

Panelists challenge academia to shape discourse on violent extremism

A panel of eminent scholars has challenged the academia to engage in research that will advise the nation on how to deal with violent extremism and develop legitimate narrative. During the discourse, it was established that it is important for country to think through and shape the discourse on legitimate narratives in countering violent extremism, thereby creating a deeper understanding of the issue. The knowledge created will advise policy and guide the country as it combats terrorism.

The forum dubbed 'Countering Violent Extremism: Shaping the Discourse on Legitimate Narratives,' hosted by the University of Nairobi and the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government, brought together faculty and students who sought to understand the phenomena on extremism.

While moderating the session, Amb Dr. Monica Juma, extremism envisions and propagates a single narrow viewpoint and readily perpetrates violence on those deemed as opponents. Dr. Juma noted that extremists continue to viciously propagate disinformation, over time creating erroneous narratives exploited for recruitment and actual violence. Therefore, it is important to understand the phenomena and create new narratives that will defeat extremists' views. Dr. Juma is the Principal Secretary, Ministry of Interior.

Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbithi noted that universities have a role to play in confronting the challenge that is facing the country and the region. Prof. Mbithi said that the government is intent on optimizing on talents of leading experts and scholars to further deeper awareness and propagate the right kind of message on the important topic of countering violent extremism. Indeed, the University is keen to play its rightfully role and contribute towards this noble idea of countering extremism and terrorism.

Among the panelists was Prof. Karima Bennoune, a professor of law at the University of California, who made a presentation based on her book *'Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism.'* The book details local

struggles against extremism and terror, based on 300 interviews with people of Muslim heritage from 30 countries.

Prof. Michael Chege, UoN, said in order to understand violent extremism, intelligence driven research is important. He said that academia is not doing enough research to deal with the issue.

Prof. Rohan Gunaratna, a specialist of the Global Threat Environment, challenged UoN to build a specialist centre that will produce strategic thinkers and researchers who understand the art of fighting terrorism.

UoN through the Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies (IDIS) recently held a symposium on “Countering Terrorism: in search of a Grand African Strategy”, on May 7, 2015. On June 17, 2015, UoN through IDIS in collaboration with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) held another symposium on the topic “Get to know refugees, their roles in the host country.”

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