*Testimony of Vidhya Ramalingam*
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*before the*
*Europe, Energy, Environment and Cyber Subcommittee and*
*The Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee*

**Hearing on**
**"Transatlantic Cooperation on Countering Global Terrorism and Violent Extremism"**
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Chair Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, members of the Subcommittees: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I appreciate your leadership to ensure better international cooperation on countering global violent extremism.

My name is Vidhya Ramalingam, and throughout my career, I have worked to design and deliver terrorism prevention and de-radicalization models globally. Ten years ago, when a white supremacist terrorist murdered 77 people in Norway, I led the EU's first inter-governmental initiative on white nationalist terrorism and extremism.

I worked with hundreds of policy makers, practitioners, social workers, and former extremists across 10 EU countries to gather evidence and design policy and programs on what worked in prevention of this form of terrorism.[1]

Today, I've taken this fight online as Founder of Moonshot, an organization working with US and European governments to build online prevention mechanisms fit for the 21st century. Our work has been delivered with partners such as the U.S. Department of State, across administrations, and the Global Coalition Against Daesh, with which we worked across over 80 Coalition partners on online efforts to degrade terrorist recruitment efforts.[2]

The last 20 years has seen considerable investment across Europe in terrorism prevention models. For the past decade the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) has connected frontline practitioners from across Europe to exchange knowledge, first-hand experiences and approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism in all its forms. But what actually works?

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[1] https://www.isdglobal.org/ISD_New_Approach_Far_Right_Report.pdf
[2] https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/

Based on my experience and what the research shows, the following components of various European prevention models have proven to be effective.

1. **They involve behavioral health methods**. There is a vast evidence base demonstrating their efficacy - particularly counseling - which helps to adequately address underlying vulnerabilities and drivers, and can lead to referrals to other social services.[3] This has become the cornerstone of most European programs.[4] **They are also built on preexisting social services** and draw on adjacent fields such as gang prevention work,[5] rather than developed as stand-alone terrorism prevention programing, which is more sustainable and cost-effective.

2. **They involve multi-agency systems** which can achieve better case management drawing on expertise across social services, education and healthcare systems, and law enforcement.[6]

3. **They are locally established** and run with substantive involvement from communities where they're deployed.[7]

4. **They need not be ideology-focused but rather span the ideological spectrum**. Licensed practitioners, including psychologists, counselors, social workers and others involved in these programs require training to engage ideology when it arises, but ideology does not need to be addressed first and foremost. In fact, evidence shows this is sometimes counter-productive.[8] Many long-standing European prevention programs engage individuals at-risk of Salafi Jihadism, neo-Nazism, violent incels, and potential mass shooters alike.

5. **They offer off ramps** for those looking to leave violent extremism. Offramping and exit programs, such as those in Sweden, Finland and Germany demonstrate high caseloads and low recidivism rates,[9] and have served as the model for Life After Hate in the United States.

And finally, these programs tend to be more effective and credible when they are:

6. **Independent of government** but have stable government funding. Accountability is critical, but a bit of independence gives programs, especially exit programs, greater authority with those looking to leave violent extremism.[10]

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[3] https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_LessonsLearnedfromMentalHealthAndEducation_FullReport_Oct2015.pdf

[4] Koehler, D. (2016). Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism. Routledge.

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2020-09/ran_exit_adjacent_fields_gangs_11-12_09_2018_en.pdf

[6] https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/2020-03/1764750_korrekt-versionmixing-logics_digital_korrekt.pdf

[7] https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2021-06/ran_activities_local_coordination_and_local_approach_to_p-cve_june_2021_en.pdf

[8] https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/20200729-pw_163-violent_extremist_disengagement_and_reconciliation_a_peacebuilding_approach-pw.pdf

[9] Hall, N., Corb, A., Giannasi, P., & Grieve, J. (Eds.) (2014). The Routledge international handbook on hate crime. Routledge; Aggredi https://rikoksentorjunta.fi/en/aggredi-programme; Exit Germany https://www.exit-deutschland.de/Datei-Download/29/Broschuere-EXIT-Engl_PDFDS_11.4.pdf

[10] https://www.unodc.org/documents/brussels/News/Communities_First_December_2016.pdf

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the international community today is how to bring these prevention models into the 21st century. Social media has created new opportunities for perpetrators to reach vulnerable audiences, and has supercharged the spread of violent extremist content. Many of the prevention models set up over the past 20 years struggle to keep up.

**In 2021, every terrorism prevention model needs a robust digital component.** Moonshot has spent six years working with governments to design and implement digital components to offline terrorism prevention infrastructures. This must be done safely, ethically, and responsibly.

First, the entire suite of prevention services needs to be adapted for online delivery, including risk assessment frameworks and counselling services. We need to build the digital literacy and capacity of existing prevention practitioners. Second, we need to adequately signpost terrorism prevention services - such as hotlines, counselling, and Exit offers - online. Third, online prevention frameworks must be designed with user privacy at its heart.

Evidence shows us that this works. In Moonshot's recent studies, audiences at risk of jihadism were 47% more likely than the general public to take up offers of psychosocial support services online. Neo-Nazis were 48% more likely.[11] This year alone, Moonshot has channeled over 100 individuals at-risk of violent extremism across the United States into text-message counselling sessions via online engagement.

We need to acknowledge that the tech companies are not doing enough in this fight. As we continue to hold these companies to account, we have an obligation to adapt our terrorism prevention infrastructures to this new reality. We must both learn from the past and look to the future in our fight against global terrorism.

Thank you for your time today, I look forward to your questions.

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[11] https://moonshotteam.com/mental-health-violent-extremism/;
https://moonshotteam.com/indonesia-social-grievances-violent-extremism/