



Strong Cities Network
Fourth Global Summit
19—21 September 2023

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Event Report

Fourth Global Summit

New York City, USA
19 — 21 September 2023



Overview, Key Takeaways and Next Steps

On 19 — 21 September 2023, Strong Cities Network held its [Fourth Global Summit](#) in New York City, which brought together over 240 participants from diverse contexts across the world to share and learn from promising city-led efforts to prevent hate, extremism and polarisation.

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115+ cities represented from 50+ countries	80+ mayors and governors	100+ local government practitioners	3 days, 11 events, 10 partners
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The Global Summit convened officials from **115+ cities** from **50+ countries** across the world. More than eighty mayors and governors were joined by **100+** local government practitioners as well as representatives from national governments, the United Nations and other multilateral partners.

It featured a multi-dimensional programme of **11 events**, which included plenary sessions that placed the spotlight on city-led innovation and mayoral leadership in preventing and responding to hate- and extremist-motivated violence and related threats as well as smaller, thematic workshops on the role of local governments in addressing specific challenges, such as hate speech and the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from conflict zones. Many of these events were delivered with support from one or more of the Summit's **ten partners**.

Key Takeaways and Next Steps

The Summit, which took place while national government leaders convened at the opening of the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to explore solutions to global crises, including rising levels of hate and extremism, offered mayors and other city officials the rare opportunity **to convene on a global scale to showcase the many contributions they are making and can make to address these threats in local communities**.

Whether through investing in community-based programmes that reach historically marginalised residents, coordinating city agencies and civil society actors to identify, understand and proactively address grievances that extremist groups seek to exploit, or simply condemning hate – regardless of its target – where it manifests, mayors and local governments are driving policies and programmes to build and sustain ‘strong cities’.

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Spotlight: Mayoral Meeting & the New York City Mayoral Declaration

The Summit's capstone event was a Mayoral Meeting hosted at Gracie Mansion by **Eric Adams, Mayor of New York City**. There, he and **Mayor Asmaa Rhlalou, Mayor of Rabat** signed the **New York City Mayoral Declaration**, which enumerates practical steps that endorsing local leaders can take to address threats of hate, extremism and polarisation while promoting human rights. At the time of the meeting, the Declaration, which remains open for endorsements, had already been endorsed by 108 mayors from across the world.



The Summit also provided mayors and other city officials with the opportunity to share their perspectives on how Strong Cities, national governments and multilateral partners such as the UN can help enhance and sustain city-led prevention efforts. This includes, for example, more city-focused resources on specific topics such as hate speech and more proactive consideration by national governments and multilateral partners of the contributions that local governments can make in the development and implementation of country-level, regional and global prevention frameworks and guidance.

Participants identified several priorities for Strong Cities to take forward over the coming year to meet the needs raised during the Summit. These include:

- **The formation of a Strong Cities Women's Leadership Caucus.** During the International Steering Committee meeting, mayors advocated for the creation of a women's leadership group that would help Strong Cities shed light on gendered approaches to prevention that many women mayors, governors and other city officials have taken, it would also provide a safe space in which women leaders can discuss and brainstorm solutions to the hate and threats of violence of which they are increasingly targets.
- **Development of resources for local governments on how they can address hate speech.** Mayors and other city representatives voiced their concerns throughout the three-day programme about rising levels of hate speech, disinformation and misinformation. They shared that, despite the proven potential of these threats to polarise communities and lead to violence, which have long-term consequences on a city's social cohesion, local governments are often not equipped nor supported to respond adequately. To address this gap, Strong Cities seeks to partner with the UN [Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide](#) (UNOSAPG) and the UN [Office of Counter-Terrorism](#) (UNOCT) to co-develop a city-focused action plan for addressing hate speech. This would build on the existing

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collaboration among the three bodies and be developed in consultation with mayors and other local government representatives from across the Strong Cities 210+ member cities and beyond.

Spotlight: Keynote by Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London

During the 'Widening the Lens' event that was held on 19 September 2023 in partnership with Columbia University, **Mayor Sadiq Khan** delivered a keynote speech on dis- and misinformation, noting how the City of London has had to respond to malign information campaigns linked to his climate policies. Mayor Khan urged mayors and local governments to come together to address these threats.



- **Elevating the voices of mayors and other city leaders in global conversations about the proliferation of harmful content online.** Despite the potential for harmful content online to polarise communities and/or lead to violence, local governments, which are at the forefront of mitigating these long-term consequences, are rarely included in global conversations with social media companies about content moderation and related policies. Strong Cities is committed to addressing this gap, including by facilitating interaction between relevant groups, such as the Christchurch Call Community (which includes representatives of national governments, tech companies and civil society) and Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), and mayors and other city officials.
- **An added focus in Strong Cities activities on urban planning as a means to enhance social cohesion.** Mayors and other city officials agreed that public spaces, particularly when designed in consultation with residents, can be used to break down silos and tensions between communities. However, participants highlighted how the role of urban planning in creating cohesive and resilient cities has, for the most part, remained a largely unexplored area of prevention. Strong Cities will seek to address this gap by partnering with experts in urban development and safety, including [UN-Habitat](https://unhabitat.org/), to help cities tap into the potential of urban planning as a tool for preventing hate, extremism and polarisation.
- **Supporting local leaders and governments with contextualised application of Strong Cities resources for prevention.** For example, the Summit featured the launch of three new Strong Cities guides:

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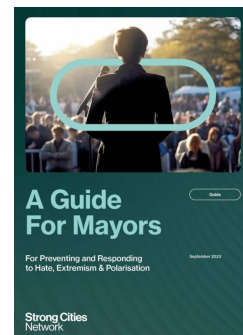




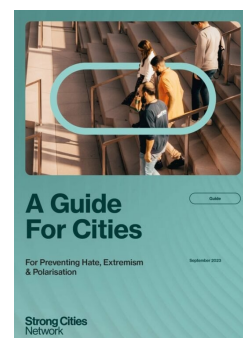
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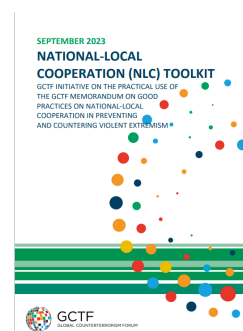
[A Guide for Mayors](#), which outlines key questions, decision points and good practices to help mayors prevent and respond to hate, extremism and polarisation;



[A Guide for Cities](#), which provides guidance for and case studies of city-led prevention; and



The [National-Local Cooperation \(NLC\) Toolkit](#) for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), which was co-developed with the [Global Counterterrorism Forum](#) (GCTF) and provides guidance – informed by 60 case studies – on how to strengthen prevention-related NLC through the implementation of the GCTF's [NLC good practices](#).



Over the coming months, Strong Cities will work with local governments globally to apply these guides. This includes through virtual awareness-raising sessions and at in-person national and regional workshops. Strong Cities will additionally leverage its global **Expert Pool** to ensure the appropriate technical support is provided to local governments as they contextualise the guides.

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Spotlight: “Putting the public back in public safety”

During the ‘Widening the Lens’ event, **Mayor Ras Baraka of Newark (New Jersey, USA)** delivered a keynote speech about how his city is “putting the public back in public safety” by approaching safety and social cohesion as the collective responsibility of the entire community. The city has managed to reduce crime and other harms by investing in community-based programmes, youth engagement, and much more.



- **Providing additional opportunities for local governments to directly interact with multilateral partners.** This is a direct outcome of the dialogues that Strong Cities held during the Global Summit between local government representatives and different multilateral partners, such as the GCTF and various UN bodies. In these meetings, city officials remarked on the benefits of such dialogues in helping raise their awareness about international tools and frameworks that they can contextualise as they seek to deploy local prevention efforts. Representatives from the UN, in particular, equally shared that they are committed to better engaging local governments in recognition of their vital role in prevention. Strong Cities, which has committed to elevating the perspectives and experiences of cities on the global stage since its launch in 2015, will continue to facilitate opportunities for direct interaction between international partners and mayors and the cities they lead.
- **Building out the Strong Cities [Resource Hub](#) with city practices.** For example, Summit participants expressed particular interest in learning from existing city-led efforts to engage with faith-based organisations and communities, integrate migrants and refugees, develop multi-actor policies and structures for prevention, contribute to efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate returnees from conflict zones, strengthen cooperation between border cities facing shared challenges and more. Strong Cities is working with cities to capture these practices in accessible, bite-sized city spotlights, which are being collated into a library that mayors and other city representatives can use to inspire their own policies and programmes.
- **Partnering with other city networks to pilot a joint project on the role of cities in preventing gender-based violence.** The Summit featured a coordination meeting among different city networks and other organisations that work with cities on peace and security issues. There, it was agreed that Strong Cities and these different organisations should collaborate to pilot a project focused on a select number of cities on the role of mayors and the local governments they lead in addressing gender-based violence.

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- **Continued mobilisation and convening of city leaders nationally, regionally and globally.** The Summit not only culminated into a series of clear action steps for Strong Cities to take forward, it also underscored the importance of bringing cities together in the first place. Throughout the events, participants highlighted the benefits of coming together to share and learn from one another, pointing out that they “learned a great deal”, that it is “inspirational” to hear from counterparts from across the world and that they are eager to take some of what they learned and apply it at home. Strong Cities will continue to support mayoral and broader local government gatherings at national, regional and global levels, ensuring that all such engagements continue to be driven by the hate and extremism prevention needs of cities.

Spotlight: Strong Cities in North America

During the Mayoral Meeting on 21 September 2023, Strong Cities and **William Peduto, former Mayor of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania, USA)**, announced a new dedicated stream of work to engage mayors and cities across North America in partnership with the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, which will bring North American mayors together for further sharing and learning. This is in addition to a new Strong Cities initiative focused on piloting multi-actor frameworks for prevention in several small and mid-sized cities in North America.



Overview of Events

19 September 2023

Widening The Lens: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach to City-Led Prevention and Response to Hate and Extremism

In partnership with Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA)

The Summit started with a full-day event in partnership with Columbia SIPA on innovations, approaches and lessons that local governments can apply from other sectors, such as climate change, data, technology and urban development, to the prevention of hate and extremism. **Read the event report [here](#).**

Engaging Local Governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in the Prevention and Response to Violent Extremism and

In partnership with the UN Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (UNCTED)

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The first day of the programme also provided mayors and other city officials from MENA with the opportunity to directly engage UNCTED on its work in the region, which typically focuses on national governments. It offered city officials a rare opportunity to engage directly with the UN on the prevention agenda, enabling them to share their approaches to and challenges with preventing hate, extremism and polarisation, while also learning more about the work of UNCTED as a leading entity in the UN counter-terrorism and P/CVE architecture. **Read the event report [here](#).**

20 September 2023

Inaugural Meeting of the International Steering Committee

The Summit featured the first meeting of Strong Cities' revitalised International Steering Committee, which is co-chaired by Mayor Asmaa Rhlalou of Rabat (Morocco) and Mayor Jan Van Zanen of The Hague (The Netherlands). The Committee endorsed Strong Cities' [three-year strategy](#) and several proposals for new initiatives, including the formation of a Women's Leadership Caucus and a Friends of Strong Cities group that will allow the network to deepen and expand cooperation with multilateral bodies, other city networks, local government associations and other key stakeholders. **Read the meeting report [here](#).**

Unlocking the Potential of Cities to Contribute to Whole-of-Society Efforts to Rehabilitate and Reintegrate Returnees from Conflict Zones

Informed by findings from Strong Cities' global engagements with cities, which shows that local governments across the world are concerned about their ability to effectively and sustainably reintegrate returnees from conflict zones, the Summit featured a workshop that brought together more than 50 mayors, local government officials and frontline practitioners to share good practices and lessons learned on rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) relevant for cities. The workshop featured remarks from the UN Special Rapporteur for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism and U.S. Department of State's Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism (overseeing countering violent extremism and terrorist detentions), an overview by R&R experts of internationally recognised good practices that cities could leverage as they develop R&R structures and programmes, and a series of examples of city-led R&R efforts. **Read the event report [here](#).**

Unlocking the Potential of Cities to Address Hate Speech

In partnership with the [UN Office of Counter-Terrorism](#) (UNOCT) and [Office of the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide](#) (UNOSAPG)

The roundtable on the role of local governments in addressing hate speech, was co-organised with UNOCT and the UNOSAPG in light of the growing number of mayors and other city officials who have voiced concern to Strong Cities about the rising levels of hate in their communities, the potential for hate speech in particular to manifest into violence and challenges with mounting an effective response amidst its rapid spread – often fuelled by misinformation – via social media. The

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session offered mayors and other city leaders the opportunity to learn about relevant UN counter hate frameworks and initiatives and share with the UN Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide and senior UNOCT officials some of their inspiring efforts to address the threat of hate speech – particularly to prevent its escalation to violence – in their communities and what they need, including from the UN, to be able to scale and sustain such efforts. **Read the event report [here](#).**

Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative Working Lunch

Strong Cities' [Transatlantic Dialogue Initiative](#) recognises that threats of hate and extremism are increasingly transnational, with extremist groups and hate-based narratives in North America inspiring European hate movements and vice versa. Since launching the Initiative in [October 2021](#), Strong Cities has regularly brought city officials from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean together to enhance transatlantic cooperation on these challenges and discuss practices for mitigating them from escalating further. The working lunch offered North American and European participants of the Global Summit with the opportunity to reflect on the Initiative's successes so far and to inform its forward agenda. **Read the event report [here](#).**

Enhancing Global-Local Cooperation: Realising the Potential of Mayors and Local Governments in P/CVE

A conversation between Strong Cities and the GCTF

The dialogue with the GCTF presented a rare opportunity for GCTF national-level representatives to hear directly from and engage with city leaders on their approaches to addressing hate and extremism in their cities, the challenges they face and the support they need to enhance their work. Local leaders from cities in Botswana, Tanzania and Uganda spoke about their prevention efforts as part of a wider conversation about the role of African mayors in addressing hate and extremism. City leaders from Bangladesh, Germany, Kenya and Libya then contributed to a discussion about operationalising and sustaining inclusive, city-led approaches to prevention. **Read the event report [here](#).**

Spotlight: Mayors as Trust-Builders

During the dialogue with the GCTF, **Florence Namayanja Mayor of Masaka (Uganda)** shared how she is building trust between youth and the local government through investing in them as future leaders. She actively involves them in city-led efforts to make Masaka “green, clean and liveable”. Not only does this build their sense of active citizenship, but it also steers them away from harmful paths, helps them build healthy peer networks and shows them their voices are heard by the local government.



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Peace & Security City Networks Coordination Meeting

In partnership with [The Carter Center](#) and [Peace In Our Cities](#)

Building on a similar roundtable during the April 2023 Cities Summit of the Americas, Strong Cities, [The Carter Center](#), [United Cities and Local Governments](#) (UCLG), the [International Republican Institute](#) (IRI) and [Peace in Our Cities](#) to explore synergies and potential areas for collaboration. The meeting included representatives from the City of Edmonton (Canada), which participates in several city networks, to provide a local government perspective on how these initiatives can engage cities in a more coherent and synergistic way. **Read the event report [here](#).**

21 September 2023

Mayoral Meeting: Hosted by Eric Adams, Mayor of New York City

In partnership with the [Office of the Mayor of New York City](#)

The Mayoral Meeting convened 150+ mayors, governors and other local leaders from across the world at Gracie Mansion (the official residence of the Mayor of the City of New York), to spotlight their role in addressing hate, extremism and polarisation. In his opening remarks, New York City Mayor Adams highlighted the whole-of-city efforts to foster social cohesion and prevent hate crimes in what is one of the biggest and most diverse cities in the world. Through a series of keynote remarks and panel discussions, mayors from nearly two dozen cities around the globe shared their experiences, successes and challenges in building resilient, inclusive and ‘strong’ cities. **Read the event report [here](#).**

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

In partnership with UNCTED and New York University’s (NYU) [Center for Global Affairs](#)

Strong Cities partnered with UNCTED and NYU’s Center for Global Affairs to host a workshop that 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 showcase for multilateral representatives existing city-led efforts to protect soft targets and engage communities, including those that are “hard to reach”. **Read the event report [here](#).**

Whole-of-City Models for Prevention: An Exchange with New York City’s Hate and Extremism Prevention Policymakers and Practitioners

In partnership with New York City Mayor’s [Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes](#) (OPHC) and NYU Center for Global Affairs

The Global Summit ended with a half-day workshop on Whole-of-City Models for Prevention, held in partnership with NYU’s Center for Global Affairs and New York City’s OPHC, which coordinates multiple city agencies and community-based partners to reduce hate crime and related harms in

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what is one of the world's most diverse and largest cities. This event was inspired by both OPHC's achievements and the innovative multi-actor efforts that other cities across Strong Cities' membership and beyond are deploying to address hate, extremism and polarisation, and to foster inclusive and resilient communities. The workshop featured a series of panels in which local government representatives were invited to share their successes and challenges with such efforts. This showcased why local governments are so vital to addressing threats of hate and extremism effectively and sustainably and the diverse ways in which cities can make a difference here. **Read the event report [here](#).**

Donors & Partners

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Strong Cities is also grateful to its partners for their invaluable contributions to the Summit: The Mayor of New York City, New York City's OPHC, Columbia University SIPA, NYU Center for Global Affairs, UNCTED, UNOCT, UNOSAPG, the GCTF, The Carter Center and Peace In Our Cities.

The views expressed in this document and in event-specific summaries do not necessarily reflect those of all participants, Strong Cities, its members nor Summit sponsors and partners.

Contact Us

For more information about Strong Cities Network and/or the Fourth Global Summit, please contact Allison Curtis, Deputy Executive Director, at ac@strongcitiesnetwork.org.

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