



Strong Cities Network
Fourth Global Summit
19—21 September 2023

Fourth Global Summit Event Report

Enhancing Global-Local Cooperation in Protecting Soft Targets and Engaging Local Communities

A Strong Cities – UNCTED Dialogue

New York City, USA
21 September 2023



Summary

On 19 – 21 September 2023, Strong Cities Network held its [Fourth Global Summit](#) in New York City, which brought together over 240 participants, including city leaders and practitioners representing more than 115 cities from 50 countries globally. The Summit featured 11 events and provided city officials from diverse contexts the opportunity to share and learn from promising practices for city-led prevention of hate, polarisation and extremism. **Read the event report [here](#).**

As part of this programme, Strong Cities partnered with the [UN Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate](#) (UNCTED) and New York University's (NYU) Center for Global Affairs to organise a

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workshop on ‘Enhancing Global-Local Cooperation in Protecting Soft Targets and Engaging Local Communities’. This brought together more than 40 local government officials, frontline practitioners and representatives from UNCTED and other UN agencies to strengthen understanding amongst local governments of relevant UN frameworks, as well as showcasing for multilateral representatives existing city-led efforts to protect soft targets and engage communities, including those that are ‘hard to reach’.

The workshop was inspired by feedback from local authorities that Strong Cities has engaged over the course of the past few years, which showed that cities have had little direct interaction with the UN. This is despite the increased recognition amongst the UN and other multilateral partners of the vital role that local actors play in addressing threats of hate and extremism. At the outset of the workshop, UN and city representatives agreed that mayors and local governments are crucial actors in operationalising a whole-of-society approach to prevention that is globally recognised as good practice, and that they can help facilitate on-the-ground implementation of counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) measures the UN Security Council and the UN more broadly has adopted over the past two decades. **David Scharia, Chief of Branch at UNCTED**, also emphasised the role of mayors and local governments more broadly in post-attack response, particularly in mitigating the long-term social consequences of terrorist and/or extremist violence.

Why Global-Local Cooperation?

Rachael Atley, Political Analysis and Research Coordinator , UNCTED explained that UNCTED’s mandate is to assess and support Member States in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions. To do this, they mostly engage national governments as interlocutors; however, since local actors have a role in implementation, she said that UNCTED seeks to more meaningfully cooperate and map the work and needs of local governments and civil society organisations. She added that UNCTED also advises national governments on how to ensure inclusive processes when developing extremism prevention frameworks, including by consulting local governments.

Participants shared some existing good practices that exemplify how local governments can both support national counter extremism strategies and implementation of UN frameworks. For example, **Romina Koku, Deputy Interior Minister of Albania and President of Tirana City Council**, said that the City of Tirana set aside dedicated resources to train more than 20,000 teachers to recognise early signs of radicalisation to violence amongst their students, in line with the country’s National Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Strategy. Importantly, the point was made that this approach also aligns with the UN’s [Global Counter Terrorism Strategy](#), [Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism](#) and Security Council Resolution 2178 and the newly adopted Security Council [Resolution 2686](#), which all list education as a key component in the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism.

Participants remarked on the need for more intentional and proactive collaboration between the UN and cities to align the former’s counterterrorism and P/CVE measures with local government-led action. This necessitates raising awareness amongst city leaders of the relevant UN measures and the UN resources at their disposal to facilitate their implementation on the ground. The point was

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Strong Cities Network
Fourth Global Summit
19—21 September 2023

also made that city-UN cooperation can help local governments overcome some of the barriers they face as they seek to prevent hate and extremism. This includes how social media and new technologies are exploited to amplify and reinforce hateful narratives, as well as incite violence. With the potential for online hate to cause harm offline, workshop participants underscored the need for sustained engagement between the UN and other multilateral partners and local governments so that the former can help the latter better understand international threat-related trends and practices for response. This roundtable focused particularly on enhanced global-local cooperation for soft target protection and community engagement.

Soft Target Protection



As violent extremists are increasingly targeting malls, educational facilities, sports and cultural venues, places of worship and other soft targets, cities across the world are taking measures for their enhanced protection. For example, **Helen Neale-May, Mayoral Committee Member for Public Safety & Emergency Services, Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (South Africa)**, reported that hate-motivated violence and other criminality targeting businesses owned by minorities or foreign nationals have increased in her city over the past couple of years. To address this problem the local government developed a city-chaired, multi-stakeholder community safety forum, which includes representatives from the district community policing forum, civil society and law enforcement. This structure is not only responsible for preventing criminality targeting minority communities, protecting related infrastructure (e.g., minority-owned businesses) but also for mapping the nature and assessing the scope and severity of the threat, developing response plans following an incident and strengthening trust between the local government and communities overall.

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Fourth Global Summit
19—21 September 2023

Daniel Heinke, Director General for Public Safety, City of Bremen (Germany), reported that the biggest threat in his city is directed at public events, including the Bremen Freemark, which is one of the biggest annual fairs in northern Europe. To ensure the safety of visitors, the local government is working to ensure there is adequate operational coordination among all relevant stakeholders as well as robust information sharing systems and an external communication strategy where civilians are proactively equipped and encouraged to report suspicious behaviour.



Similarly, **Tomasz Kępa, Director of the Office of Security and Crisis Management, City of Katowice (Poland)** explained that his city has taken measures to protect various international events, including to strengthen surveillance systems and cooperation with law enforcement.

These efforts correspond with the latest revision of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, which as noted by **UNCTED's Anne-Maria Seesma**, considers the protection of soft targets and other infrastructure a crucial area in which local authorities should be involved, particularly in cooperation with their national governments. This also extends to recovery efforts in a post-attack environment, in which cities play a vital role in mitigating the social impacts of such crises. She further stressed that cities can benefit from UNCTED resources to build capacities on this front, including by accessing a special module dedicated to vulnerable target protection.

Community Engagement

The roundtable also explored community engagement as another area that would benefit from enhanced global-local cooperation, particularly as community and civil society engagement have been crucial in shifting prevention efforts from a predominantly securitised to a whole-of-society approach. This has been reflected in various UN Security Council Resolutions such as 1624 (2005), 2178 (2015), 2686 (2023) and others, to ensure community engagement is considered a core part of any central government's efforts to prevent extremism and hate.

Mattias Sundholm from **UNCTED** remarked that local governments can press their counterparts at the national level to develop relevant procedures to support and catalyse community engagement efforts by reminding them of their obligations under international law, including UN Security Council Resolutions mentioned above and other UN frameworks. Moreover, he stated that countries tend to focus on one threat at a time, but this is not sufficient to effectively counter broader obstacles to social cohesion and security; hence, national governments should work with local authorities to identify and partner with relevant civil society and stakeholders, building local networks and infrastructure that can provide more comprehensive pictures of the threat landscape and a better informed understanding of what is needed in response.

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In this context, participants shared examples of how local governments are already taking extensive steps to engage communities in their prevention efforts. **Mzwakhe Nqavashe, Portfolio Chairperson for Safety and Security, City of Cape Town (South Africa)** reflected on his City's efforts to engage communities to prevent violence and in the aftermath of a violent incident. Community partnerships and youth engagement are distinct pillars of the Cape Town's prevention framework, with the local government investing in building the capacity of community members to understand and recognise threats of hate and related issues. The City also invests heavily in neighbourhood watches, equipping community members with the skills, confidence and leadership to actively safeguard their neighbourhoods, including through being able to recognise and swiftly report suspicious behaviour. Additionally, the local government engages youth through skills development trainings and roundtable discussions on issues they are facing in their communities.



Similarly, **Madison Reid, Director of Collaborative Public Safety Programmes, Government of British Columbia, Canada**, explained that partnerships with civil society organisations to building community resilience is a core component of her government's approach to preventing and responding to hate, extremism and polarisation. A key component of this partnership is to map the scale and scope of extremist issues and the most targeted communities in British Columbia. Additionally, the government has trained more than 1,000 practitioners from across the state on different topics from case management to crisis response.

Further, **Christine Van Dyk, Manager for Partnership Safety and Care and Welfare Organisations, City of Utrecht (the Netherlands)** shared how her local government has invested in building an "extensive network of allies in different neighbourhoods", which it can leverage to understand different communities' most pressing concerns and needs to mitigate them. She also noted how pre-existing relationships with community-based actors is also essential in a post-attack environment – when the city experienced an attack on its public transportation in 2018, one of the challenges in the aftermath was effectively communicating and coordinating relevant stakeholders in response. As a result, the City has now invested in building a platform that connects key entities and actors – including community-based ones – with a view to ensure a more streamlined response post-crisis.

Participants also commented on the importance of including law enforcement in broader community engagement efforts, and the unique role of cities in facilitating this relationship. Additionally, they shared that city-led multi-actor prevention models should include academia and researchers to help cities better understand contemporary transnational threats such as far-right and anti-establishment movements.

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Fourth Global Summit
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What's Next?

Participants agreed that global-local exchanges such as this one are important to inspire greater city leadership in prevention, and that enhanced collaboration between local governments and multilateral partners helps to facilitate the sustainable implementation of the whole-of-society response to hate, extremism and polarisation. City participants expressed an interest in increasing their understanding of and access to international guidelines, toolkits and training modules that can help them strengthen their prevention capacities. Additionally, they reported that by increasing cities' understanding of their country's relevant international obligations, these exchanges can better position local governments to advocate to their national counterparts for more support in addressing local prevention needs as part of the latter's responsibility to adhere to their international commitments. UN representatives on the other hand expressed interest in continuing this conversation so they can tap into local knowledge and city-led practices to address hate, extremism and polarisation to better inform their support packages for stakeholders that are on the frontline of this problem. Strong Cities will continue facilitating global-local dialogues, as part of its sustained commitment to bringing local government voices into global conversation on extremism and hate prevention so the input and needs of cities and the communities within them are reflected in international policy and programme debates.

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Strong Cities is also grateful to UNCTED and NYU's Center for Global Affairs for their partnership in delivering this specific event.

The views expressed in this summary do not necessarily reflect those of all workshop participants, Strong Cities, UNCTED, NYU or the Summit sponsors.

Contact Us

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