The Role of Universities and Schools in Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism: Malaysian Experience

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1.   Introduction

This essay explores the roles of universities and schools in dealing with the violent extremism phenomenon in Malaysia. In doing so, the article is divided into three parts: firstly, it discusses the recent involvement of lecturers and students in supporting pro-Daesh movements in Malaysia. The second part deals with the question of why universities and schools are being targeted as recruitment grounds. The third part of the essay explores the roles of universities and schools in tackling violent extremism among their communities. The author asserts that universities and schools have a unique function in society to curb the rise of violent extremism. However, these functions are currently undercapitalised and not fully utilised to the optimum level, at least in the Malaysian context. Educational institutions are considered to be "the third force" in countering violent extremism and terrorism, alongside government agencies and the intelligence community. They have multiples roles such as detector, educator, preventer, and producer of ideas in countering violent extremism.

2.   Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Educational Institutions

It is very interesting to observe the recent phenomenon of radicalisation and violent extremism in Malaysia. In the process of nation-building,

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educational institutions are supposed to play defensive and educative roles against extremism. But, unfortunately, educational institutions turned out to be one of the recruitment grounds for militant groups. In recent cases, we have seen students and teachers being detained by the authorities for promoting and supporting terrorist organisations such as Daesh and planning to stage attacks against soft targets inside the country.

Historically, the involvement of students in militancy is not a new phenomenon in Malaysia. The participation of Malaysian students in the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) and Afghan Civil War (1989-2001) is one of the earliest evidences showing students' involvement in militancy outside Malaysia. From the 1980s until the 1990s, the Malaysian police also detected movements of some Malaysian students into Pakistan and Afghanistan to join jihadi movements against the Soviet occupation.[1] These students, who were either studying in Pakistan or India, are widely known as "Pakindo" students. One of the former Pakindo students told the author:

> We came here as students. But, when the war broke out in Afghanistan, we joined the jihad. When summer break was over, we returned back to madrasah. It was fun and a quite unforgettable experience. We learned a lot in the battlefield, much better than in a classroom.[2]

The exact number of Malaysian students joining the Soviet-Afghan War is unknown. Even the Malaysian Embassy in Pakistan complained that they faced difficulties in keeping track of student movements during this period, because the majority of them never reported to the embassy. When the war was over, some of them returned home and established militant groups such as Kumpulan Mujahiddin Malaysia (KMM). In fact, several founding members of KMM were former Afghan veterans such as its chief Zainon Ismail and Nik Adli Nik Aziz. Both of them fought during the Afghan War. The trend of sending students continued even after the First Afghan War (1979-1989). In 1999, for example, Jama'ah Islamiyyah (JI) sent 13 students to Pakistan as part of its regeneration programme. These students were the members of al-Ghuraba cell, consisting of the children of JI members who were groomed to be leaders of JI in future.[3]

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[1] Counter-terrorism officer, interview with the author, 25 June 2018, Kuala Lumpur.

[2] Former Pakindo student, interview with the author, 10 March 2018, Pasir Mas, Kelantan.

[3] Counter-terrorism officer, interview with the author, 25 June 2018, Kuala Lumpur.

It is also reported that during the Bosnian War (1992-1995), several Malaysian students studying in the University of Madinah, Saudi Arabia were given special permission to join the war in Bosnia, especially during the summer break.[4] One Bosnian war veteran told the author:

> Our lecturers at the university [of Madinah] encouraged us to go. They have donors who funded the trip and many of us went there to fight. When semester break was over, we went back to campus again.[5]

Again, an exact figure is not available because these students refused to be identified for fear of being arrested by the authorities. The involvement of students, and even lecturers and teachers in Malaysia, became more obvious in recent cases involving Daesh-affiliated groups. Since February 2013, over 340 Malaysians have been arrested by the Malaysian counter-terrorism unit for various terrorism-related charges and at least 40 students from schools, colleges and universities have been arrested since the beginning of the operation in February 2013. Among the well-known cases were Dr. Mahmud Ahmad, former lecturer at University of Malaya (UM);[6] Aishah Atam, a graduate student in UM; and a secondary school student, Hafizi Jusoh.

Clearly, the penetration of the Daesh movement and violent extremism into Malaysia is serious and threatening. Maybe to some people, the percentage of involvement is quite small and such incidents could be considered isolated cases. Thus, there is no need for an exaggeration. In my view, this mindset is dangerous for national security. Extremism and terrorism must be treated seriously at all times for it has an exponential effect. In practical terms, it takes only one person to launch an attack in a country. In June 2016, it took only two men to stage an attack at Movida nightclub in Puchong, which caused panic nationwide. Thus, in fact, the presence of one extremist in a campus is sufficient reason for the authorities to take preventive measures. One extremist is considered a potential threat. This potential threat may escalate into an actual threat if we do not manage it from the very beginning. Indeed, it is a serious mistake to

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[4] Counter-terrorism officer, interview with the author, 25 June 2018, Kuala Lumpur.

[5] Former Bosnian veteran, interview with the author, 14 June 2018, International Islamic University Malaysia, Gombak, Selangor, Malaysia.

[6] Dr. Mahmud Ahmad was a lecturer at the Department of Aqidah and Islamic Thought, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya. The UM has immediately sacked him after learning his involvement in militancy.

measure the severity of the terrorist threat based on numbers and statistics. Its existence in our community provides sufficient reason for the authorities to take preventive measures before it escalates into full-blown threats.

Case 1: Dr. Mahmud Ahmad

In the case of Dr. Mahmud Ahmad, it is quite surprising that he managed to pass the university's screening and that his extremist views, radicalisation and militant orientation went on undetected for so long. He managed to become one of the senior lecturers, teaching graduate and undergraduate students until the university was informed. Admittedly, detecting indicators of radicalisation is difficult. It requires certain techniques and expertise. But, in my view, it can be done if certain procedures are performed and thorough analyses are carried out.

In my analysis, Dr. Mahmud had already shown indicators of radicalisation at the beginning of his academic life. In the 1990s, he was in Pakistan's International Islamic University of Islamabad, doing his Bachelor's degree. The Malaysian police believe that during this period, he was in and out of Afghanistan, participating in training and guerrilla warfare, besides getting himself familiar with the extremist discourse. After returning from Pakistan, he enrolled for the Master's programme at the International Islamic University Malaysia in 2011. Therein he wrote a thesis entitled "Ibn Hazm on Christianity: Textual Analysis from Zahiri Perspective", in which he employed Zahiri's methodology to critique discrepancies in the Christian belief. In this thesis, the sign of radicalisation does not overtly manifest. He even asserted that despite the Truth of the Qur'an, it encourages Muslims to practise wisdom and tolerance with regard to other religions.

However, his radical views started to manifest as he embarked on his doctoral studies, when he secretly published a book under the pseudonym "Dr. Abu Hanzalah" entitled *Iman Para Mujahiddin* (Faith of the Fighters). In this book, he discussed in detail the necessity of jihad (armed struggle) as the best solution for today's problems. In my view, the publication of the book indicates the culmination of his belief and it is a form of externalization of his belief system. Besides, the subjects of jihad, the Palestine-Israeli conflict, US occupation of Iraq, conflicts in Mindanao and the like often become part of his discourse during lectures.

There are four indicators of radicalisation which can be identified. The *first indicator* is his exposure to the extremist discourse during his stays in Pakistan. According to Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, the time from 1990s-2000 was considered one of the most important periods in the history of militant movements, which they referred to as a "[consolidation] period for their revivalist movements."[7] Dr. Mahmud was in Pakistan and Afghanistan during this period. It was the epicentre of militant discourse at that time. The exposure to this environment had a lasting impact on his thinking.

The *second indicator* is his penchant for the "discourse of jihad". In fact, his liking for discussions on "jihad" and his encouragement of them was one of the reasons Aishah Atam was attracted to his thinking.[8] This is validated by other students who observed that "he is different from other lecturers," as one of his students informed a Malaysian interrogator.[9]

The *third indicator* is the use of a pseudonym for the publication of his book, indicating the development of an idea and his deliberate act to conceal his conviction from his colleagues and the public.

The *fourth indicator* is the use of the pseudonym "Abu Hanzalah", which is also not a coincidence. In Islamic history, Abu Hanzalah was a fighter who fought in the Battle of Uhud. Thus, the choice of "Abu Hanzalah" is not coincidental. It is a representation of a belief system and a source of motivation. In short, the case of Dr. Mahmud Ahmad is a classic example of how a lecturer can play a strategic role as an educator and a recruiter at the same time while working in the environment of a higher-learning institution. Still, the university authority and his colleagues did not raise any "red flag" and he continued to teach and supervise students, including Aishah Atam, his graduate student.

Case 2: Aishah Atam

Aishah Atam was a former student of Dr. Mahmud at UM. During her undergraduate studies, she attended Dr. Mahmud's lectures and gradually became attracted to his unique style and discourse, which she considered

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[7] ÑUmar ÑAbdul ×Ékim (AbË MusÑab al-SËrÊ), al-Mukhtasar MasÉr al-Øahwah al-IslÉmiyyah in DaÑwah al-MuqÉwamah al-IslÉmiyyah al-ÑÓlamiyyah, https://archive.org/details/Dawaaah, accessed 6 April 2018.

[8] Counter-terrorism officer, interview with the author, 25 June 2018, Kuala Lumpur.

[9] Counter-terrorism officer, interview with the author, 25 June 2018, Kuala Lumpur.

nonconventional and different from other lecturers. In his lectures, Dr. Mahmud often discussed issues and problems facing Muslim ummah and the urgency for jihad (armed struggle) in today's world. At the beginning of her graduate studies, Aishah planned to study the caliphate system, considering the caliphate had perished and there had been no successful effort to revive it. However, Dr. Mahmud suggested that she study "jihad" instead, starting with reading the book *Tarbiyyah Jihadiyyah* (Education for Jihad), written by Abdullah Azzam. He further advised her to deepen her knowledge on Muslim contemporary issues, history of jihadi movements and the key figures in jihadi movements. Acting on his advice, she acquired some books considered relevant to her studies. These books were confiscated in her possession and tendered in court as exhibits. Analysis by experts confirmed that these books contained extremist ideology. The titles of the books are as follows:

- *Visi Politik Gerakan Jihad* by Hazim Al-Madani and Abu Mus'ab As-Suri

- *Generasi Kedua Al-Qaedah: Apa dan Siapa Zarqawi, Apa Rencana Mereka ke Depan* by Fuad Hussein

- *Akankan Sejarah Terulang* by Dr. Muhammad Al-'Abdah

- *Deklarasi Daulah Islam Iraq* by Dewan Syariah Daulah Islam Iraq, translated by Abu Hafsh As-Sayyar and Abu Musa Ath-Thayyar

- *Merentas Jalan Jihad Fisabillah* by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Abdul Aziz, translated by Hassan As-Sayyari

- *Misteri Pasukan Panji Hitam* by Muhammad Abu Fatiha Al-Adani, translated by H. Muhammad Harun Zein

- *Turki Negara Dua Wajah* by Shaykh Abdullah Azam

- *Masterplan 2020: Strategi Al-Qaeda Menjebak Amerika* by Fahmi Suwaidi

- *Dari Usama Kepada Para Aktivis* by Syaikh Usamah Bin Ladin dan Syaikh Yusuf Al_Uyairi, translated by Umar Burhanuddin, Abu Hafs As Sayyar and Syahida Man

- *Dari Rahim Ikhwanul Muslimin Ke Pangkuan Al-Qaeda* by Ayman Az-Zawahiri, translated by Umar Burhanuddin

- *Ketika Maslahat Dipertuhankan dan menjadi Taghut Model Baru* by Abu Muhammad Ashim Al Maqdisiy, translated by Abu Sulaiman Aman Abdurrahman

- *Seri Materi Tauhid for the Greatest Happiness* by Abu Sulaiman Aman Abdurrahman

In addition, she was also active on social media and used this as a platform to get connected with wider networks of militancy in Malaysia and Syria. Again, her activity and radicalisation went on undetected by the university authorities until her family reported her to the police.

In my view, there is no doubt that Aishah had shown signs of radicalisation, particularly when she embarked on her graduate studies. The acquisition of extremist literature, her closeness to Dr. Mahmud and her online activities were vital indicators of radicalisation. However, given the fact that she was living in an educational environment, it was hard for people around her to notice that she was undergoing a "mental transformation" from an "ordinary person" to a person who had adopted a "radical ideology". Nonetheless, it is quite common for students at the graduate level to buy and read radical books especially for research purposes. In fact, there are many radical books and literature available in university libraries. These materials are made available by the university for research and educational purposes. Strict procedures are also implemented to get access to these materials. Thus, this situation makes detection work more challenging. It requires a certain expertise to be able to detect and verify such a transformation.

Case 3: Hafizi Jusoh

The case of Hafizi Jusoh is another example of student radicalisation. Hafizi was a former secondary student in Pasir Putih, Kelantan. He was detained by the counter-terrorism team for possession of three improvised explosive devices (IED), pipe bombs, ball bearings, and pictures, videos and documents related to Daesh. He was also charged for giving instruction to conduct terrorist activities via WhatsApp and for attending training for terrorist activities as preparation to launch an attack. According to the police, the suspect wanted to target the *Octoberfest* (Beer Festival) planned

to be held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2017.[10] The plan was thwarted due to the intelligence-gathering and operation conducted by the Malaysian counter-terrorism team. Interestingly, neither his family nor friends detected Hafizi's radicalisation. In fact, the school reported that Hafizi was a good student and had demonstrated good academic performance for scoring 2.92 point in Sijil Tinggi Pengajian Malaysia (STPM) examination.[11] Hafizi's case is another example of failure in detecting and preventing radicalisation in an educational environment.

The above three cases shared similar patterns: (1) radicalisation occurs in the educational environment; (2) the persons involved have already shown overt signs of radicalisation; (3) the institution is unable to detect the signs of radicalisation and therefore fails to take preventive action; and lastly; (4) the persons involved are at the last stage of radicalisation; meaning, they have crossed the "red line" and violated national laws that warrant the police to arrest them.

3.   Universities and Schools as Recruitment Grounds

Why have universities and schools become targets? This is another important question that we have to answer. Before we unravel that question, perhaps it is useful for us to understand what makes a recruitment drive successful. In the world of militancy, recruitment is an important art carried out by a recruiter to persuade prospective members to join the group. In my experience of interviewing militants, there are very few effective recruiters. Unfortunately, these very few cause significant problems for security agencies because of their persuasive ability to attract a large number of people. Muhamad Wanndy is the best case in point. On 25 March 2016, Wanndy, using the name "Akhi Wandy", created a Telegram group called "Gagak Hitam". Despite living in Syria, he successfully recruited more than 30 Malaysian youths to support Daesh. Some of them gave *bai'ah* (pledge of alliance) to him and Daesh. Based on an analysis of "Gagak Hitam" Telegram, there are four elements required for successful terrorist recruitment: (1) effective recruiter, (2) impactful messages, (3) powerful

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[10]   Counter-terrorism officer, interview with the author, 25 June 2018, Kuala Lumpur.

[11]   *New Straits Times*, "20-year-old IS supporter who planned attack on Better Beer Festival 2017 to spend 9 years in jail," 21 May 2018.

tools or platform, and (4) vulnerable individuals. The combination of these elements produces an impact capable of changing an ordinary individual to become a militant or a terrorist, or at least to become a supporter or a sympathiser.

An *effective recruiter* possesses charisma, respect, a revered position, and knowledge and is extremely convincing. Being conversant in religious knowledge and possessing a good command of the Arabic language are added values for the recruiter. Muhamad Wanndy embodied these characteristics. Despite living far away from Malaysia, he was capable of facilitating an operation in Kuala Lumpur using his followers who had pledged allegiance to him. The Movida grenade attack was the manifestation of Wanndy's successful recruitment.

Impactful messages are another key element for successful recruitment. The messages comprise of the narratives or "stories" that are weaved together with actual events, experiences and issues to form a bigger narrative. This narrative will be a building block for an ideology and functions as a motive for a struggle. The messages become more powerful and convincing when combined with actual images, videos and dramatic music. These messages are saved and stored in their smartphones and laptops. It is common for militants to save and store thousands of images and videos in their smartphones as a source of reference and motivation.

The impactful messages are transmitted using *powerful tools* such as social media and applications in smartphones. In Malaysia, according to a study by the Institute for Youth Research (IYRES), 85% of 39 militants cited social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Telegram and WhatsApp) as their main source of information.[12] Social media is a very powerful tool for conveying messages and convincing users to take a certain course of action. Terrorist recruiters take advantage of this technology to facilitate their recruitment drives.

Finally, recruiters might be convincing, possess impactful messages and use powerful tools to spread their messages, but these elements are meaningless without having the "right target". The right target is a *vulnerable individual*. The vulnerable individual could be a person who is in the process of change, has family problems, is in financial difficulty and is socially unfit. He or she is the perfect target for recruitment.

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[12] *Ringkasan Eksekutif Profail Belia Dalam Kegiatan Ekstrimisme* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute for Youth Research, 2017), 26.

In the context of our discussion, teachers or lecturers can be highly effective recruiters because they hold a respectable position among students. Students generally tend to be more receptive to their teachers. This revered position, level of knowledge and respect make students more susceptible to recruitment. Thus, it is not surprising that Aishah Atam was easily influenced by Dr. Mahmud, who was her lecturer and later become her supervisor. A former Jama'ah Islamiyyah recruiter, who was well experienced in recruitment work, told the author:

> In a class setting, when the lecturer says something, usually the students will easily believe it. So, let's say I have 30 students in my class. Among these 30 students, it is not impossible to convince one or two students. This is more than enough actually. Teachers have great influence upon students and this makes them more effective recruiters.[13]

Terrorist recruiters often take advantage of the university environment, in which students come from different countries, and have diverse social and family backgrounds. Students are often inquisitive, searching for something new, open to new ideas, adventurous and willing to experiment with new ideas, even if they sound radical. These elements provide perfect ingredients for subtle recruitment. A former victim of Daesh's recruitment told the author:

> I did not feel that I was being recruited until I realised he was persuading me strongly to travel with him to Syria, in order to join the "caravan of jihad". He was so subtle and patient in building trust and provided me with reading materials, video and references. These are done in the name of knowledge sharing.[14]

Searching for students with technical expertise is also one of the key factors for terrorist recruiters in targeting universities. Students who are majoring in medicine, engineering, and information technology and possess technical know-how are the most sought-after individuals.[15] Their expertise is needed in the world of militancy.

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[13] Former member of Jama'ah Islamiyyah, interview with the author, 3 June 2018, Kuala Lumpur.

[14] "Jannah", former victim of Daesh recruitment, interview with the author, April 2016, Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

[15] Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, *Engineers of jihad: the curious connection between violent extremism and education*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016.

4.   The Roles of Educational Institutions

Universities and schools have strategic positions and unique functions in countering and preventing violent extremism (CPVE) in society. They can play multiple roles such as detector, preventer, planner and producer of ideas to tackle the threat of violent extremism either in their communities and society at large. However, to what extent have educational institutions played their roles in facing the growing challenges of violent extremism today? In my view, educational institutions, primarily universities, colleges and schools, have a lot to improve on in order to function as the "third force" in countering and preventing violent extremism in Malaysia. Below are some proposed recommendations that might be useful in empowering educational institutions to play their roles in CPVE initiatives.

First, university and school administrators need to be more proactive in detecting extremist elements in their communities. The proactive approach can be translated as a form of aggressive pursuit in identifying whether potential elements exist in their communities and acknowledging the existence of the problem should there be a legitimate case. The education administrator should not sweep the issue under the carpet or try to cover up the matter in order to protect the good name of the institution. Admittedly, protecting the good image of an institution is important. But, they also must bear in mind that when it comes to security issues, it often overweights other considerations due to the magnitude of the impacts and public interest. Dr. Mahmud's case should be a lesson to all public universities that a proactive attitude is important to safeguard education institutions from being the target of a recruitment drive.

Second, background checks on prospective lecturers and teachers are one of the vital components in preventing the spread of violent extremism in campuses and schools. Admittedly, this recommendation may invite criticism from some quarters for it may touch upon civil liberties and freedom of expression. However, based on my experience, this policy is an effective method in nipping violent extremism in the bud. Security or background checks involve identifying prior contacts with terrorist organisations, prior involvement in militancy, educational background and ideological orientation. The purpose of this exercise is clear: to prevent the potential extremist and terrorist from spreading their virulent ideologies to students and to safeguard campuses and schools from being the hub of terrorist recruitment. Collaboration with security agencies and experts

enhances the effectiveness of the exercise. In the case of Dr. Mahmud, there is no evidence showing that he went through thorough background checks, especially by the police (Malaysian Special Branch). I believe that his radicalisation could have been detected early if thorough background checks were performed on him by the relevant authorities.

Third, lecturers and teachers provide the best early warning system about students' inclination to extremism. Lecturers and teachers are not only there to impart knowledge, they also can play a detective role and to guide students in dealing with extremist ideologies. Students often approach their lecturers or teachers to ask questions and seek answers. This is particularly true for students who are at the early stage of radicalisation. At this point, their roles are crucial: to steer students away from radicalisation and if necessary to report to the universities authorities for further action. However, it is important to note that in universities, we celebrate academic freedom, diversity of opinions, freedom of expression and individual choice. But, when security issues and public interest clash with individual freedom, the former takes precedence over the latter. Society cannot afford to have certain individuals hijacking the freedom of expression and human rights to spread hatred, radical ideologies and violence in society.

Fourth, institutions should redesign syllabi and incorporate peace studies elements in teaching. Universities syllabi are an important part of the long-term countering and preventing violent extremism strategy. Certain discussions related to the extremist discourse such as the concepts of jihad, democracy, Islamic state, *fiqh al-awlawiyyat* (science of priority), and *wasatiyyah* can be incorporated into existing syllabi as part of intervention programmes. In Malaysia, there is a strong recommendation to public and government agencies to introduce new forms of syllabi to mitigate the spreading of extremist ideologies. The incorporation of a peace studies subject for example, can be helpful in creating a more resilient generation in facing the emerging trend of extremism.

Fifth, universities should capitalise on the relevant expertise available to conduct research on violent extremism issues. Certain universities are known for their expertise such as in the area of security studies, sociology, psychology and Islamic studies. This expertise and discipline can be utilised to better understand the phenomenon of militancy, extremism and terrorism. Adopting multidisciplinary approaches is a good strategy to

understand the nature of the problem in a more holistic way. From this holistic understanding, we are able to produce the best formula to deal with the problem at hand. Universities also need to provide certain incentives, allocate funds and develop expertise in this field in ensuring the participation of academics in terrorism research.

Sixth, countering and preventing violent extremism also necessitates the participation of student bodies, associations and clubs in community-oriented programmes. It is important that universities play a facilitating role to connect student bodies with the communities and civil society at the local level to organise programmes, workshops and social activities that promote peace, tolerance, understanding and moderation. Programmes of that nature are not only useful for the community, they are also beneficial for students in developing their leadership skills and educating them on the issues at hand.

Seventh, while most CPVE programmes are organised in the cities, it is important for CPVE operators to also focus on the low-income group and youth residing in rural areas. In fact, most detainees in Malaysia are not coming from the cities. 32 out of 37 detainees the author interviewed are residing in rural areas. Surely, urban-centric CPVE programmes do not reach the target group. Thus, schools and universities at the local level can play an effective role in engaging these youth, educating and empowering them with positive values and enhancing their capacity to disown extremism and violence.

Eighth, the education community in schools and universities can also benefit from cooperation and collaboration with civil society organisations (CSO) and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), particularly those which are dealing directly with the issue of extremism, interfaith dialogue and promotion of positive values. In Malaysia, there are a number of CSOs and NGOs that have the capacity to work on building resilience against violent extremism. Unfortunately, there is a serious lack of collaboration between government and civil society organisations in the area of CPVE. In this regard as well, there is a serious lack of collaboration between educational institutions and civil society in building resilience against violent extremism.

Ninth, an ideal CPVE project must be inclusive of all stakeholders, particularly ethnic groups and religious communities. In Malaysia, CPVE programmes often focus on Muslim communities alone without the

participation of other ethnic groups and religious communities. In my view, given the multi-ethnic, -religious and -culture nature of Malaysian society, it is important that other religious communities also participate in the promotion of positive values such as tolerance, peaceful coexistence, understanding and promotion of common good. There is a need for the leaders of religious communities to jointly identify universal values, common goods and programmes that promote peace, toleration and moderation in order to create a long-lasting impact on societal resilience-building. Schools and universities can be effective platforms for multi-ethnic- and multi-religious-based CPVE projects given the fact that the education community itself is multi-racial and multi-religious in nature.

Tenth, there is an urgent need for active interaction between parents/families and educational institutions in CPVE programmes. Educational institutions have a limited capacity to detect "early warning signs" of radicalisation. Students and instructors do not spend the majority of their time at university or school. Thus, the work of detecting early warning signs, "mental transformation" and "behavioural changes" is difficult without cooperation from families or parents. In fact, there are at least three cases that the author has come across where the parents were actually reporting to the authorities about the "changes" and suspicious activities of their children. Clearly, the role of families, parents, and siblings is crucial in preventing children from falling deeper into radicalisation and violent extremism.

5.   Conclusion

In closing, in facing the emerging trend today, educational institutions need to be more proactive in countering and preventing the wave of violent extremism. They should not adopt a "play safe" or "wait-and-see" approach in dealing with violent extremism threats that have started to penetrate deeper into university and school compounds. The cases of Dr. Mahmud, Aishah, Hafizi and others should be a wake-up call for university and school communities, especially its administrators, that a "wait-and-see" policy and lukewarm attitude is hazardous to students and institutions. Ten recommendations were put forward for consideration by university and schools administrators: university and school administrators need to be more proactive in detecting extremism elements in their communities;

background checks on prospective lecturers and teachers; lecturers and teachers provide the best early warning system about students' inclination to extremism and militancy; designing syllabi and incorporation of peace studies elements in teaching; capitalising on the relevant expertise to conduct research on extremism issues; participation by student bodies in community-oriented programmes; countering and preventing violent extremism (CPVE) should focus on urban and rural areas; collaboration with civil society organisations; participation by other ethnic groups and religious communities; and active interaction between parents and families and universities and schools. Admittedly, this list of recommendations is not exhaustive. However, it may at least guide and empower the educational institutions to be the "third force", alongside the government and security agencies, in fighting against violent extremism nowadays.

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