

THE CARTER CENTER

Countering Daesh Recruitment Propaganda Workshop 1

Mastering the Message: Engaging our Youth

September 2016

Executive Summary

The Carter Center (TCC) convened a workshop on Sept. 6 – 9, 2016, in Switzerland, the first in a series of six reiterative workshops designed to analyze Daesh recruitment strategies, develop counter-messaging strategies, and build capacity among participants for engaging youth vulnerable to manipulation by Daesh recruitment propaganda. Twenty participants from Morocco, Tunisia, France, and Belgium included religious and community leaders, social activists, and ex-foreign fighters with large grassroots followings in their local communities.

The workshop featured leading experts on political and media communication, digital media production, and political transitions and coalition building. The objective was to develop insights into Daesh recruitment, specifically the use of video production and social media, and engage religious and community leaders in peacebuilding in their local communities, both online and offline. Each of the three days featured sessions organized around four subjects: 1) deconstruction of Daesh recruitment propaganda strategies, 2) effective strategies to engage with marginalized youth, 3) practical applications to address the rise of Islamophobia and delegitimize Daesh narratives, and 4) attaining media literacy tools to produce efficient and effective arguments. By the end of the three days, a sense of agency, shared responsibility, trust, and collaboration developed among participants that cut across ideological and gender lines, and eroded not only resistance to technology but also emphasized the need for religious leaders to engage on these difficult issues.

The Vocal Minority: Deconstructing Daesh Media

Participants were in broad agreement that Daesh represents, as one participant described, “a cancer on the *ummah*”

workshop to better understand Daesh recruitment strategies, requesting analysis so that they could be better equipped when they return to their communities. Other participants countered that the Daesh problem was well-known; instead of diagnosis, prescriptions were needed, practical strategies that could be quickly implemented in local contexts. All, however, agreed on the urgency of the problem, and its multifaceted nature. Workshop experts provided both analysis of Daesh recruitment strategies and practical tools for constructing counter-narratives.

commented, “We are the silent majority. We have a collective responsibility to speak out and act. Daesh is perhaps only one million, but they are very good at getting their message out. They have skills, but we have more numbers. Whenever we talk about terrorism, we are talking about the minority, but we need to be talking about the majority.” In post-workshop evaluations, participants agreed by a wide margin (70%) that TCC analysis of Daesh recrui

shoot, edit, and present a short video designed to counter Daesh's recruitment narratives. Despite the range of participants in age, ideological orientation, nationality, and technical knowledge, each group worked collaboratively to create a video geared to a particular audience. The videos, for a first attempt, were excellent, incorporating complex editing and narrative techniques, and produced and edited entirely on smart phones. Participants viewed and assessed each other's work, and workshop experts provided technical advice. Even those who struggled with technology found value in the cooperative nature of the exercise and developed a sense of agency in creating counter-messaging. Working together to solve technical problems and deliver a product in limited time deepened the sense of community established on day one, and served as evidence that the technical and theoretical training was well received and put to immediate use.

The Islamophobia Industry: The Other Form of Extremism

A constant theme of the workshop, and a vital concern for workshop participants, was the rising tide of Islamophobia. This was of particular concern to participants from France and Belgium, most of whom expressed that Islamophobia has become common political currency within Europe.

professionals; majority-minority.” Experts and participants repeatedly expressed their appreciation to TCC