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## **International Engagement in Countering Youth Radicalisation: Sri Lanka's Untapped Opportunities**

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## I. Introduction

The Easter Sunday attacks that took place in Sri Lanka on 21 April 2019 are a stark reminder of the country's fragile peace and the urgent need for strong leadership in the area of counter radicalisation. Following the attacks, Prime Minister [Ranil Wickremesinghe stated](#)<sup>1</sup> that the government's priority is to apprehend those responsible and end the network that led to the attacks. Sri Lanka will seek international support in this regard, and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) will [assist](#)<sup>2</sup> the investigation. However, media reports suggest that there were [lapses in sharing of information](#)<sup>3</sup>—between the country's multiple intelligence agencies and the government—that indicated terrorist attacks are in the works. Therefore, the country not only needs better measures to prevent such grave security lapses in the future but also needs a more proactive long-term plan to counter and manage radicalisation and its effects – particularly that of youth radicalisation.

Sri Lanka has dealt with youth radicalisation throughout its post-independence history and continues to do so. The Easter Sunday attacks are allegedly the actions of a relatively new extremist group called the [National Thowheed Jamath](#),<sup>4</sup> which is said to be linked to the Islamic State (IS). Therefore, the continuing existence of radical actions and sentiments among youth in Sri Lanka and the threat posed by IS and [Sri Lankans who have joined](#)<sup>5</sup> IS should not be ignored. Around [22%](#)<sup>6</sup> of Sri Lanka's population is between 15 and 29 years old, and this burgeoning population of young people is potentially fertile ground for the sowing of radical ideologies. [A study conducted by PAI](#),<sup>7</sup> a Washington-based advocacy group, indicates a strong correlation between countries with rapidly increasing youth populations and countries prone to civil conflicts. Similarly, [the “youth bulge” theory](#)<sup>8</sup> holds that rapidly growing youth populations result in large groups of unemployed and frustrated young people who are susceptible to radicalisation.

Given the tragic events of Easter Sunday and the challenges that followed, Sri Lanka should recognise the need to cooperate with and learn from other countries to develop stronger counter radicalisation policies that target youth. Failing to engage and implement such policies not only risks the lives of Sri Lankan citizens and foreign nationals but also leaves room for confusion, fake news and misinformation to thrive.

Sri Lanka has many untapped international opportunities to counter a resurgence of youth radicalisation. Additionally, if the government acts effectively and efficiently in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, the country could also play a larger role in shaping counter radicalisation efforts both regionally and globally. This *Policy Brief* attempts to facilitate better and stronger counter radicalisation efforts in Sri Lanka by providing examples of the types of radicalisation in Sri Lanka, explaining the country's previous international engagement to counter radicalisation, and by highlighting gaps in its counter radicalisation efforts. It then considers opportunities to expand engagement to address this issue, at the regional and global level.

## II. Major Types and History of Youth Radicalisation in Sri Lanka

Radicalisation, [as aptly defined by the European Union](#) (EU),<sup>9</sup> is the process by which a person comes to adopt extreme political, social or religious ideas and aspirations that inspire violence or acts of terror. Taking that definition into consideration and relying on a typology of radicalisation developed by the [Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence](#),<sup>10</sup> it is possible to map some of the types of radicalisation involving youth in post-independence Sri Lanka. The types listed below are not meant to be exhaustive, and do not include the most recently named radical groups of the Easter Sunday attacks. Nonetheless, these examples illustrate different examples of radicalisation in Sri Lanka.

### *1. Left-wing radicalisation; the JVP (1960s-1980s)*

The emergence of youth radicalisation in post-independence Sri Lanka can be traced back to the establishment of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in the late 1960s. The JVP was a Marxist-Leninist group composed primarily of rural Sinhalese youth who had become frustrated with the government's failure to provide them avenues for employment and upward social mobility. These grievances provided fertile ground for radicalisation along Marxist-Leninist lines, particularly given the regional and global contexts of the Cold War. The JVP first attempted to seize power from the government in 1971, an insurrection that was suppressed using military force. This was followed by a second attempt in the late 1980s. The JVP's second insurrection, also suppressed by military force, was launched largely [in response to the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987](#)<sup>11</sup> and left up to [60,000 people dead](#).<sup>12</sup> The JVP has since reformed, and is now a major electoral party in Sri Lankan politics.

### *2. Right-wing radicalisation; the LTTE (1976-2009)*

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an ethno-nationalist separatist group, waged war against the Sri Lankan government to carve out an independent state in the North and East of the country for Sri Lanka's Tamil minority. The group engaged in recruiting and radicalising children and youth. It was reported by UNICEF that [over 6,000 child soldiers](#)<sup>13</sup> were recruited by the LTTE between 2003 and 2008. Additionally, following the end of the civil war in 2009, official sources indicate that [over 500 youth](#)<sup>14</sup> from the LTTE entered the government-supported rehabilitation programme.

### *3. Politico-religious radicalisation; the Bodu Bala Sena (2012-present)*

The Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), a hardline Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist group, is active in spreading politico-religious extremism. It has [attracted the support of young Buddhist monks](#)<sup>15</sup> and its leader is said to be [a product of youth radicalisation](#).<sup>16</sup> The recent

radicalisation of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka has been [linked](#)<sup>17</sup> to the radicalisation of youth in the late 1960s (which led to the emergence of the JVP).

Research has suggested a number of reasons for the rise of the BBS, including the [perceived erasure of distinct cultural identities under globalisation](#).<sup>18</sup> Others have argued that the [BBS arose in the wake of the defeat of the LTTE](#),<sup>19</sup> which eliminated the primary ‘other’ (Tamil Sri Lankans) in Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. The resulting vacuum was filled with the ‘otherness’ or imagined threat of hitherto ignored minority groups, especially Muslim Sri Lankans.

The BBS has been accused of [inciting violence against Muslim Sri Lankans](#),<sup>20</sup> including by vandalising mosques, and Muslim houses and businesses. BBS-instigated riots along the southwestern coast of Sri Lanka in 2014 were noted as [the worst](#)<sup>21</sup> ethno-religious violence the country has experienced in the recent past.

### **III. Sri Lanka’s Engagement to Counter Youth Radicalisation**

Having provided an overview of the kinds of youth radicalisation in post-independence Sri Lanka, this article considers below how Sri Lanka has engaged the international community to help counter such youth radicalisation. International engagement so far has broadly taken two forms: *practical* engagement (development of rehabilitation programmes) and *normative* engagement (adoption of international normative frameworks to promote de-radicalisation).

#### *1. Practical Engagement*

After the military defeat of the LTTE in 2009, the Sri Lankan government had custody of approximately [12,000 LTTE cadres](#),<sup>22</sup> including [over 500 youth](#).<sup>23</sup> To de-radicalise and reintegrate this group into society, Sri Lanka [reviewed and adopted](#)<sup>24</sup> elements of rehabilitation and de-radicalisation programmes of various countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Sri Lanka’s efforts largely focused on [Singapore’s rehabilitation model](#),<sup>25</sup> which involves psychologists and religious counsellors as well as programmes like skills development and education. Sri Lanka adapted Singapore’s model to suit its local fabric, the consequence of which was the [“6+1 Rehabilitation Model.”](#)<sup>26</sup>

The 6+1 model [includes six programmes](#):<sup>27</sup> education, vocational training, spiritual growth, recreational activities, psycho-social counselling, and exposure to society, culture and family. The ‘+1’ component includes preparing the wider community to accept and assist in aftercare, to prevent re-radicalisation and marginalisation.

There have been attempts to measure the success of Sri Lanka’s 6+1 model. Researchers, including psychologists from the University of Maryland, used two control groups<sup>28</sup> to assess changes in attitudes and opinions; one group was exposed to

the 6+1 model for nine months, and the other group was not. An analysis of the two control groups signified that over time the group exposed to the 6+1 model changed their attitude<sup>29</sup> towards armed violence, while the other group did not. The [researchers concluded](#)<sup>30</sup> that this finding provides preliminary evidence for the success of the programme – although it does not indicate whether the effect of the programme will last in the long term. While the number of youth de-radicalised through the programme is currently unavailable, official government statistics indicate that over [11,000 participants of the programmes](#)<sup>31</sup> were reintegrated into society.

While this model is not without its flaws and critics, it is nevertheless an important example of Sri Lanka’s attempts to engage with the international community to counter radicalisation.

## *2. Normative Engagement*

In normative engagement, Sri Lanka has sought to counter youth radicalisation by [ratifying the Optional Protocol](#)<sup>32</sup> to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. In ratifying the Optional Protocol, Sri Lanka issued a ‘[Declaration](#)’<sup>33</sup> that: “(a) there is no compulsory, forced or coerced recruitment into the national armed forces; (b) recruitment is solely on a voluntary basis; (c) the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into national armed forces is 18 years.”

Such normative engagement laid, or at least supported, an international framework within which the government raised awareness of the LTTE’s recruitment of child soldiers. Subsequently, organisations such as [Human Rights Watch](#)<sup>34</sup> and [Amnesty International](#)<sup>35</sup> highlighted the LTTE’s recruitment of child soldiers. The radicalisation of children and youth by the LTTE became a symbol of the LTTE’s continued militarisation during the ceasefire agreement of 2002 and contributed to demonstrating the LTTE’s disregard for international law in its treatment of children and youth.

## *3. Gaps in Engagement Efforts*

While Sri Lanka’s efforts to counter youth radicalisation have been largely commendable, they have been narrowly related to tackling youth radicalised by the LTTE. The government is yet to engage globally to counter youth radicalisation driven by other groups and ideologies, and establish counter radicalisation programmes that adapt quickly to emerging trends in radicalisation.

By contrast, other countries have updated their counter radicalisation programmes to maintain their overall effectiveness. In March 2017, Singapore’s Deputy Prime Minister, Teo Chee Hean, pointed to [new global contexts](#)<sup>36</sup> which underscore Singapore’s intolerance for divisive or exclusivist speech – such as the rise of far-right politicians in Europe and anti-immigration policies. Furthermore, a study on ‘[Preventing and Countering Youth Radicalisation in the EU](#)’<sup>37</sup> recommended

radicalisation should be “analysed as a dynamic process in specific contexts in which violence is embedded.”

Therefore, notwithstanding the success of its 6+1 model, Sri Lanka needs to do more to ensure that its counter radicalisation programme remains dynamic and up-to-date, and comprehensive in terms of addressing various kinds of youth radicalisation. Such opportunities are many and varied, but can be broadly classified within the categories of *regional* engagement and *global* engagement.

#### **IV. Opportunities for Regional Engagement**

Regionally, Sri Lanka identifies simultaneously as a state of South Asia, the Bay of Bengal region, and the Indian Ocean region. A country’s regional links increase its vulnerability to radicalisation, but also provide opportunities for engagement and cooperation to counter such radicalisation.

Sri Lanka’s regional engagement could be broadened to include all of the following areas: (1) regional frameworks to define and holistically address contemporary radicalisation, (2) trilateral and bilateral agreements to facilitate targeted counter radicalisation programmes, and (3) networks of practitioners to help implement the frameworks and agreements.

##### *1. Regional Frameworks*

Regional frameworks are valuable in establishing a shared understanding of radicalisation, including its driving factors and contemporary forms. The EU, for example, [has a definition for radicalisation](#)<sup>38</sup> and clearly identifies the types of radicalisation that it views as a threat and will work towards eliminating. By contrast, regional associations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) are yet to define radicalisation, or to identify the drivers and types of radicalisation that exist in member states.

Member states of SAARC signed the “[SAARC Regional Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism](#),”<sup>39</sup> which entered into force in 1988. Additionally, BIMSTEC member states [have already signed](#)<sup>40</sup> a “Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organised Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking” in 2009, and have [worked towards signing](#)<sup>41</sup> a “Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters.” However, neither of these two signed regional conventions addresses youth radicalisation or radicalisation in general.

In March 2017, member states of IORA took the important step of adopting a “[Declaration on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism](#)”<sup>42</sup> at the

IORA Leaders' Summit in Jakarta. The Declaration highlights the "importance of parents, teachers, community leaders, and civil society in countering and preventing youth radicalization," and sets out ways in which IORA member states can work to counter radicalisation in general. Nevertheless, the IORA Declaration stops short of defining radicalisation (including youth radicalisation) or identifying its types.

Sri Lanka could take a leading role in building regional frameworks for SAARC and BIMSTEC, and in transforming the IORA Declaration into a binding agreement, to further a common but dynamic understanding of radicalisation that can support national counter radicalisation policies. Frameworks for cooperation in countering youth radicalisation or radicalisation in general should be developed in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders. They should include a definition of radicalisation, the regional drivers of radicalisation, and the types of radicalisation that are prevalent or could emerge in the region.

The regional framework could also include a legal framework to combat the drivers (and not only the symptoms) of radicalisation. A legal framework would help to guide the formulation of national legislation on radicalisation. Countries have already begun to develop national laws to counter radicalisation without such a regional framework. Examples include Singapore's Undesirable Publications Act,<sup>43</sup> which prohibits publications linked to groups like ISIS,<sup>44</sup> and Sri Lanka's subsidiary legislation<sup>45</sup> sanctioned by the Attorney General's Department, which targets the rehabilitation and reintegration of LTTE combatants.

Finally, the regional framework should include criteria for measuring the success of counter radicalisation efforts. States are familiar with implementing counter radicalisation policies. However, they are yet to focus on measuring the success of implemented counter-radicalisation policies. Mechanisms such as 'randomised controlled trials'<sup>46</sup> can help evaluate and improve the success of counter radicalisation programmes.

In short, regional frameworks would help ensure the coherence of counter radicalisation policies and efforts across countries in the region, while ensuring legislation protects fundamental freedoms and open societies.

## *2. Trilateral and Bilateral Agreements*

Trilateral and bilateral agreements offer additional opportunities to counter youth radicalisation. Given that these agreements involve fewer states, they tend to be easier to negotiate than multilateral agreements, and offer an avenue for targeted and strategic collaboration in counter radicalisation. In 2016, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines agreed<sup>47</sup> to establish a hotline to combat piracy and kidnappings and coordinated patrols in waters of common interest. Sri Lanka would benefit from a

similar agreement with Myanmar and/or Thailand to counter youth radicalisation, since all three countries face [similar issues](#)<sup>48</sup> relating to Buddhist extremism.

Sri Lanka's regional neighbours are already strengthening regional cooperation at the bilateral level to address the threat of radicalisation. India and the Maldives [are developing](#)<sup>49</sup> a “Cross-border Counter Terrorism Mechanism” to counter radicalisation and inhibit citizens from joining terrorist organisations. This is an arrangement that Sri Lanka should consider joining, especially given its location between India and the Maldives.

### *3. Networks of Practitioners*

The regional organisations to which Sri Lanka belongs lack sufficient networks for sharing intelligence, knowledge, and best practices. Developing effective networks for practitioners is essential to successfully implementing frameworks and agreements.

The [Declaration on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism](#),<sup>50</sup> which IORA member states adopted in 2017, recognises, in principle, the need for states to “collaborate to successfully rehabilitate, de-radicalise, and reintegrate radicalized individuals to bolster social cohesion.” An example of how this is being done elsewhere, in practice, is the “[Radicalisation Awareness Network](#)”<sup>51</sup> (RAN) established by the European Commission. The RAN connects practitioners who work at the grassroots level on radicalisation. In particular, working groups allow practitioners to share their knowledge and experiences, and review each other's work related to countering radicalisation.

Sri Lanka could advocate the establishment of regional networks, similar to RAN, for practitioners and policymakers within IORA, SAARC and BIMSTEC, to advance the outcomes of regional agreements and conferences, and implement normative frameworks to counter youth radicalisation.

## **V. Opportunities for Global Engagement**

While Sri Lanka's regional engagement could focus on countering radicalisation at a macro level, it can increase its global engagement to help counter radicalisation at a micro level – within its local communities. This would be useful in addressing domestic aspects of radicalisation, resulting in stronger local resistance to the process of radicalisation. Such global engagement could span four different areas; national policy, educational reform, language reform, and urban planning.

### *1. National Counter Radicalisation Policy*

Sri Lanka lacks a national policy or action plan that focuses on countering radicalisation. In 2014, it launched a [National Youth Policy](#).<sup>52</sup> However, that policy

does not address radicalisation or extremism. By contrast, countries such as [Norway](#)<sup>53</sup> and [Denmark](#)<sup>54</sup> have established action plans related to countering youth radicalisation, and Indonesia has issued [a blueprint](#)<sup>55</sup> for de-radicalisation. Sri Lanka could study the plans of such countries and expand its own youth policy to include counter radicalisation, or develop a counter radicalisation policy that has provisions for countering youth radicalisation. A national policy is essential to provide a framework for sectoral action plans (for example, education, religion, and justice), create public awareness of the issue, and signify political will to tackle the issue.

A national counter radicalisation policy requires input from multiple stakeholders, as well as inter-ministry and inter-agency coordination. Clear ‘ownership’ of the policy is vital to effectively implement such a multi-pronged policy. In Norway, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security is the [main body responsible for coordinating](#)<sup>56</sup> the action plan, including for overseeing other ministries’ specific responsibilities under the action plan. Sri Lanka should similarly assign ownership of the counter radicalisation policy to a single government entity. This could be, for example, the [National Security Council](#),<sup>57</sup> which is an executive body operating under the Ministry of Defence.

## *2. Educational Reform*

It is vital for counter radicalisation efforts to include educational initiatives to stem youth radicalisation. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) [Commission on Countering Violent Extremism](#)<sup>58</sup> has urged the international community to forge a new [global partnership](#)<sup>59</sup> around education reform. This [partnership calls](#)<sup>60</sup> for advancing tolerance, respect for religious diversity, and resilience to extremist narratives. In Sri Lanka, this may require concerted action to integrate students of different ethnicities and religions in schools and classrooms and develop textbooks that foster the thinking and perspectives necessary to counter radicalisation.

Students in Sri Lanka attend schools [segregated by language](#),<sup>61</sup> and to a lesser extent, by religion as well. This prevents youth of different ethno-religious backgrounds from learning and engaging with one another. Furthermore, [research indicates](#)<sup>62</sup> that textbooks in Sri Lanka reinforce ethno-religious divides, and could potentially mobilise youth to participate in establishing exclusive ethno-centric versions of nationalism. This indicates that Sri Lanka needs to bear in mind the relative impact and value of various models of education and school textbooks in counter-radicalisation.

Scholars at the American University in Cairo have argued that the liberal arts model of higher education [is better suited to counter](#)<sup>63</sup> the one-dimensional thinking of radicalisation than ‘STEM’ education. This is supported by a sociological study released by the University of Oxford titled “[Engineers of Jihad](#),”<sup>64</sup> which highlighted the over-representation of engineers in violent radical movements. The liberal arts system by no means excludes ‘STEM’ subjects, and indeed requires the study of the

‘hard’ sciences. However, it also requires exposure to different views in subjects such as history, philosophy and poetry, and is said to [cultivate lateral thinking](#)<sup>65</sup> and the ability to appreciate diverse perspectives on a variety of issues.

Asia’s policymakers have already begun to value the liberal arts education model. In 2011, Singapore established Yale-NUS College – Asia’s first liberal arts college – in partnership with Yale University. Sri Lanka should also work with other countries to establish an educational model that fosters the very type of thinking that radicalisation rejects.

Policymakers in Europe and Asia have also collaborated to develop common history textbooks that present shared narratives. This is expected to foster long-term cohesion and harmony in the region, which would contribute to countering youth susceptibility to radicalisation. In 2006, [France and Germany](#)<sup>66</sup> released a common history textbook developed by historians and five teachers from each country. Similarly, in 2014, it was reported that [ASEAN educationalists and historians](#)<sup>67</sup> have met to explore the possibility of developing a common history textbook for its member states. This initiative is expected to enhance regional relations, which in turn would help ASEAN coalesce into a single market.

A common regional history textbook may not be an immediate priority for Sri Lanka. However, Sri Lanka could engage with countries in Europe and Asia to learn how to develop national textbooks in a way that contributes to reducing youth susceptibility to radicalisation.

### *3. Language Reform*

A national policy to counter youth radicalisation must also tackle issues around language, which have contributed significantly to radicalisation in Sri Lanka. The Official Language Act of 1956, which established Sinhala as the only official language of Sri Lanka, led to Tamil-speaking citizens being marginalised by the state (the percentage of Tamils in the public service decreased from [30% in 1956 to 5% in 1970](#))<sup>68</sup> and facilitated extremist ideologies that led to the LTTE and its violence. The Sri Lankan government has more recently taken measures to address language issues. In 1987, the [13th Amendment to the Constitution](#)<sup>69</sup> made Tamil an official language, and in 2007 public sector employees were mandated to [achieve proficiency](#)<sup>70</sup> in Tamil and Sinhala within five years of being hired.

However, these efforts have not yet translated into significant ‘on the ground’ improvements. [The Economist reported](#)<sup>71</sup> that in 2015-16, approximately 60% of those in the public sector who passed the language exam did so with the lowest possible pass mark, and national identity cards [became bilingual](#)<sup>72</sup> only in 2014. Sri Lanka could learn from the experiences of countries that have successfully reformed their language policy in a manner that more effectively counters radicalisation. Singapore, for instance,

established English as a ‘neutral’ language for [commerce and public administration](#),<sup>73</sup> while still maintaining [four official languages and Malay as the national language](#).<sup>74</sup> In 2016, [73.2% of Singaporeans](#)<sup>75</sup> were literate in at least two languages, which was an increase from [56% in 2000](#).<sup>76</sup>

Singapore has been able to implement its language policy without undermining other cultural identities such as native languages or religion. Government surveys have revealed that even though more people are speaking English at home, and can read and write in more than one language, the proportion of those speaking Mandarin and Tamil and the proportion of people of different religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism) [has remained stable](#).<sup>77</sup> Given that both Singapore and Sri Lanka have multiple ethnicities and religions, it is in Sri Lanka’s interest to learn from Singapore in [undoing language barriers](#)<sup>78</sup> responsible for stirring radicalisation. Building multiple links between linguistic communities improves communication and has long term implications for social cohesion that can prevent radicalisation.

#### *4. Urban Planning*

The potential impact of urban planning in countering radicalisation is yet to be realised, and in Sri Lanka, yet to be acknowledged. Urban planning is another key to the social cohesion that is vital to countering youth radicalisation. In 2016, the Brookings Institution published an article that explained the [role of “third places” in strengthening social cohesion](#).<sup>79</sup> The sociologist [Ray Oldenburg coined the term “third places,”](#)<sup>80</sup> to refer to places where people spend time between home (‘first’ place) and work (‘second’ place). Third places are locations for exchanging ideas, social enjoyment, and building relationships.

Planning cities to provide accessible physical spaces for such interaction could reduce the tendency for youth to seek virtual spaces in their place. The threat of self-radicalisation through virtual platforms is supported by evidence, including a 2008 [study conducted by two researchers](#)<sup>81</sup> at Dublin City University. That study analysed the demographics of those who support video content on YouTube that promoted religious violence among Muslims, and concluded that a majority of them were below 35 years of age who resided *outside* the Middle East and North Africa.

Urban planners abroad are already renovating metropolitan neighbourhoods to increase social cohesion. As an experiment, [a park in Washington D.C. was renovated](#)<sup>82</sup> to allow office workers to reserve tables and chairs to meet or socialise, and in [Maryland, the concept of an ‘Outbox’ was developed to provide a covered workplace outdoors](#).<sup>83</sup> The concept involves a glass-enclosed space in a downtown location, containing wall-less vestibules equipped with Wi-Fi and seating, available for people to use throughout the day.

The world's urban population is expected [to increase by 66% by 2050, and Asia is home to 53% of that global urban population](#).<sup>84</sup> It is vital that urban planning in Asia advances social cohesion, and thereby helps to maintain peace and security and build sustainable cities. Sri Lanka must seek to engage with other countries to plan its own (rapidly evolving) urbanisation in this manner.



*Outbox, Silver Spring, Maryland, USA (2016)*

*Image credit: Rachel Nania/WTOP*

## **VI. Concluding Recommendations – Seizing the Opportunities**

This article has provided an overview of the types of youth radicalisation in Sri Lanka, the measures Sri Lanka has already taken to counter youth radicalisation, and the opportunities for both regional and global engagement in countering youth radicalisation. These opportunities for policymakers are summarised below.

### *Policy Recommendations for Regional Engagement*

Sri Lanka should:

1. Encourage regional organisations like IORA to adopt multilateral **normative frameworks** which establish a shared understanding of youth radicalisation, including of its new forms and factors and of acceptable counter-radicalisation legislation and policies;
2. Enter into bilateral and trilateral **implementing agreements** with neighbouring countries, to deliver the specific and intended outcomes of a national counter radicalisation policy and of multilateral normative frameworks; and
3. Build active **networks of practitioners** in the region, to enhance intelligence-sharing, institutional knowledge, and best practices on counter radicalisation.

### Policy Recommendations for Global Engagement

Sri Lanka could:

1. Establish a **national counter radicalisation policy** that directly addresses youth radicalisation and is coordinated by a single government agency;
2. Forge **international educational partnerships** that cultivate in local students the learning and creative processes that can counter radicalisation or extremist ideologies;
3. Study and adapt the **language policies** of other countries, to help dismantle linguistic barriers that can stir radicalisation; and
4. Plan cities in partnership with other countries with highly advanced **urban planning**, to promote organic opportunities for social cohesion.

The list of policy recommendations shows that the scope for international engagement is vast, diverse, and untapped. Sri Lanka should, therefore, view the Easter Sunday attacks, its past crises and possibly looming issues of youth radicalisation as an opportunity to rapidly build cooperative arrangements with regional neighbours and other partner countries: in short, as a call to take a leading, proactive role in counter radicalisation.

**Indian Ocean Rim Association Declaration on Preventing and Countering  
Terrorism and Violent Extremism 2017**

**INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION**

**Declaration on Preventing and Countering  
Terrorism and Violent Extremism  
2017**

**1**

DENOUNCE all forms and manifestations of **TERRORISM** and violent **EXTREMISM**

**2**

Resolve to stand together to **PREVENT** and **COUNTER** terrorism and violent extremism

**3**

Enhance **INFORMATION** sharing, expertise, best practices, and **LESSONS LEARNED**

**4**

Cooperate to spread respect, **TOLERANCE**, co-existence, inclusion, diversity, and social **COHESION**

**5**

Promote the role of **EDUCATION** and society in building **RESILIENCE** against violent extremism

**6**

Collaborate to **REHABILITATE**, de-radicalise, and **REINTEGRATE** radicalised individuals

**7**

Encourage **DIALOGUE** with and between civil society, and socio-cultural institutions

**8**

Support **INSTITUTIONS** preventing and countering terrorism and extremism, nationally and regionally

**9**

Strengthen efforts to resolve conflicts, promote rights, **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** and good governance

**10**

**WORK WITH** global and regional institutions to prevent and counter terrorism and extremism

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Daily FT. (2019). *Extremism engulfs Sri Lanka on Easter*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.ft.lk/top-story/Extremism-engulfs-Sri-Lanka-on-Easter/26-676765> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2019].

<sup>2</sup>Ada Derana. (2019). *INTERPOL deploying team to Sri Lanka to support investigation into bombings*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/54552/interpol-deploying-team-to-sri-lanka-to-support-investigation-into-bombings> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2019].

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