

On the margins of the 70th UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York GCERF hosted a high-level roundtable on *"Investing in Fragile Environments: The Role of the Private Sector in Countering Violent Extremism"*.

With interventions from **Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter**, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland; **Dr. Sarah Sewall**, Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, U.S. Department of State; **Mr. Steve Killelea**, Founder & Executive Chairman, Institute for Economics and Peace; **Dr. Timothy Docking**, Leader, Global Post and Emerging Markets Funding (EMF) Group, IBM Public Sector, and **Dr. Peter Maurer**, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the roundtable explored the role of the private sector in countering violent extremism and the private sector. Some 50 participants from the private sector, government, foundations and international institutions attended.

One area for discussion was to what extent the private sector has a responsibility to join current international efforts to counter violent extremism. It may be argued that where companies have profited from conflict and instability they have a direct responsibility. In part responsibility also stems from the unique ability of the private sector to address some of the root causes of violent extremism, for example by creating jobs and fostering entrepreneurship and innovation.

A second approach discussed for engaging the private sector was to emphasize the business case. Violent extremism diverts talent, disrupts supply chains, and makes investment high-risk. Further violent extremism cannot be separated from the larger challenges of conflict and instability which undermine sustainable economic growth.

A final area for discussion was how in more practical terms to build partnerships. Particular sectors of industry, such as extractives, travel and tourism, and insurance, may be more directly vested than others. Social media companies have a particular role to play. It is also worth distinguishing corporate social responsibility from direct business engagement. A focus on addressing the underlying drivers of violent extremism for example through education and women's empowerment is probably most likely to attract direct private sector support.

Overall the private sector was characterized as aware of its responsibility, prepared to engage, but careful. The challenge now is to develop successful partnerships, especially focusing prevention at the local level among communities most at risk of radicalization to violent extremism.

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