



Strong Cities Network
Fourth Global Summit
19—21 September 2023

Strong Cities Network
International Steering Committee

Fourth Global Summit Event Report

International Steering Committee

New York City, USA
20 September 2023



Summary

On 19 – 21 September 2023, the Strong Cities Network held its [Fourth Global Summit](#) in New York City, bringing together more than 240 participants, including mayors and governors, city officials and practitioners from more than 115 cities and 50 countries around the world. The Summit agenda included 11 events, providing participants with opportunities to share and learn from city-led innovations and approaches to prevent and respond to rising hate, extremism and polarisation. **Read the meeting report [here](#).**

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The Summit agenda included the inaugural in-person meeting of the revitalised Strong Cities International Steering Committee (ISC), a geographically diverse membership of mayors and senior representatives from more than 20 Strong Cities members. During the meeting, ISC members were briefed on the Network's growth and sustainability, as well as the recent rebranding process and investments in new technology and a new multilingual website. The ISC also endorsed the Strong Cities Network Strategy (2023 – 2025), and three new initiatives, including a Women's Leadership Caucus, a Friends of the Network mechanism, and an ISC thematic focus on how rising hate, extremism and polarisation is manifesting in increased attacks on elected officials, with a particular focus on women local leaders.

Opening Remarks

The meeting was opened by the new ISC Co-Chairs, **Asmaa Rhlalou, Mayor of Rabat (Morocco)**, and **Jan van Zanen, Mayor of The Hague (the Netherlands)** (prerecorded remarks). The Co-Chairs emphasised the importance of the Strong Cities Network particularly considering the myriad challenges currently facing cities and the erosion of social cohesion around the world. **Sasha Havlicek, Co-Founder and CEO of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)**, which hosts the Strong Cities Management Unit, briefed the ISC on the background and context for the establishment of the Strong Cities Network. **Eric Rosand, Strong Cities Executive Director**, followed by underscoring the significance of this first meeting of the reinvigorated ISC, noting that the Management Unit looked forward to a fruitful partnership with ISC members, as ambassadors and champions for the Network within their respective countries and regions.



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A tour de table followed, with members emphasising their shared commitment to the Strong Cities mission and the platform it provides for much-needed sharing and learning from the experiences and approaches of other cities to prevent and respond to these challenges.

Strong Cities Strategy (2023 – 2025)



ISC members were briefed on the new [Strong Cities Strategy](#), which acts on the key findings of a 2021 assessment commissioned by Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Strategy (2023 – 2025) articulates how, over the course of the next three years, Strong Cities will chart a course that delivers impact for cities worldwide as the need for support remains pressing, and the threats and challenges they face continue to evolve across the full spectrum of hate, extremism and polarisation. The Strategy discussion included a briefing on the Network's new Regional Hub structure – operational in East and Southern Africa, MENA, South Asia and the Western Balkans – as well as plans to launch a North America Regional Hub to expand and deepen the Network's engagement in this region, as well identified need and potential prevention work in Southeast Asia and coastal West Africa. The ISC welcomed considerable work done to develop the Network's forward trajectory, the inclusive nature of the consultations and the focus on city needs and priorities. The Strategy was endorsed unanimously by ISC members.

Network Growth: Diverse and Inclusive

The ISC was then briefed on the growth of the Strong Cities Network. Launched in 2015 with 25 members, the Network now has more than 210 members with a further 41 currently in the application process. The Network's diversity and inclusivity are among its greatest strengths; a global network of cities in different national and local contexts ensures that wherever a city is located, there will be other cities facing similar challenges and with similar capacities and needs. The Network's growth and diversity are being driven in large part by the Regional Hub model, which has enabled more focused, dedicated work with cities on a regional basis, further catalysing the Strong Cities mission. Members were briefed on plans to launch a North America Regional Hub in the coming months and increasing interest in and engagement by cities in the Caribbean and South America following the Network's successful engagement in the 2023 Cities Summit of the Americas.

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Investments in Infrastructure and Data for a Stronger Network

The ISC was briefed on significant investments made in technology over the past year to build the foundations necessary to support the Network's growth and to streamline and centralise Management Unit work processes; investments made possible with support from the US Department of State and the European Union.

A new relationship management database has enabled the Management Unit to manage and track member data and contacts through a secure, cloud-based platform, and to understand more clearly and dynamically the Network's reach, diversity and impact. Strong Cities has also been rebranded, moving away from the SCN acronym and logo to a new Strong Cities brand that puts cities front and centre, and prioritises its members, inclusivity and diversity. A new multi-lingual website (in Arabic, English and French) and online Resource Hub is providing members and non-members with a vastly improved user journey, one better tailored to the needs and priorities of a global network of cities and making more accessible tools and guides. This includes two new guides launched ahead of the Global Summit – [A Guide for Mayors](#) and [A Guide for Cities](#) – to support city-led efforts to address hate, extremism and polarisation. Developed through consultations with local leaders and city officials in different contexts globally, the guides draw on experiences, good practices and advice from more than 100 local leaders and city officials, as well as a diversity of examples from city-led approaches to prevention and response. These new guides can be downloaded as PDFs, but they are also built out as online, living multi-media tools, and will serve as crucial resources for in-depth training and support provided by Strong Cities, including through our Regional Hubs, for mayors and city officials globally.

New Proposals: Friends of Strong Cities, Women's Leadership Caucus and ISC Thematic Focus for 2023 – 2024

ISC members were also asked for their input and endorsement of three new initiatives.

The first was a proposed **Friends of Strong Cities** mechanism, which would invite local government associations and city networks from around the world to become 'friends' of the Network. This would enable the Management Unit to support non-members through these associations and networks rather than expanding membership to an extent beyond our capacity to support, noting that membership understandably raises expectations of a certain level of engagement. Through Friends of Strong Cities, the Network would work with and through local government associations and city networks, to catalyse city-led action by sharing Strong Cities' tools, guides, good practices and invitations to our events, where geographically relevant. The Management Unit proposed this as a responsible way forward and in keeping with the mission of the Strong Cities Network. The proposal received unanimous support and endorsement by ISC members and will be taken forward by the Management Unit.

The second proposal was a **Women's Leadership Caucus**, a mechanism through which to empower and support women leaders and the value of women leadership across the Network. The

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Women's Leadership Caucus would be run virtually – through quarterly meetings – and through gatherings in the margins of our events and workshops around the world. An opportunity to bring together in a room, women working in local governments, including young women, to share their experiences, challenges and perspectives, and form connections through which they can offer each other support. This proposal received unanimous support and endorsement by ISC members and will be taken forward by the Management Unit.

The ISC also welcomed the proposed **thematic focus for the year ahead** on how rising hate, extremism and polarisation – fuelled by mis- and dis-information – are manifesting in anti-establishment attacks on elected officials globally: mapping the threat and how Strong Cities members are responding. This is a challenge that is cross-regional and on which Strong Cities members have requested support. The ISC members underscored the impact of such threats and violence – both within their city administrations and from personal experience – and committed to working with the Network's Management Unit to take forward the proposal.



Closing Remarks

In closing the inaugural in-person meeting of the reinvigorated ISC, the Co-Chairs shared more about their priorities in the year ahead. The representative of The Hague emphasised the city's desire to support the Strong Cities Network, the Management Unit and member cities, including by identifying new funding streams and opportunities to elevate the voices of mayors and cities in international fora, including the United Nations, which is among the Network's key strategic priorities. The **Mayor of Rabat** also reiterated the importance of support for youth and women and in building partnerships with associations and civil society.

Eric Rosand thanked the Co-Chairs and the ISC members for their support and active participation during the ISC's first meeting and said he looked forward to working with the ISC on the new proposals, implementation of the new Strategy and the Network's strategic priorities, as well as engaging more cities and associations in their countries.

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The views expressed in this summary do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the ISC or the Summit sponsors.

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Contact Us

For more information about the [Strong Cities Network International Steering Committee](#) and/or the Fourth Global Summit, please contact Allison Curtis, Deputy Executive Director, at ac@strongcitiesnetwork.org.

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