

PRESS RELEASE

Up to 6,000 African ISIS Fighters Returning Home, and they are Returning Home with Incendiary Ideals

Accra, December 11, 2017 – The West Africa Centre for Counter-Extremism (WACCE) is learning with deep concern that up to 6,000 Africans who fought with ISIS in Syria and Iraq are returning home – a dangerously dreadful moment WACCE has been speaking about in the last 3 years. The return of these elements with many having played prominent roles on the battlefield poses an immediate and serious threat to our national security and requires direct and specific intervention. In a region that is already an epicenter for radicalization and terrorist recruitment, these fighters will return with the skill and incendiary capacity to not only carry out deadly assault but also radicalize and recruit others to set up a legion of fighters to stage terrorist attacks in new locations to avenge for the demise of the so-called caliphate.

However, the choices these returnees will make next, the sort of lives they will live and the threat they may pose to our society will be determined significantly by how they are treated and what options they have upon their return. The imminent threat is that terrorist propaganda still commands a strong allure in many communities across Africa. Widespread youth unemployment, extensive corruption, inequality, marginalization and poor social support services render the youth highly vulnerable. Such factors in many parts of the continent have for decades fuelled human trafficking, illegal migration, civil conflicts and terrorist recruitment. The pervasiveness of these factors in the last decade has seen a growing number of young West Africans succumbing to the allure of terrorist ideals, making the region (West Africa) the deadliest for terrorism globally after registering in excess of 7,200 casualties in 2014. Ghana has not been spared, as more than 13 individuals are believed to have left to join terrorist groups as at August 2016. Current estimates indicate that the number could be between 80 and 120 individuals.

The West Africa Centre for Counter-Extremism notes these with concern and calls on our governments and security agencies to adopt an alert-posture whilst intensifying Inter-Agency Coordination and Intelligence Sharing among the various countries in the region. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation involving intelligence sharing and coordination among countries has often proven very fruitful resulting in successful arrests and foiling of plots that otherwise could have been disastrous.

A combination of religious, political, economic and social factors is responsible for the situation. However more broadly but appropriately, this is a problem, a manifestation of the anguish of citizens who have lost faith in the State. A long term sustainable solution is therefore to undertake initiatives and programs that are aimed at restoring our youth's faith in our countries. More importantly, government must in the immediate term consider setting up de-radicalization centers focused on prevention, integration and promoting citizenship.

We call on the Ministry of National Security, Ministry of the Interior, the Bureau of National Investigations, National Security and all State security agencies to move quickly to develop effective strategies in line with the above recommendations to respond to these returnees. Such strategies must be grounded in a human security framework that prioritizes keeping individuals and the local community safe not only from terrorism but, also from the intended or unintended harmful consequences of counterterrorism measures.

Thank you.

For further information or clarifications please contact +233 505837185 and info@wacce.org