



The Role of Cities in Advancing Global Efforts to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism

UN General Assembly Side Event

30 September 2021 | Meeting Summary



Executive Summary

On 30 September 2021 the Strong Cities Network (SCN) hosted a side-event on the margins of the 76th United Nations General Assembly on *The Role of Cities in Advancing Global Efforts to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism*. Co-sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, North Macedonia and the United States Department of State, participants included mayors and other local leaders from around the globe as well as representatives of national governments, the United Nations (UN) and other multilateral bodies. Speakers highlighted the contributions that mayors and the cities they lead can make to a 'whole of society' approach to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and how national governments and multilateral bodies can best support these efforts. Key points included:

1. Cities, which face a diverse threat landscape, are increasingly relevant in global P/CVE efforts, including by defending against authoritarianism, fighting corruption, promoting human rights, and building communities resilient to violent extremist movements, hate and disinformation.
2. Cities are central to a 'whole of society' approach to P/CVE. They are often closest to the ground, best placed to identify the drivers that can lead to violent extremism, to bring together different communities to build trust and otherwise mitigate the drivers, and address hate and racism, which is becoming increasingly normalised.
3. Mayors and the cities they represent have a unique role to play in bridging the gap between national P/CVE frameworks and local action.
4. Cooperation between national and local actors is needed for P/CVE interventions to be both effective and sustainable and there are number of steps (e.g. regular communication, information sharing, fusion cells, mobile support teams, training, resources) national governments can take to facilitate such cooperation.



5. Racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE) has increased in the past few years, magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. This threat is increasingly transnational and a concern for peace, security, and democracy.
6. A growing number of cities face protests against government COVID-19 policies, which are attracting right-wing and left-wing extremist groups that fuel conspiracies against the government and online hatred. Many cities need guidance on whether to label these groups as terrorists and thus apply counter-terrorism tools against them.
7. Some cities and frontline professionals need more data and knowledge on the nature of REMVE, and tailored risk and needs assessment tools to work preventatively against the threat. There remains a tendency to prioritise organised groups over online self-radicalisation and marginalised youth.
8. The burden of rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of family members of former foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) typically falls on cities and thus there is a need to involve local governments in a multistakeholder approach to R&R that includes civil society and local practitioners.
9. Challenges to effective R&R include: establishing better coordination between a variety of stakeholders; strengthening national support for local level structures; overcoming negative perceptions in society of R&R efforts; and limited sharing of good practices within and among regions.
10. The SCN should take a number of steps to enhance its impact. These include: ensuring the network is driven by the needs and priorities of its members, who should provide it with more strategic direction; deepening and broadening SCN engagement with the global P/CVE architecture; shifting to a regional hub model to make the network more relevant to more members who should be encouraged to take greater ownership over the SCN going forward; and ensuring that the voices of mayors and perspectives of cities on addressing violent extremism, hate and polarisation are shared more regularly at national, regional and global levels.

Opening Session

In her welcoming remarks, **Sasha Havlicek, the founder and CEO of the [Institute for Strategic Dialogue \(ISD\)](#)**, which helped launch and manages the SCN, highlighted some of the network's achievements since its launch in 2015. These include a membership that has grown to more than 150; a number of global and regional mayoral summits; the development and piloting of a local prevention network model that has been implemented in a tailored fashion in cities in different countries around the globe; North-South city-level partnerships; and P/CVE tools for cities, including ones on how to map hate and extremism, and respond to a terrorist incident within a particular city.

Particularly given the increasingly localised and hybrid nature of the threat, with cities often on the frontlines, the network hopes to engage more consistently with and support more cities in pushing back against the rise of extremism, hate, and polarisation that so many parts of the world are facing. RRThe network, she said, should be better positioned to respond to the needs and concerns of its members and strengthen cooperation with the wider multilateral P/CVE ecosystem to ensure the voice of mayors and the perspectives of cities are more consistently heard in global and regional discussions about how to most effectively address the threat.

Eric Rosand, the SCN Director, *a.i.*, spoke of the increasing relevance of cities in global efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism and the unique role that mayors and the cities they lead can play in bridging the gap between national frameworks and local action, including by



integrating hyper-local concerns into wider international and national government-driven counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism agendas. He noted that the SCN, informed by the practice of its members, has developed a document outlining [10 steps](#) each city can take to contribute to preventing extremism, hate, and polarisation, adding that the SCN looks forward to supporting the efforts of cities as they step forward to take action.

U.S. Under-Secretary of State Uzra Zeya underscored the United States' continued strong support for the SCN, pointing to the critical role cities play in delivering for their residents. This includes defending against authoritarianism, fighting corruption, promoting human rights, and building communities resilient to violent extremist movements, hate crimes, and disinformation. She noted how the SCN helps cities around the world identify and address drivers of extremism, hate and polarisation, and that it has an important contribution to make in addressing racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE), a top priority for the United States. She said it was vital for donors to support its work in an environment where "cities face a diverse threat landscape, exacerbated by the pandemic, climate change, and competition for resources."

UN Under-Secretary General for Counter-Terrorism Vladimir Voronkov spoke about the expanded geographic focus of the threat and its evolving nature. He noted how member states have emphasised the need for a "bold investment... in prevention and building social and institutional resilience to terrorism." He stressed the contributions that municipalities and communities can make to the "whole of society" approach to P/CVE, given they are often the closest to the ground and best placed to identify the grievances and drivers that can lead to violent extremism. He encouraged stronger collaboration between the SCN and UNOCT, noting how the network has "helped to connect and support cities and municipalities to take action against terrorism in joint efforts with national governments, civil society, and youth... [and] is exactly the kind of initiative needed to reshape responses to all forms of violence"

[Session 1: What Are National Governments Doing to Empower And Support City-Led P/CVE Efforts?](#)

John Picarelli, Director of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, provided a brief overview of a threat landscape that is more complex, dynamic and diversified, increasingly fuelled by false narratives, conspiracy theories, and violent extremist rhetoric spread through social media and other online platforms to recruit and incite violence. He highlighted how DHS' prevention mission centres on building local capacity to prevent targeted violence and terrorism and protect local communities through a 'whole of society' approach that emphasise partnerships. DHS established the [Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships \(CP3\)](#) to improve the Department's ability to address the threats through this public health approach, the centrepiece of which is trust at all levels and across all actors involved, including local communities. The aim is to support the development of new, or strengthening of existing, community-based violence prevention and intervention programmes and frameworks.

He highlighted how DHS is supporting, including through both grant funding and the deployment of regional coordinators across the country, the development of "Local Prevention Frameworks" in different localities. These flexible frameworks "reach, coordinate, train, resource and support the many networks and segments of local society to engage on the prevention of the threat." In addition to raising awareness within communities of the threat, they seek to develop multidisciplinary threat assessment and management teams, and encourage coordination among a variety of health and social support services to provide help to individuals before it becomes a criminal justice matter.

Roger Noble, Australia's Ambassador for Counter-Terrorism, shared three lessons from two decades of counter-terrorism practice: partnerships matter, a comprehensive approach works best, and sharing information saves lives. He highlighted how cities and local governments often best understand the needs of communities and local drivers of violent extremism and are well placed to bring together



different stakeholders. He stressed how cooperation between national and local actors is needed for P/CVE interventions to be both effective and sustainable, noting that Australia and Indonesia worked with the SCN to develop [the GCTF's good practices on national-local cooperation for P/CVE](#), which identifies different steps national and local actors can take to strengthen cooperation and facilitate implementation of national P/CVE plans. He added how Australia is looking to implement the good practices at home.

Rubina Abu Zeinab, the National Coordinator for Preventing Violent Extremism in Lebanon, pointed to the growing radicalisation within communities in Lebanon that leads to violent extremism. Some communities are stigmatised and violence is normalised, she explained. She added that Lebanon is pursuing a multi-institutional approach to addressing the drivers of violent extremism in the country. She added that Lebanon's PVE model is built on connecting national and local actors, bringing together different government and non-governmental actors, developing partnerships, and taking into account local needs to develop context-specific interventions. The goal is to make the national PVE Strategy a living document and to improve the understanding of the driving factors of violent extremism in Lebanon.

Rosalind Nyawira, the acting Director of the National Counter-Terrorism Center in Kenya, said that its National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (NSCVE) has been localised in all 47 counties through County Action Plans (CAPS) for The Prevention of Violent Extremism. The CAPS provide a framework for national-county government coordination and collaboration in P/CVE; a forum for onboarding and coordinating diverse government and non-governmental stakeholders, including civil society, to contribute to P/CVE efforts; and doing joint monitoring, evaluation and learning in this space.

She praised the SCN's work in Kenya, and pointed to the growing number of counties that have benefited from engagement with the network, including through SCN support for local multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms for CAP implementation, the development of local prevention networks, and inter-county exchanges of experience in P/CVE. She said the SCN remains a vital mechanism for sharing lessons from Kenya, adopting good practices trialled elsewhere, and integrating the perspectives of Kenyan county governments into a global conversation on P/CVE. She looks forward to the SCN Virtual Africa Summit in November.

Donjet Gjoka, the Head of Civil Society and Security Sector in the CVE Center in Albania, spoke of his government's focus on prevention, which, based on Albania's experience, not only does not require additional financial or human resources for national and local governments, but facilitates the empowerment and development of resilient communities. He contrasted prevention efforts with the rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, which require significant funds, energy and human resources and are not always successful. The CVE Center has established a 12,000-person network of frontline practitioners that includes, among others, social, health, and youth workers, NGOs, local communities, youth groups, and religious leaders. A number of these frontline practitioners were involved in Albania's rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for the 24 Albanians repatriated from the camps in Syria and Iraq, which the CVE Center has coordinated. He added that Albania is fully prepared to repatriate and accommodate its remaining citizens in the camps of Syria and Iraq and is in the final stages of adopting a protocol "to unify and standardise the procedures for the reception and treatment of the Albanian citizens repatriated from conflict areas."

In terms of prevention, rather than creating new local mechanisms, Albania has integrated PVE into existing Local Public Safety Councils, which serve as unique platforms for local authorities and other relevant stakeholders to discuss and address any security related issue including violent extremism. He highlighted the role the national CVE Center played in consolidating the PVE role of Local Public Safety Councils in all municipalities, to foster social activities, provide necessary education for the children of the affected families and enhance financial stability through the creation of jobs in collaboration with local businesses in the framework of a community-based, multi-agency "soft" approach.



Liesbeth van der Heide, Head of Counter-Radicalisation and (Violent) Extremism in the City of The Hague, The Netherlands, highlighted how, like in many countries, the Netherlands established a national counter-terrorism [fusion centre](#) (within the National Coordinator for Security and Counter-Terrorism – NCTV) in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks to facilitate coordination between national and local actors. The mandate was to identify threats, support efforts to increase local level resilience, and minimise disruption in the aftermath of an attack. She described how counter-terrorism efforts in The Netherlands have typically focused on jihadist groups and individuals inspired by them, but with the rise in right-wing extremism over the past few years there are now questions regarding whether to view those involved as terrorists. This challenge has been brought into sharp relief as The Hague, like other cities, grapples with how to address the protests against government COVID-19 policies, which are attracting right-wing and left-wing extremist groups and fuel conspiracies against the government and online hatred.

She reported on a recent discussion with the fusion centre, where the police, intelligence officials, psychiatrists, and representatives from the NCTV and the city were present to discuss the protests and how to identify and address the security threats surrounding them. Regular communication between national and local actors, she emphasised, is critical to being able to translate national threat assessments into local action to address emerging threats. She highlighted the approach in the Netherlands as a best practice: where major cities have local advisers in the NCTV and cities regularly discuss with their national counterparts the current threats and what should be done at a local level to address them (e.g., what types of programmes; who should be the target; and who should be involved in designing and delivering them).

Session 2: Role of Cities In Addressing Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (REMVE), Including Violent White Supremacy

Georgia Holmer, Head, Action Against Terrorism Unit, OSCE, noted how the nature of violent extremist threats will continue to evolve and how right-wing violent extremism has increased in the past few years, exacerbated by COVID-19. She added how this threat is both increasingly transnational and a threat to peace, security, and democracy. She underscored the need to build international cooperation and deepen engagement with cities in order to harness their local knowledge and understanding of grassroots dynamics. With this in mind, she announced that OSCE will be convening a series of dialogues next year, which will engage mayors and local officials in North America and Europe to share and learn more about how they are grappling with these challenges, and identify what tools, training, and other support local actors may need going forward.

Naheed Nenshi, Mayor of Calgary, Canada, spoke about how pluralism and multiculturalism are much celebrated in Canada, but that following the *Black Lives Matter (BLM)* and *Indigenous Lives Matter (ILM)* movements last year, governments in Canada have sought to move from multiculturalism to anti-racism. He shared how COVID-19 has sparked anti-mask and anti-vaccine movements in his city, some of which are associated with right-wing extremists. He added that in Canada terrorism has too often been seen as a “Muslim thing” when in fact, right-wing violent extremism was a bigger problem. Some political leaders have not only sought to minimise the threat from right-wing extremist groups, but in some cases have blown (racist) dog whistles or otherwise coddled them. Communities, he said, need to fight this. He underscored three commitments Calgary had made in this regard: to become an anti-racist city government; to reform the police, including by acknowledging historical racism in the institution and emphasising community policing; and leading communities forward to become an anti-racist city and in doing so build strong communities which is the most effective way to fight right-wing extremism that is racially motivated.

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, United Kingdom, said the world has witnessed a rise in REMVE in the last decade, tracing it to the political changes that resulted from the financial crash in 2008. He added that divisions generated by different opinions on how to manage the pandemic and on vaccinations are causing more discord. He noted how right-wing extremists came to Manchester



following the 2018 attack at the Ariana Grande concert and sought to exploit the feelings of despair. However, there was also spontaneous outpouring from different communities. He referred to the post-attack commission the city created to explore how to address the hateful narratives and promote social cohesion. Among the solutions identified were to be open and honest about failures in addressing threats and steps taken following the attack; visibly support all communities in equal measure; bring all voices to the table; let communities lead P/CVE efforts; have a zero-tolerance policy to hate crime; and make sure young people are a priority when discussions that concern their future are held.

William Peduto, Mayor of Pittsburgh, United States, spoke about the attack at the *Tree of Life Synagogue* in his city three years ago. He shared that as they watched the situation unfold, the community came together, with members from different religious and cultural backgrounds showing up to offer their condolences to victims. He stressed how mayors should take preventative measures so the city is prepared for and communities can rally when an attack occurs. This means, for example, bringing citizens together through interfaith and interethnic dialogues.

Lovis Rieck, Deputy Head of the Unit for Political Crimes, Senate Department for the Interior and Sport, Berlin, shared some insights into what Berlin is doing to address REMVE, noting that Germany experienced two right wing attacks in recent years. These measures range from enhanced policing, including deployment of mobile police near houses of worship - to help build trust with the different religious communities; to commissioning independent research to identify any racism in the police; to participating in the "Joint Information and Assessment Centre on Right-Wing Extremism" that includes Berlin police and national intelligence officials; to developing the Berlin Advisory Network that facilitates cooperation among local experts active in the fields of right-wing extremism, anti-racism, or anti-Semitism; to supporting EXIT programs that enable young people to leave right-wing violent group as well as victims' assistance projects.

He underscored the essential role that the Berlin government plays – on both practical and strategic issues – in countering REMVE and other forms of violent extremism. However, he also said the local governments understand the importance of networking, cooperation and communication with other authorities in Germany, especially the federal government.

Josefin Bergstrom, Senior Advisor at the Swedish Center for Preventing Violent Extremism, shared how the centre was established in 2018 to promote coordination among national, regional, and local PVE stakeholders and activities. She spoke about her role on the centre's mobile support team that helps municipalities with their prevention work. She highlighted the need for finding a national structure where the local level, or cities, know where to turn when they are faced with complex issues.

In addition, she underscored the need to raise awareness around REMVE threats and the potential dangers associated with engaging with communities on them, and making sure frontline municipal staff were equipped to meet individuals in a non-confrontational, non-polarising way. She added that her centre is advising teachers and social workers in Sweden on how to have these challenging conversations with individuals they are concerned about. The key, she said, "is to meet them with respect and curiosity, to listen to what they have to say and to try not to judge or label them." Beyond this advice, frontline professionals also need knowledge on how REMVE has shifted, as there remains tendency to look at organised actors rather those who have self-radicalised online that are posing an increasing violent threat. This means more work is needed at the local level to work preventively online.

Jeppe Albers, Executive Director, Nordic Safe Cities, underscored that the foundation of prevention is to build inclusive communities and promote the values of democracy, freedom of speech, mutual respect, and trust. He outlined a four-pillar blueprint for addressing right-wing extremism that is informed by the experiences of 20 Scandinavian cities. The first pillar is to address everyday hate and racism, which is becoming normalised extremism. Here, mayors and other city leaders can facilitate public discourses within and among communities and help them navigate the space between freedom of speech and hate speech. Because REMVE is often legal, albeit harmful, civil society has a particularly important role to play in prevention efforts.



The second pillar is to defend a safe, local democracy. This recognises that minorities are often being prevented from participating in the political sphere and politicians are frequently being harassed. Here, democracy training for mayors and city leaders on how to safeguard voting rights and deal with harassment, for example, is important. The third pillar is to ensure safe, local democracy. In this regard, he noted how artificial intelligence (AI) can help cities in delivering data on REMVE online. This can help cities to be proactive and present online, address harmful narratives, and raise awareness. The fourth and final pillar focuses on the need to update risk assessment tools - designed primarily to focus on marginalised youth most susceptible to Islamist violent extremist recruitment and radicalisation - to address those most typically involved in or attracted to REMVE, i.e., adults, often with resources. He added that this is part of a wider challenge Scandinavian cities are facing as they grapple with how to address the threat: much of the crime prevention architecture in their countries is geared towards young people and the social safety net is focused on economically disadvantaged ones. Those involved in REMVE, however, are often adults with resources.

Session 3: Role of Cities and Civil Society in Supporting the Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Family Members of Foreign Terrorist Fighters

Khalid Koser, Executive Director of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), spoke about how, in migration contexts, the burden of integration typically falls on cities, which are often the ones responsible for providing housing, school, counselling, and job-training. As we know from other migration integration contexts, cities face both challenges and opportunities. He wondered whether cities involved in managing the reintegration of family members of returning foreign terrorist fighters faced similar ones.

Rebeka Qena, Programme Manager, Community Development Fund (CDF), Kosovo, is a GCERF grantee working to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria and Iraq. She outlined Kosovo's approach to the repatriation of some 242 Kosovars who have returned from Syria and Iraq. She highlighted some practical rehabilitation and restorative measures that Kosovo had implemented, with the former including psychological and religious counselling, social support, and employment programmes, and the latter involving families, schools, and social assistance. Kosovo has put in place a mechanism to facilitate coordination and communication among the different government agencies involved in R&R work. This serves as the single link between the different stakeholders involved, including NGOs (when authorised), and returnees. She highlighted Kosovo's efforts to increase the capacities of local actors with returnees and CDF is preparing to train psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers who will then train local practitioners on how to address the mental health of returnees.

She spoke about the unique reintegration challenges posed by child returnees, as they are more prone to stigmatisation and a sense of isolation and discrimination from the community. Some adult returnees are facing barriers as well, including to employment, as private companies refuse to hire them as they perceive them to pose a threat to the community. CDF assists by providing small grants to returnees and finding internships for them with local businesses. She directed a number of recommendations to central government. These include facilitating more involvement of different professionals and organisations in the rehabilitation and reintegration process; designing and implementing a communication strategy that targets communities and seeks to increase their willingness to accept returnees; implementing, in cooperation with CSOs and academia, capacity- and knowledge-building activities directed at municipalities, local security councils, and frontline practitioners; and strengthening local level structures to support this work, instead of continuing to conduct everything through the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA).

Gulnaz Razdykova, Director of the Center for Analysis and Development of Interfaith Relations, Pavlodar, Kazakhstan, said that the government, as part of a humanitarian mission conducted in 2019, oversaw the return of 637 citizens, mostly women and children, from Syria and



Iraq. Rehabilitation and reintegration programmes have centred on the social well-being of returnees and highlighted the need for the socioeconomic reintegration of women in particular. She cited some of the challenges surrounding these programs in Kazakhstan. For example, while the expert community in the country is supportive of the programmes and their objectives, the wider society is generally sceptical. Another challenge is how women are often perceived as passive victims of terrorism. This despite the fact that the analysis shows that it is not always the case and that women are often crucial agents in recruitment and radicalisation processes. This is important to be understood, as is the risk that women are returning to families who may be radicalised. She concluded by highlighting that Kazakhstan's current R&R efforts are in a "remission" phase, where the focus is on bringing about gradual cognitive change amongst returnees. She added that R&R efforts should do more to bring in the expertise of theologians, since returnees often have limited knowledge about religion and theology.

Taufik Andrie, the Executive Director of Institute for International Peace Building (YPP), Indonesia, spoke about his country's evolving experience managing returnees from Syria and Iraq. During the first and second waves of repatriation in 2017 and 2018, which involved some 700 individuals, he said there was only a single, four-week national programme that offered counselling and education, but that there was nothing in place at the local level to manage the situation when they returned to their communities. In January 2021, however, the government adopted a comprehensive national action plan for P/CVE that includes rehabilitation and reintegration measures and a plan for involving local governments and CSOs in supporting its implementation. He said there is now recognition that these issues can no longer be within the exclusive purview of the central government and there is a need to involve local governments and develop a multistakeholder approach that involves civil society and local practitioners. He added that YPP has created a local task force to help, but the capacity of the Central Java government to contribute to the rehabilitation and reintegration of its residents who have returned from Syria and Iraq (including those who have completed prison sentences) is limited.

Yusuf Lule Mwatsefu, Executive Director, Human Rights Agenda (HURIA), Kenya, spoke about some of the challenges and opportunities civil society actors in Kenya face as they seek to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of those seeking to return from joining al-Shabaab in Somalia. He noted that the national P/CVE strategy situates R&R issues within the sole domain of the national government. In fact, those CSOs that sought to facilitate the surrender of returnees were charged with terrorism. He said that this led the government to further limit civil society's involvement in P/CVE. However, he noted progress in recent years, which began when NCTC sought to facilitate more involvement of civil society and local governments as way to promote efforts to translate the national plan into local action. The county action plans that have emerged provide a platform for cooperation and engagement among NCTC, county governments, and civil society.

Although CSOs are still limited in what they can do to support returnees, they have been "midwife-ing their self-return". This has involved leveraging their networks of trust to receive information from families who want their relatives to surrender to the authorities voluntarily as opposed to being "disappeared" or victims of extrajudicial killings. He described some of HURIA's work on these issues, which includes activities to enhance community understanding of and support for R&R efforts, providing psychosocial support to returnees, and legal aid and human rights education to families whose relatives have been victims of extrajudicial killings or "disappearances". He closed by underscoring the need for the national government to outline a framework for civil society to support R&R efforts.

Session 4: The Future Direction of SCN: Ensuring it is Fit for Purpose to Support City-Led P/CVE Efforts, and Concluding Remarks

Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Under-Secretary Christina Markus Lassen shared some ideas for how to further enhance the SCN's relevance and impact, pointing to findings which emerged from an independent forward-looking assessment on the network that Denmark recently commissioned. She noted how the study confirmed that the SCN was delivering on its original purpose: to help local



governments leverage their comparative advantages as part of a 'whole of society' approach to P/CVE and that with the size (nearly 150) and diversity of its membership, the SCN is uniquely positioned to advocate for more focus on the role of mayors - and the cities they lead - in effective prevention at all levels.

She shared some recommendations from the assessment geared to ensuring that the SCN delivers on its full potential. One focused on deepening SCN engagement with global actors such as the UN Office of Counterterrorism, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and its inspired institutions, to ensure the role and needs of cities are reflected in global policy and programming discussions, and an enhanced focus on local prevention efforts as the most effective way of reducing the threat from violent extremism. Second, the cities on the SCN International Steering Committee, which should be revitalised, need to provide greater strategic direction to the network to ensure it is driven by the needs of its members. Cities should be represented both at the "global table" in New York when member states review the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and at the national table when governments are developing "whole of society" P/CVE frameworks.

Xheladin Ajvazi - Deputy National CVE Coordinator, National CVE/CT Committee, North Macedonia highlighted some of his government's work on prevention and rehabilitation and reintegration of returning family members and FTFs from Syria and Iraq. He pointed to the consultations with different national and local stakeholders, including NGOs, that informed the development of the national P/CVE strategy. In the prevention space, he cited the development of the Community Action Team in Kumanovo and the various Local Prevention Councils as examples of local multi-agency prevention structures. On the repatriation front, he pointed to the national strategy on repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration that the government adopted in 2020 and the complementary Standard Operating Procedures for repatriation which elaborates which institution is responsible for which actions during the repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration process. He added that the government has begun to prepare communities to receive returnees, but this will require more time given the sensitivities involved. In addition, the government has created local multi-disciplinary teams for returning women and children entering back into their communities, and is facilitating the training of the social workers and psychiatrists who will lead these local teams. Finally, while North Macedonia has intensified the sharing of P/CVE good practices with other countries in its region, he said a global network where practitioners and governments can share experiences and lessons learned on the range of issues related to returning family members of fighters from Syria and Iraq is needed.

Maye Seck SY, Technical Adviser to the Mayor in Charge of Urban Security, Dakar, Senegal, said that Dakar, as one of the original members and long-time supporter of the SCN, was delighted to be among the nearly 20 cities from different regions that participated in the 22 September SCN meeting to discuss how to strengthen the network and further enhance its impact. She emphasised how the network remains the only initiative focused on strengthening the role of mayors and local governments around the globe in preventing and countering violent extremism. She shared some of the highlights from the meeting. For example, participants agreed that the network needs to engage on a more consistent basis with more cities, facilitate more sharing and interactions among mayors and local government officials, help ensure that perspectives of local leaders and governments are heard more regularly in global, regional, and national P/CVE conversations, and needs to be guided by a reinvigorated steering committee.

She said that most cities, including hers, are confronted with more immediate and widespread threats and challenges than violent extremism. Given this reality, and particularly where resources are limited, many cities in the meeting emphasised the value of integrating efforts to prevent violent extremism across a variety of municipal services or activities. She highlighted how being proactive against the threat before it leads to violence was seen as critical and, for those cities which had not necessarily been directly affected by past terrorist incidents, was a motivation for joining the network. In this context, she noted the discussions highlighted the need for cities to have access to data on the extremist and hybrid threats, which would not only increase their understanding of the threats, but also what



existing resources could be leveraged to address them and thus motivate them to take preventative action.

Erik Rostoft, Deputy Mayor of Kristiansand, Norway, said that Kristiansand, which integrates PVE efforts into broader work the city is doing to promote diversity, inclusion, and social cohesion, has been a member city of the SCN since 2016 and has participated in a number of network activities since then, including a city exchange with Mombasa. It has also worked with Nordic Safe Cities (NSC) to gain more local knowledge from, and to discuss best practices with, cities in its region. He suggested having NSC be a regional hub for the SCN, which he recommended should shift to a regional hub model that allows the network to better cater to the different needs and capacities of its members. He thought such an approach would make the network more relevant to more members, which he encouraged to take greater ownership over the SCN going forward. He added that Kristiansand needs more knowledge on violent extremism, hate crime and radicalisation, including being able to address the line between hateful narratives and freedom of speech.