

Event Report

Transatlantic Initiative

Responding to Extremist and Hate-Motivated Violence: Building Strong and Resilient Communities

10 – 12 May 2023

Oslo, Norway



Summary

In May 2023, the [Strong Cities Network](https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/) co-hosted with the City of Oslo a transatlantic dialogue on *Responding to Extremist and Hate-Motivated Violence: Building Strong and Resilient Communities*. The workshop provided mayors, city officials and civil society an opportunity to share approaches for mounting an effective, community-oriented and long-term response in a (post) crisis environment.

The event convened more than 80 representatives from local governments and civil society in Europe and North America, as well as international partners such as the [Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe](https://www.osce.org/) (OSCE) and [Nordic Safe Cities](https://www.nordicsafe.org/). Participants from European cities, such as Amsterdam and The Hague (The Netherlands), Copenhagen (Denmark), Essen (Germany), Greater Manchester (United Kingdom), Helsinki (Finland), Madrid (Spain), Mechelen (Belgium), Strasbourg (France), Dąbrowa Górnicza and Wrocław (Poland), and Kristiansand and Oslo (Norway), joined US participants from Alexandria (Virginia), Aurora and Denver (Colorado), Boston (Massachusetts), Chicago (Illinois), and Highland Park (Illinois).



Oslo Governing Mayor Raymond Johansen, framed the importance of mayoral leadership and a community-centred response in his keynote address, drawing on his city's experience and lessons learned in responding to the 22 July 2011 attacks that killed 77 adults and children, and the 25 June 2022 anti-LGBTQ+ violence that killed two and injured more than 20.

Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham also shared his experience of the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing that killed more than 20, including what newly-elected mayors – as he was then – need to know about preparing their city to respond to an attack.

During the event, participants heard from many inspiring leaders, including **Oslo's Vice Mayor for Employment, Integration and Social Services, Usman Mushtaq**, on the city's response to the 2022 attack, and **Kamzy Gunaratnam, a member of the Norwegian Parliament**, and survivor of the 2011 attacks, who focused on current and future challenges, including how artificial intelligence could further proliferate disinformation/misinformation and how local governments communicate with communities in post-attack or heightened contexts. Panel discussions covered topics ranging from mayoral leadership in a post-attack environment, the role of national-local cooperation (NLC), interfaith communities and law enforcement after an incident, how members of Oslo's LGBTQ+ communities experienced the 2022 attack, as well as the importance of long-term trauma-informed care for those impacted, including survivors and first responders.

The event also included a guided visit to the island of **Utøya**, one of two sites targeted in the 2011 attacks. Participants learned how the attack unfolded and how the island has been reimagined, through extensive consultations, as a memorial and centre for democracy promotion and youth engagement. The programme ended with a tour hosted by the City of Oslo, where participants had the opportunity to see up close the City's approach to protecting soft targets while upholding principles of openness, accessibility and inclusion.

Among the themes and lessons that emerged from the dialogue:

1. Mayors play a vital role in both the immediate and long-term response to a crisis, particularly around coordination, communications and support for victims and frontline workers.
2. An effective post-crisis response requires a multi-stakeholder in approach, leveraging local partners that have access to and can deliver vital long-term support to impacted communities.
3. Preparedness is key: while there is no such thing as a perfect response, having structures, relationships and protocols in place *prior* to an attack helps facilitate an effective response.

Key Challenges & City Needs

By virtue of their proximity to local communities and responsibility for daily public service delivery, city leaders and local governments are well-placed to mount an effective and holistic response to acts of hate-motivated or mass-casualty violence. However, they can face challenges. These include a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities both at the local level and in relation to national actors. Participants noted that local governments without explicit mandates, with national governments active in this space, may not see for themselves a role in crisis response. Yet, it is mayors and other city leaders who need to drive this response, supported and encouraged to do so by national government counterparts and security actors (e.g., through appropriate information-sharing and financial support). In this context, participants commended the forthcoming Strong

Cities Mayoral and City Guides (see *Next Steps*), which will support local action in preventing and responding to hate- and extremist-motivated violence.

Participants also reflected on other challenges, from sustaining long-term support for those impacted (including as their needs evolve over time) to how to identify and implement lessons learned into forward strategies. US participants noted that this can be further complicated in their cities, with a mayor's departure often accompanied by an exodus of senior political appointees, and a loss of institutional memory.

Key Themes

1. **Mayors play a vital role in both immediate and long-term responses to crises, particularly around communications, coordination and support for victims and frontline workers.**

Participants had the opportunity to hear from current and former mayors about their experiences leading cities through crises. Participants agreed that **mayors must play a role regardless of whether they have an explicit mandate for post-attack response** and that they should seek out this role *proactively*. One participant observed that too often mayors and other city leaders let central governments dictate post-crisis response, while it is mayors that an impacted city's residents will look to for information and reassurance. Others noted that the absence of strong and *visible* mayoral leadership in a post-attack environment may reduce trust in the mayor's ability to lead the city, and the local government's ability to handle crises. As a representative from Oslo observed, **"mayoral leadership [in the aftermath of the 2011 attacks] inspired trust that the [post-crisis] system was working"**.

Among the roles a mayor can play is coordinating different actors to ensure local needs are being met and that national and local response efforts complement rather than duplicate. For example, participants noted that:

- Once an incident has been neutralised, **mayors should be on the ground consulting with victims, bereaved families, first responders and community leaders to identify gaps in response, psychosocial and other needs, and leading a multi-agency committee to allocate local resources or seeking national government support.**
- Mayors can play a key role in coordinating with national government stakeholders and ensuring that the national response aligns with the tone and focus of local efforts.
- Mayors should also ensure that "outsized loud voices" do not drown out local voices, perspectives and needs, and serve as advocates for their constituents at the national level and a buffer between national and local actors on the ground.
- Mayors should be at the forefront of public communications following an incident. Participants noted, for example, that "leadership communications set the tone for response" and can mitigate polarisation and other impacts of the crisis. Key principles for mayoral communications identified at the event include:
 - **Accessibility:** City leaders should avoid jargon, keep messaging succinct, and include sign- or other language accessibility aligned with the needs of their

communities.

- **Balance:** Messaging should balance the need to inform with the need to mitigate fear and post-crisis inter-communal tensions and focus on the city and its communities rather than on perpetrator(s). War and other explicit or loaded rhetoric must be avoided in favour of rhetoric that emphasises unity and togetherness as a means of recovery.
- **Transparency:** Leaders should be transparent about the city's response; crucial for maintaining credibility and public trust. As the city identifies lessons learned from its response, these should be shared, with one participant observing that "all public service should be an obligation to tell the truth".
- Mayors play an important role in supporting victims, bereaved families, frontline workers and other communities. For example, following the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, Mayor Burnham commissioned a [non-statutory review](#) of the city's response. The review found that personal visits by the Mayor to victims and bereaved families, and the Mayor's overall strong civic leadership, enhanced community reassurance and confidence, and further highlighted the city's commitment to mounting a united "families first" response. Importantly, the review also found that outreach should extend to survivors of the attack who were not amongst the injured, but still experienced the trauma, and that such efforts continue in the long-term.
- Mayors must be embedded in command centres responsible for crisis management. Following the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the Mayor formed part of the "unified command centre" that oversaw the city's response. Utilising this multi-agency structure, the Mayor was able to assign roles and responsibilities for different aspects of the response, and craft "[clear, concise and unified messages](#)" to be delivered by the Mayor and other city leaders. This helped ensure consistent messaging shaped by multiple local government agencies and emergency responders, and reflective of the Mayor's outreach. Similarly, in Oslo, Governing Mayor Raymond Johansen immediately mobilised and led the crisis response team following the anti-LGBTQ+ shooting in 2022.



City Practice: Civic Leadership – Greater Manchester Combined Authority, UK

- **Goal:** A family and community-focused, transparent and efficient response.
- **Approach:** The Greater Manchester Combined Authority’s response to the 2017 Manchester Arena attack – across communications, community engagement, deployment of public health services, and public commemorations – centred around the needs of those impacted. Shortly after the attack, the Mayor announced a vigil for those who were lost, which he attended. He spent time with survivors and bereaved families and commissioned a non-statutory review of the City’s response, which looked at all components of response. Recommendations from the review are being used to refine ongoing efforts related to the 2017 bombing, and the city’s response strategy.
- **Impact:** Despite the intensity of publicity around the attack, and national government and royal family visits that required support, response focused firmly on the community and families, with messaging reinforcing unity, community and recovery.

2. An effective post-crisis response must be multi-stakeholder in approach, leveraging local partners that have access to and can deliver long-term support to impacted communities.



Participants underscored the importance of mounting a *long-term multi-stakeholder* response, including, *inter alia*, a key role for interfaith actors. For example, the Oslo branch of a national [Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities](#) brings together more than 40 religious communities across the city, established to create understanding and build inter-religious trust and harmony. Following the 2022 LGBTQ+-targeted shooting, the Council mobilised religious leaders of all faiths to support Oslo’s LGBTQ+ community and “to show solidarity against the attack”.

The interfaith community also played a role in addressing conspiracies and bigotry that followed the attack, hosting seminars that emphasise the city’s principles of openness and inclusion. The importance of collaboration between interfaith communities – particularly religious minorities – and law enforcement was also discussed. For example, Oslo’s [Sondre Norstrand Muslim Center](#) has a designated contact person at the police department which it meets with regularly to discuss concerns, whether that be emerging tensions that need to be addressed, or ways



to make Oslo’s Muslim community feel safe and protected against bigotry, building relationships and trust that are also pivotal in a post-attack environment. Participants commented on the importance of sustainable and consistent local government – community engagement to build relationships and

establish a cadre of local leaders and service providers who can support both prevention and response.

“You have to know your city ... engage new organisations, identify new leaders and have open discussions with them ... building new relationships is critical.”

Paul Rosenthal, City of Denver, Colorado, US

City Practice: Utøya, Norway

- **Goal:** A place to remember and honour victims and survivors and support learning.
- **Approach:** The island of Utøya was home to a youth camp hosted by the Norwegian Labour Party. It was one of two sites attacked in 2011. Following the attack, Utøya's management conducted extensive, multi-year consultations with the City of Oslo, survivors, bereaved families and frontline responders. Utøya was rebuilt to host young people once again, and as a centre for democracy promotion, while also serving as a deeply moving memorial for those who come to the island to remember the victims of the attack. A learning centre, built around the cafeteria where so many lost their lives, engages youth on topics of democracy, social cohesion and community resilience.
- **Impact:** The extensive consultations that fed into the design process ensured that Utøya is not only a living memorial but also a centre for learning and youth engagement.

3. Having multi-actor and national-local structures, relationships and protocols in place *prior* to an attack helps facilitate an effective and timely response should there be an incident.

Participants discussed the need for cities to prepare and practice for worst-case scenarios, including mass-casualty acts, and not to underestimate how quickly incidents can escalate. Representatives of cities that have endured terrorist and other acts of hate-motivated violence underscored the importance of preparedness, emphasising that this should go beyond just having local structures, strategies and policies in place. **It must also include table-top exercises and simulations, proactive risk mappings and coordination with national actors to pre-identify roles and responsibilities in crisis situations.** Preparing and testing crisis response systems and approaches *regularly* will help cities identify where such strategies can be improved and ensure the different stakeholders involved are aware of changes and their responsibilities. This can in turn facilitate a swift, appropriate and effective multi-stakeholder response in the event of violence.

Prevention and preparedness are also crucial for fostering trust between different stakeholders involved in response (e.g., mayor, government departments, law enforcement, etc.) and the communities they serve. High levels of trust also support response at a practical level, with law enforcement officials at the event noting how community engagement efforts have helped with post-

incident information gathering, as members of the public were already aware of reporting processes and trusted that law enforcement would respond appropriately.

In Boston, pre-existing relationships between city leaders and frontline personnel, developed through planning for the annual marathon and other events, proved vital in the wake of the 2013 bombing, enabling the city to swiftly mobilise a command centre through which the response was coordinated.

Other approaches shared included the City of Helsinki's [Safe City Network](#). Comprised of 23 stakeholders from across local government and civil society, the network meets to proactively discuss community tensions, challenges and needs for responding to emerging threats, and can be mobilised in response to an incident.

The **Norwegian Commission on Extremism** is working to identify lessons learned, and to work with cities to help them respond to local threats and improve national-local collaboration in prevention, and to support local implementation of the national CVE strategy. The Commission has consulted with municipalities across the country to understand their needs. As noted under Key Theme 2, Oslo also has multiple multi-stakeholder structures in place that can be leveraged in a post-attack environment.

“You cannot demand unity and trust: people need to [already] trust police and the public sector.”

Raymond Johansen, Governing Mayor, City of Oslo, Norway

City Practice: Crisis Training and Preparedness – City of Denver, Colorado, US

- **Goal:** To ensure the city is prepared and has tested infrastructure to manage crises.
- **Approach:** In Denver, the City's [Office of Emergency Management](#) (OEM) has a mandate for broad crisis response, including inter alia public health, migrant-related crises, terrorism, etc. OEM leads training for those involved in managing crises, as well as for the public. This partnership model brings together local organisations, elected officials and businesses to ensure the city is prepared for effective crisis management. Topics range from how to make a crisis management plan to specific scenario training (e.g., active shooter). OEM also hosts an emergency alert system, sending alerts to residents' phones with updates and guidance on active situations.
- **Impact:** OEM is a dedicated multi-agency unit responsible for community preparedness and crisis response. By situating responses to terrorism and targeted violence within the same team responsible for emergency management, OEM is building capacity and integrating lessons learned.

Next Steps

Identified city practices and lessons learned will inform a number of tools being launched at the Strong Cities Global Summit in September 2023, including an updated one on [Post-Incident Response](#) and guide for mayors and local governments.

Additional Resources

- [Responding to a Terror Attack](#), Strong Cities Network
- [Why Networks Are Key to Preventing Extremism and Hate](#), Strong Cities Network
- [UNOCT/UNCCT Crisis Communications Toolkit](#)
- [After Action Report for the Response to the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombings](#), Massachusetts EMA
- [The Kerslake Arena Review](#) (Manchester Arena Bombing, 2017), Lord Kerslake

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Oslo



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Contact Information

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