COUNTER-NARRATIVES TO CYBER EXTREMISM THROUGH APPS AND VIDEO GAMES
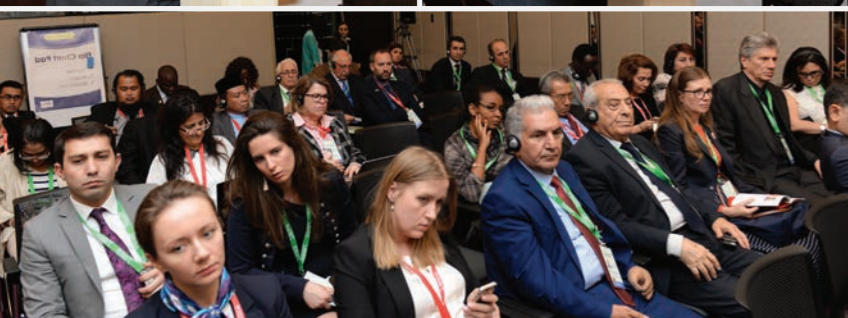
Breakout Session,
26 April 2016, 16:30-18:00

SPEAKERS:

Dr. Adel Iskandar
Professor, Simon Fraser University

Mr. Tim Receveur
Director, PeaceTeach Exchanges, PeaceTechLab

Mr. Aaditeshwar Seth
Co-founder, GramVaadi, Department of Computer Science IIT Delhi

Mr. Hans Shakur
Co-founder, Games for Peace

Ms. Tanya Silverman
Managing Coordinator, Against Violent Extremism Network, Institute for Strategic Dialogue

Moderator: Ms. Renee Black
President, PeaceGeeks

The session provided the opportunity to highlight different best practices focusing on concrete digital platforms that propose narratives different to the ones promoted by media messages exacerbating violent extremism and polarizing discourses.

"The prospect of death is not a deterrent for a young person thinking of joining a violent extremist group; providing them with real opportunities of social inclusion is."
Adel Iskandar

Panellists presented a wide variety of examples, such as: providing simple text communication platforms through smart phones for communities that still lack access to the Internet, which allows the development of local narratives and systems of alert vis-à-vis possible media misrepresentations that could generate social conflicts (GramVaadi); and producing media messages that feature the voices of former inductees of violent extremist groups and are distributed via social media platforms, therewith countering narratives of violent polarization (Institute for Strategic Dialogue).

The session also highlighted the power of creating dialogue between communities perceived as polarized through the creative use of Internet-based video games. The initiative is strategically designed towards the personal interaction of the participants (Games for Peace). Other panellists provided insight into the academic research on the digital spread of narratives of terrorist groups. They pointed at strategic ways to counter-balance them with other narratives, more positive and competent ones in reaching out to younger audiences, who are often already attracted to narratives of conflict (Iskandar).

Finally, the panel also presented capacity building initiatives, where individuals living in conflict zones are provided with hands-on workshops empowering them to build their own digital technologies for peace platforms, reflecting and providing support to their own local communities and needs (PeaceTechLab).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Support the development of digital communication technologies as an integral part of peacebuilding processes.

2. Encourage connecting polarized communities through digital platforms, such as Internet-based video games, which facilitate and foment personal conversations to decrease misrepresentation and damaging social stereotypes.

3. Further develop efforts to identify and engage with individuals at the early stages of developing possible violent fundamentalist ideologies by providing them with digital narratives coming from former radicalized individuals with whom they can identify.

"Young people are more open to pay attention to the disenchanted experiences of former radicalized youth than they are to words of their parents or educators. We need to promote the easy access of these kinds of narratives in the social media platforms."
Tanya Silverman