



Strong Cities Network
Fourth Global Summit
19—21 September 2023

Fourth Global Summit Event Report

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

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

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The programme included a half-day workshop on ‘Whole-of-City Models for Prevention’, held in partnership with New York University’s (NYU) [Center for Global Affairs](#) and New York City’s [Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes](#) (OPHC), which coordinates multiple city agencies and community-based partners to reduce hate crime and related harms in what is one of the world’s most diverse and largest cities. The work of OPHC, which is led by **Executive Director, Hassan Naveed**, and which includes, for example, a citywide [Breaking Bread, Building Bonds](#) initiative that brings different communities together to enhance inter-communal trust, has contributed to a 16% decrease in hate crimes in the last fiscal year, as noted by **Camille Varlack, Chief of Staff to Eric Adams, Mayor of New York City**. This event was inspired by both OPHC’s achievements and the numerous 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 achievements and challenges with such efforts, ultimately showcasing why local governments are so vital to effectively and sustainably addressing threats of hate and extremism.

Understanding the Threats: City-Led Data Collection and Analysis

The event started with a panel on how local governments seek to identify and understand local threats. In the case of New York City, **Rebecca Ulam Weiner, Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, New York City Police Department (NYPD)**, shared that their approach to understanding the threat of terrorism and other forms of hate-motivated violence is multi-faceted. On the one hand, they deploy officers around the city to actively engage residents, build rapport in order to encourage greater reporting from residents and as a means of deterrence, recognising that a visible police presence may discourage crime. On the other, the NYPD also leads more clandestine efforts to understand the scale of concern, including through covert investigations. Such initiatives to understand threats of terrorism as they manifest locally are complemented by partnerships with national and international partners, which provide insight into the broader transnational threat landscape and into good practices that may be replicable in New York City.

Importantly, the NYPD’s efforts to understand the more explicit threat of terrorism are supplemented by the OPHC’s work with community-based organisations and other city agencies to prevent ‘softer’ threats of hate crime, bias and related issues. This includes through [Partners Against The Hate \(P.A.T.H.\) FORWARD](#), a collaboration between the City and six ‘anchor organisations’ that have credibility within New York City’s diverse communities. The City provides these organisations with funding and other support to, inter alia, “improve data collection on bias incidents and hate crimes” and “develop strategies to enhance reporting”. OPHC and the NYPD also have information-sharing structures in place through which the two can share emerging threats and concerns with the other. For example, after the NYPD discovered recent threats of violence against synagogues in the city, in addition to their own mobilisation to prevent such violence, they informed OPHC so it could mobilise its community partners to address antisemitism longer-term.

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The importance of partnerships for data collection and analysis was reiterated by other panellists. For example, **Julian Becker, Advisor, Mayor of Dortmund (Germany) on Civil Society Matters**, shared that as a much smaller city than New York City and with limited resources to dedicate specifically to data gathering on local drivers of hate and extremism, Dortmund relies on big companies that already collect various types of data that might provide insight into causes of polarisation and hate. Through partnerships with, among others, [the SINUS Institute](#), the City has obtained over 200 data points about its societal composition and segmentation. These insights have enabled the local government to invest in targeted social activities that bring different groups together with a view to reduce polarisation across the city.

Further, **Tariq Tyab and Yusuf Siraj, Co-Founders of [Foundation for a Path Forward](#) in British Columbia (Canada)** shared how they support local governments and other actors in Canada with understanding emerging threats. Founded in the aftermath of a [2017 attack](#) against the Muslim community of Quebec, Foundation for a Path Forward works with local governments, the federal government and civil society organisations to dispel Islamophobic and other faith-based stereotypes, and provide these stakeholders with insight into both the concerns of Muslims and other faith groups in the country, as well as latest trends in the hate and extremist threat landscape. The Foundation ultimately serves as interlocutor between different research initiatives and these stakeholders, where they take it upon themselves to digest data produced by [Moonshot](#) and [Jigsaw](#), for example, and then repackage and share key findings with their networks so that these can inform policies and programmes. Such a partnership model takes the burden off local governments to digest the plethora of hate and extremist-related research that exists, while still giving them the insights needed to shape their understanding of these threats manifest in their cities.

Operationalising an Inclusive, Whole-of-City Response

Participants were also given the opportunity to learn from how different cities have built or are building multi-actor infrastructure to address hate, extremism and related threats. In New York City, the [Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice](#) (MOCJ) serves as the 'parent office' of the many task forces responsible for the safety and security of New York City, including OPHC, the Office of Neighbourhood Safety, the Office to Prevent Gun Violence, and the Domestic Violence Task Force, among others. **Deanna Logan, Executive Director, MOCJ**, shared how MOCJ is responsible for overseeing and coordinating these different efforts, helping to ensure the mandate of each complements (rather than duplicates) the other. MOCJ also keeps the Mayor apprised of all matters related to public safety.

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The **City of Cape Town (South Africa)** takes a similar approach, where the prevention of hate and extremism is integrated into the City’s broader public safety infrastructure. **JP Smith, Mayoral Committee Member for Safety and Security**, shared how Cape Town developed a prevention framework after participating in a [Strong Cities workshop](#) in May 2022, and that this sits within its pre-existing [Safety and Security Directorate](#). The Directorate oversees the City’s disaster risk management efforts, Metro Police, supports Neighbourhood Watch teams, and deploys broader community safety and trust-building initiatives, such as its [Safer and Healthier Places of Worship](#) programme, all of which bear relevance for the prevention of hate and extremism. The Directorate also coordinates significantly with the Western Cape’s Provincial Government, as well as with other departments within the city, including around housing and employability, recognising that all of this contributes to the overall safety of the city’s residents. By situating its prevention framework within this broader structure, these efforts and existing coordination mechanisms can now also be leveraged with the intention to prevent and respond to threats of hate, extremism and polarisation. He observed that an added benefit of such an integrated approach is that it can mitigate challenges around mandate – by positioning efforts to prevent and counter hate and extremism as part and parcel of existing local government responsibilities around public safety and community well-being, cities can get involved in such efforts without an explicit mandate nor dedicated budget to do so.

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In the **City of Portsmouth (United Kingdom)**, the whole-of-city response to hate and extremism occurs – in part - through ‘channel panels’, which are local government-led, multi-actor convenings with the sole purpose of identifying and providing support to individuals considered at risk of being drawn to extremism and/or terrorism. The local government is empowered to do so through the national government’s [Counter-Terrorism and Security Act](#), which mandates that local governments chair such multi-agency panels to coordinate different city agencies and community-based actors to mitigate risks of radicalisation. The national government further supports this mandate by providing comprehensive [guidance](#) on the composition of such ‘channel panels’ and the role of local government in leading these, while also offering training on extremism and terrorism, including on behavioural assessment and case management. **Suzy Horton, Councillor and Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education, Portsmouth City Council** shared that these individual-focused efforts to mitigate risks of extremism are complemented by citywide initiatives that seek to increase community resilience long-term, including concerted efforts to include youth in local government decision-making and working with sports club to deliver social activities that bring communities together.

Participants also heard from a city that is currently in the process of developing, with Strong Cities support, a multi-actor response to hate and extremism. **Aleksander Grugorovic, Mayor of Danilovgrad (Montenegro)** shared how he was inspired to build a Local Safety Council after learning of the successes of such structures at a [Strong Cities workshop](#) in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Based on lessons from other cities about the importance for such multi-actor structures to be reflective of and include credible voices from communities, the Council will be established in consultation with the city’s diverse communities, which will be asked to recommend representatives to serve as Council members. The Council will also include youth representatives, and rather than just focusing on hate and extremism prevention, will have a broad mandate to advance active citizenship and social cohesion overall. To help ensure sustainability and facilitate support from the national government, the city is also drafting a Council action plan that corresponds with relevant national strategies.

Building Trusted Relationships with Local Communities

There was consensus amongst panellists that one of the comparative advantages of local governments is their proximity and access to residents as a result – at least in part – of their existing public service delivery responsibilities. This access is essential to build trusting relationships between a city and its residents, particularly those who are subjected to hate or have been marginalised historically. Panellists observed that high levels of trust are important to prevent hate and extremism because it facilitates more proactive and prompt reporting from residents when they have concerns or have witnessed harm. They also allow residents, regardless of background, to feel heard by their local government and facilitate an inclusive city ‘identity’, thus mitigating risks of polarisation and grievances around neglect. In recognition of this, participants were provided with the opportunity to hear from how cities build trust with local communities.

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In **New York City**, as one of the most diverse cities in the world, trust-building is necessarily a joint effort of multiple City departments. The [Mayor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Partnerships \(OFCP\)](#), for example, has a mandate to build trust between religious communities, non-profit organisations and the city government. **Pastor Gilford Monroe, Executive Director of OFCP**, shared that a first step in doing so is “hiring from the community you’re trying to reach”, which is why the team that makes up OFCP is reflective of the city’s religious, ethnic, gender and racial diversity. He further observed that “people on the ground will have the best solutions”, which is why it is so important for cities to invest in building trusting relationships proactively so that they can tap into and support these solutions, rather than waiting until a crisis moment to engage communities.

Participants discussed how the work of OFCP is complemented by OPHC’s efforts to build rapport with historically marginalised communities and/or those that are frequently subject to bias, discrimination and hate speech and crime. Discussions highlighted OPHC’s successes and how they are due in large part to the commitment of its Executive Director and other senior city officials to building personal relationships with different community leaders, so they feel comfortable to immediately raise concerns or propose ideas before rather than just in response to a crisis.

Jo-Ann Yoo, Executive Director, Asian American Federation, which is one of the six anchor organisations that works closely with OPHC to reduce hate crime, reiterated the importance of investing heavily in constant communication between local government officials and the community, noting that a “constant flow of information” helps both the City stay apprised of what is happening on the ground and communities feel reassured they are being heard. This also mitigates risks of under-reporting, which Yoo raised as a significant obstacle historically to understanding the scale of anti-Asian hate crimes in the city. She additionally gave practical guidance, stating that trust can be improved even just by ensuring that information about City departments and available City resources are accessible in most – if not all - languages spoken by residents.

Accessibility and representation were both also echoed as important trust-building mechanisms by **Pia Van De Zandt, Director of Connected Communities, New South Wales (NSW) Premier’s Department (Australia)**. The NSW [Connected Communities](#) initiative sees schools as community hubs that can be leveraged to support not just the education of students but also their health and wellbeing, and that of their parents. Through this model, the NSW Government facilitates partnerships between schools and community service providers to strengthen resilience amongst young people. Van De Zandt echoed Pastor Monroe’s guidance about representation, sharing that the Connected Communities team includes individuals from communities most often affected by hate, such as Muslims and Asians. She also reiterated the importance of engaging communities as a means to understand the threat, sharing that the NSW Government has good relations with faith leaders and civil society organisations, which are both collecting their own data related to hate incidents. This can in turn be used to inform the government’s efforts to reduce hate and extremism.

Finally, participants heard from two cities in which community engagement efforts are difficult to pursue both due to limited resources and challenging social climates. **Mayor Thomas Zenker of Zittau (Germany)** shared for example “certain people [in Zittau] are not interested in having an

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inclusive city” and that these actors actively mobilise against efforts to promote diversity and inclusion. He point out that Zittau has a historically active right-wing extremist scene, the impacts of which are felt to this day. To counter this, he said, the City is partnering with community-based organisations, and has a Refugee Advisory Group it consults and includes in decision-making. This Advisory Group is elected every five years, and provides input on the City’s social and cultural policies, among others.

Similarly, **Ahmad Kamareddine, Mayor of Tripoli (Lebanon)** shared the difficult circumstances in which he operates, especially in the context of Lebanon’s political and economic crises, which was only exacerbated by COVID-19. He said that these national crises have had significant local implications as a result of widespread poverty and an overall decline in quality of life. The mayor underscored how these grievances are readily exploited by extremist groups in the country. Mayor Kamareddine noted how he and the city are addressing these challenges through community engagement efforts that seek to “change the mentality of the people”. This includes through partnerships with Muslim and Christian leaders to deploy community-based projects, providing vocational trainings, and opening a new market in which vendors from neighbouring cities are invited to exchange with local sellers.

What’s Next?

The many diverse city practices shared in this event exemplify why local governments are so important in the prevention of hate, extremism and polarisation. Opportunities such as this one, where local governments are brought together to inspire and learn from one another, are an important component of Strong Cities’ commitment to enhance city-led prevention globally. To build on the momentum of this workshop, Strong Cities will develop a series of case studies and a roadmap for city-led engagement with faith-based organisations and communities more broadly, as well as one for inter-agency city-level coordination. This effort is supplemented by Strong Cities’ forthcoming [City Spotlights Library](#), which places the spotlight on city-led innovation and mayoral leadership against hate and extremism. These practices will be shared with the global membership and beyond to inspire and catalyse greater involvement of local governments in prevention.

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

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