



**Strong Cities** Network  
**Fourth Global Summit**  
19—21 September 2023

Fourth Global Summit Event Report

## **Enhancing Global-Local Cooperation: Realising the Potential of Mayors and Local Governments in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism**

New York City, USA  
20 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 with the opportunity to share and learn from promising practices for city-led prevention of hate, extremism and polarisation. **Read the event report [here](#).**

The programme included a dialogue with the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) on “Enhancing Global-Local Cooperation: Realising the Potential of Mayors and Local Governments in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism”. The event presented a rare opportunity for national and international actors to hear directly from and engage with city

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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. Following opening remarks from local, national and international actors, the first panel drew attention the prevention potential of mayors in Africa with input from local leaders in Botswana, Tanzania and Uganda. The second panel took a wider, international perspective of the role of cities in operationalising and sustaining inclusive approaches to prevention, featuring mayors and other local leaders from Bangladesh, Germany, Kenya and Libya.

Although Strong Cities has worked closely with the GCTF on enhancing national-local cooperation (NLC) – including on a [NLC Toolkit](#) that was launched the same week – the dialogue was a first-of-its-kind engagement between local governments that Strong Cities works with and the GCTF and its now 32 members. It stands as an important recognition of the role that local governments can play in translating GCTF and other relevant global frameworks into inclusive, sustainable local action. **Eric Rosand, Executive Director, Strong Cities Network** and **Mohamed Fouad Ahmed, Director, Counterterrorism Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Egypt** opened the event, each emphasising the importance of an inclusive whole-of-society approach that empowers local leadership and recognising the role that both Strong Cities and GCTF play in advancing this objective.

“I believe that Strong Cities is bringing in a great new energy to work and respond to these challenges. I believe in bottom-up approach to solve socio-economic challenges. I think this is the right platform to address these challenges. Yesterday, we were talking about inclusiveness. As local government leaders that have been excluded from taking part in [addressing] some of [these] issues, I think this is the right time to become involved.”

Joseph Matovu, Mayor of Nansana Division (Uganda)

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**Ian Moss, Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Bureau of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State** reinforced how important a role that Strong Cities and the GCTF are playing to support implementation of whole-of society approaches to preventing extremism and terrorism. Moss additionally stressed that while local government is best placed to involve all actors in society, cooperation with the national government in this domain is essential. **Christian Bunk Fassov, Counter Terrorism Coordinator, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs** noted that, as a proud member of the GCTF and sponsor of the Fourth Global Summit and other work Strong Cities has done to build local prevention infrastructure, Denmark is committed to promoting solutions that are top-down and bottom-up at the same time to properly address the threat of extremism. Fassov emphasised that it is crucial that global frameworks reflect the needs of local communities and address the grievances that extremist organisations exploit and encouraged GCTF and Strong Cities to continue to work together to achieve this objective.

**Asmaa Rhlalou, Mayor of Rabat (Morocco)**, and co-chair of the Strong Cities International Steering Committee (ISC), set the tone for the panels that followed by speaking about the inclusive approach to extremism prevention in her country. She discussed the city's commitment to partnerships with community-based orgs and faith leaders to promote co-existence and tolerance, and to build a safer Rabat for all its residents. More broadly, she emphasised how in Morocco there is "coexistence among people, with multiple religious groups living together. Everyone contributes, including political entities, with supporting a culture of fighting hate and violence." She also highlighted how, under her leadership, the city has contributed to the elaboration of national strategies for security and development, and how her city "is ready to cooperate with all cities in this network in order to get to complete development of our rural areas and cities."

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## Mayoral Leadership Against Hate and Extremism

The dialogue placed the spotlight on mayors and other city leaders as critical actors in the prevention of hate and extremism. Panellists remarked that mayors can show leadership against these threats through intentional efforts to engage all communities within their city, particularly those that have been overlooked historically. For example, **Austin Abraham, Mayor of Gaborone (Botswana)** noted how he oversees efforts to convene different traditional leaders (e.g., tribal chiefs) and other community leaders in customary courts that provide these actors with a forum through which to raise the concerns of the communities they represent and jointly resolve matters in a peaceful panel.

Speakers also noted that it is important to work with women and other vulnerable groups and advocate for them to ensure they are involved in politics and civic life in the city. For example, **Hayat Ivy, Mayor of Narayanganj (Bangladesh)** shared that she steers women empowerment initiatives that seek to provide them with greater socioeconomic opportunities.

Panellists highlighted the role mayors play in building trust between local governments and residents. For example, **Joseph Matovu, Mayor of Nansana Division (Uganda)** shared how, in the aftermath of past politically-motivated violence, he and other city leaders focused on building trust between communities and the local government so that the former feels more comfortable to proactively report grievances, whether related to politics or otherwise, instead of resorting to violence. He reminded the audience that city leaders must always keep the needs of the people in mind as they seek to build trust and credibility with their residents.

To similarly mitigate risks of politically-motivated violence, **Maximillian Iranqhe, Mayor of Arusha (Tanzania)** shared that he has actively sought out members of the political opposition, engaging them in public meetings to facilitate open communication, reduce political polarisation and show residents that they can engage peacefully, regardless of political (or other) differences. He urged local leaders to rise above hateful narratives, opting instead to counter these with campaigns that are free of hate and that invest in building and reinforcing trusting relationships with residents of their cities.

Panellists also agreed that youth engagement is an area where mayors have significant potential for impact. For example, **Florence Namayanja, Mayor of Masaka (Uganda)** shared how she regularly works with youth, empowering them to become active citizens through involving them in city-led efforts to make Masaka “green, clean and liveable”. This, in turn, builds rapport between the mayor, local government and the city’s young people, while steering youth away from more harmful paths.

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Further, **Mohamed Khalifa Mohamed Al-Haslok, Mayor of Sabratah (Libya)** noted how he has initiated youth-run and youth-dedicated clubs and facilities as part of the City's strategy to build young people's resilience through providing them with ample fora through which they can "build healthy hobbies".

## **The Role of Local Governments in Advancing Inclusive, Whole-of-Society Approaches to Preventing Hate and Extremism**

The discussion also provided city representatives with the opportunity to share why local governments more broadly – beyond just mayors and other leaders – play a vital role in preventing hate and extremism. For example, there was consensus amongst panellists that local governments – by virtue of their greater proximity to communities on the ground – have a better understanding of key local actors and dynamics than national government stakeholders, ultimately better positioning them to facilitate a truly inclusive whole-of-society response to this issues.

Local governments, like mayors, also have a critical role to play in building trust between different actors. This is especially important between law enforcement and residents. **Christian Hochgrebe, State Secretary of Berlin (Germany)** shared, how the City has made an effort to diversify its police force to reflect the various communities within the city. In neighbourhoods with large Turkish populations, for example, they hire officers with Turkish backgrounds who speak the language and have the cultural familiarity to engage residents effectively and sensitively. Likewise, to build trust with LGBTQ+ communities, Berlin has established a dedicated team responsible for working with this community on key areas of concern and thus building stronger relationships between them and the City.

Similarly, to enhance trust between local government, law enforcement and residents, **Ahmed Abdullahi, Governor of Wajir County (Kenya)** stressed the importance of local government-led advocacy for and reinforcement of the rule of law. He said that local governments need to also hold police and other city agencies accountable where they have acted irresponsibly.

## **What's Next?**

Despite the clear potential for both mayors and local governments to serve as powerful agents of change against hate and extremism, city leaders at the event remarked that there remains a lack of support to and proactive engagement on city-led efforts to address these threats, particularly from national governments. Participants encouraged Strong Cities and GCTF to continue to work together to address these gaps, building on the collaboration to-date. This includes the development of resources to enhance NLC, such as the aforementioned NLC Toolkit, which builds on the GCTF's [Memorandum on Good Practices](#)

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[on Strengthening NLC in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism](#). Strong Cities will help local governments apply these resources, as well as its newly-launched guides for [mayors](#) and [local governments](#), to elevate their voices and more firmly establish their position as leaders in prevention in global efforts to prevent and respond to hate- and extremist-motivated violence and related threats facing communities around the globe.

## Donors & Partners

The Fourth Global Summit was made possible with generous support from the European Union, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and US Department of State.

*The views expressed in this summary do not necessarily reflect those of the GCTF, Strong Cities, their members, nor all Summit participants or sponsors.*

## Contact Us

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