



Tackling Division and Disinformation Linked to COVID-19: A Call for Support to Cities

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As we continue to respond to COVID-19, cities, towns and urban areas are at the eye of the storm. Not only are our communities facing a public health crisis of historic proportions, we are also dealing with the devastating economic and social fallout of this pandemic. This situation poses fundamental questions for local leaders about how we sustain cohesion as we struggle at the same time to deliver economic inclusion or social services.

Moreover, as we navigate these extraordinary challenges, our efforts are threatened by a proliferation of dangerous disinformation, the aim of which is the deliberate and sometimes coordinated exploitation of fear, threatening the health of our citizens and fostering suspicion and hatred between communities. If left unchecked, this could seriously undermine our democratic values and contribute to fresh waves of polarisation and extremism. As the mayors, governors and city leaders of a network founded five years ago with a central mission to counteract and prevent these critical threats from taking hold at community levels, we are on the immediate frontline in responding to this crisis.

Now, more than ever before, our efforts require support and commitment from our partners on a global basis. Just as we commit to redoubling our efforts at the community level to tackle hate, polarisation and extremism, we call on our partners to recognise the urgency of the challenges we face at this critical moment.

If we are to tackle these challenges to the cohesion, peace and security of our communities we must call on the international community to:

- Recognise the unique role local leaders play around the world in building resilience and preventing the spread of hate, polarisation and extremism;
- Commit support to efforts that comprehensively track dangerous disinformation, sharing analyses with partners to inform and empower grassroots, civic and local-level responses to international threats;
- Improve cooperation and collaboration between national and local governments to enable coordinated, effective and sustainable prevention and resilience efforts;
- Equip mayors, governors and city leaders with the means, resources and capabilities these threats and circumstances require.

25 global mayors convened five years ago at the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly to launch the Strong Cities Network and to show that coordinated action at local levels can drive lasting change on a global scale. Over 140 cities from more than 45 countries are now united as part of this network across national and regional divides in the recognition that transnational threats to peace, security and human rights demand local action and global cooperation. Now, more than ever, in the face of this unprecedented challenge, we require unwavering and proactive support to help us shape the peaceful, open and inclusive cities our world needs.

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