, not the holding of extremist beliefs.
- The timing of the rehabilitation program is important; beginning a program before conviction can be damaging, as the judicial process, conviction and sentencing can

help reinforce the individual's self-identification as a terrorist, potentially undermining any rehabilitation attempt. Starting a program only in the last phases of a long prison sentence, on the other hand, can be equally ineffective.

- Outside actors, including families, victims and former terrorists should only be incorporated at the appropriate time, when the psychologist deems that the inmate will be most open to these types of interventions and have the best chance to result in positive change.

### **Importance of Identity**

- The basic psychological hurdle with terrorist inmates is often that the detainee has rejected many of their former identities, and now has only one super-identity, regarding their membership in a terrorist group. Activating and drawing out their old multiple identities (e.g. father, sibling, active community member, athlete, musician, etc.) is key. This process is and should be a gradual one.
- Families can play a particularly important role in helping the detainee rediscover old identities not associated with being a member of a terrorist group, though it is also important to recognize that not all families offer this environment for positive change.

### **Balancing Security Needs and Reintegration Goals**

- Governments will have to carefully balance their security needs and the reintegration goals; placing too much emphasis on security and monitoring can make it more difficult for a detainee to reintegrate, in part because this will increase the stigma in the community about this individual. Overly severe restrictions on liberty can also reinforce the former detainee's grievances against the state, making it less likely that their attitudes and beliefs will shift in a positive direction. On the other hand, too little security and the detainee returning to a life of terrorism will greatly damage the credibility of the program in the long-term.
- In this respect, psychologists must work closely with probation officers and the police to manage and balance these needs and risks. The security posture should be informed by the psychologists' risk assessments of the individual.

### **Reintegration: The Critical Post-Release Period**

- The period right after release is most critical, and will likely be the most difficult for the detainee, their family and community. The families' routine and dynamics have likely changed while the detainee was in prison, with their spouses and children taking on more responsibilities than they had in the past. There will be a considerable adjustment period upon release, as the detainee works his way back into the family structure and community. Psychologists should be alert to this risk and should be deeply involved at this stage, in assisting both the detainees and their families.
- Psychologists should be working with the detainees' families and communities as an important part of a holistic plan. This can help lay the groundwork for a successful release and reintegration. This can and should be done in advance of the detainees' release.

## **Psychologists' Physical Security**

- There is a real fear and risk element to these jobs, with psychologists worried not only about their own security but the security of their families. Psychologists must be trained to deal with this fear, and must build resilience to handle difficult situations. The prison management should also be taking steps to ensure their physical security.
- Psychologists should ensure that they have an adequate support network in prisons, both to compare notes, get advice on cases, and to discuss concerns they may have, particularly about their own safety.

## **Specialized Training**

- Psychologists should have specialized training and experience in this area before participating in a rehabilitation program. They should have at least a baseline understanding of both violent extremism and terrorism, and where possible, a basic understanding of the foundational elements of rehabilitation/reintegration programs in a prison setting. However, psychologists should also recognize that working with other offender populations is also valuable experience for dealing with violent extremists, and should not regard this particular segment of offenders as too challenging or different to work with.
- Psychologists must also understand that treating terrorists can often be different than other violent offenders. Some terrorist offenders may have little outward psychopathology, but research shows that many are emotionally vulnerable and have identity and status issues. Treatment plans should be designed accordingly.

## **CHALLENGES/OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS**

- Psychology often carries a stigma with it, making detainees reluctant to meet with psychologists and receive treatment, as they are unwilling to admit that they need assistance, or do not have a clear idea of what psychologists do and how they can help.
- Psychologists in rehabilitation programs are generally employed by the state, which the detainee regards as the root of problems and as “the enemy.” This can be a major hurdle in psychologists’ efforts to build relationships of trust with the detainees.
- There is also often skepticism of psychologists and psychology among the prison leadership and prison staff as well, impeding psychologists’ role in the system and making it more difficult for them to successfully do their jobs.
- The label “terrorist” can induce fear in prison staff, management and other actors in the rehabilitation process, making it more difficult to effectively engage with this specific prison population.
- The language used to describe the programs can also hinder progress. Some violent extremists do not want to be a part of a “rehabilitation” program because they do not believe that there is anything wrong with them that needs to be fixed.
- Some research shows that there are terrorists who appear cognitively intact and do not suffer from outward psychopathologies, as opposed to other violent offenders. Further probing and an array of tests to uncover the emotional issues at play can be helpful in preventing misdiagnoses and ill designed treatment programs.
- Detainees often face enormous challenges when attempting to reintegrate into society, with communities often leery of accepting a supposedly reformed terrorist, and their former networks and influences ready to lure them back into the fold.
- The broader political will for these types of rehabilitation programs can often be lacking, which can have a real impact on their success.

HEDAYAH/ICCT EXPERT MEETING ON THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN  
REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST OFFENDERS  
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