



On the margins of the 70th United Nations General Assembly meeting 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 appetite and role of the private sector in countering violent extremism, at both the national and international levels. Some 50 participants from the private sector, government, foundations, and international institutions attended.

One area of discussion explored the extent to which 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 to contribute to CVE. In part, responsibility also stems from the unique ability of the private sector to address some of the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism, for example by creating jobs and fostering entrepreneurship and innovation.

A second approach to better engage the private sector explored ways to emphasize an attractive business case, including the argument that violent extremism diverts talent, disrupts supply chains, and deters investment due to high risk. Panellists and participants agreed that violent extremism cannot be separated from the larger challenges of conflict and instability, which undermine sustainable economic growth.

Finally, the group turned their attention to identifying practical strategies to build partnerships, including through the use of social media. Participants commented that due to potential economic gains as well as losses, specific industries with vested interests (such as extractives, travel and tourism, and insurance) could be prioritized. The group reiterated the need to distinguish corporate social responsibility from direct business engagement, and encouraged a focus on addressing the underlying drivers of violent extremism – for example, through education and women's empowerment – as probably the most likely stream to attract direct private sector support.

Overall, the private sector was characterized as aware of its responsibility and prepared to engage, but apprehensive. The challenge now is to develop successful partnerships, especially those that focus on prevention at the local level among communities most at risk of radicalisation to violent extremism.

September 2015: GCERF at the 70th UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York