



UN-HABITAT



REDUCING URBAN CRIME AND VIOLENCE: POLICY DIRECTIONS

ENHANCING **URBAN SAFETY AND SECURITY**
GLOBAL REPORT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS 2007

ABRIDGED EDITION

VOLUME 1

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Reducing Urban Crime and Violence: Policy Directions

United Nations Human Settlements Programme



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earthscan

publishing for a sustainable future

London • Sterling, VA

First published in the UK and USA in 2008 by Earthscan, London
Email: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk
Web: www.earthscan.co.uk

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This publication is the first of three volumes of the Abridged Edition of *Enhancing Urban Safety and Security: Global Report on Human Settlements 2007*, viz:

- 1 *Reducing Urban Crime and Violence: Policy Directions*
- 2 *Enhancing Security of Tenure: Policy Directions*
- 3 *Mitigating the Impacts of Disasters: Policy Directions*

An electronic version of this publication and of the full *Enhancing Urban Safety and Security: Global Report on Human Settlements 2007* is available from <http://www.unhabitat.org/grhs/2007>

The list of selected references at the end of this volume contains only a few important publications on the subtheme of crime and violence, as well as sources of quotations, boxes, tables and figures included in this volume. A complete list of references may be found in the full *Enhancing Urban Safety and Security: Global Report on Human Settlements 2007*.

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ISBN: 978-92-113-1929-3 (Series)
ISBN: 978-92-113-2003-9 (Volume)
HS/1024/08E

Typeset by MapSet Ltd, Gateshead, UK
Printed and bound in Malta by Gutenberg Press
Cover design by Susanne Harris

The paper used for this book is FSC-certified.
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INTRODUCTION

Enhancing Urban Safety and Security: Global Report on Human Settlements 2007 (Global Report 2007) addresses three threats to the safety and security of towns and cities, viz: crime and violence; security of tenure and forced evictions; and natural and human-made disasters. This publication, which focuses on crime and violence, is the first of three volumes of the Abridged Edition of the Global Report 2007. The main purpose of this volume is to present, in summary form, the main findings of the Global Report 2007 on crime and violence and, on the basis of this, to suggest policy directions for reducing crime and violence within urban settlements.

The problem of crime and violence in cities has been long recognized as a growing and serious challenge in all parts of the world. Safety from crime and violence — including the resulting fear and insecurity — is increasingly being acknowledged internationally as a public good, as well as a basic human right. Although crime and violence are found in all cities across the world, most places are safe and most citizens are neither perpetrators nor victims of crime and violence. Rather, crime tends to be concentrated in certain parts of the city and in neighbourhoods that are known to the police and citizens. Fear of crime, whether linked to these specific ‘hotspots’ or more general in nature, is often exacerbated by the media and may spread quickly as information is communicated by mobile phones, email and through the internet.

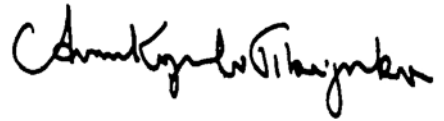
Studies of crime and violence have encompassed the following issues: distribution and incidence across countries and levels of development; distribution and incidence of the impact of crime and violence across different categories of people, specifically by gender, race and age; location of violence by city size; types of violence, perpetrators and victims; economic and financial costs of violence; and diverse theories of causation — from the ecological model of violence, through more psychocultural explanations, to broader macro-economic and developmental frameworks.

This report shows that the ‘traditional’ approach to problems of crime and violence, which is to see them as the primary responsibility of the police and the criminal justice system, is increasingly being replaced by an approach that recognizes that the complexity of the phenomena being addressed requires a broad-based response. Nonetheless, it is important that the police and the criminal justice system are ‘fit for purpose’ in a modern and rapidly urbanizing world, and are seen as key contributors to the fight against crime and violence. Improvements and reforms in these ‘traditional’ areas are essential and should be seen as complementary to the newer approaches being developed in ‘non-traditional’ fields.

The main ‘non-traditional’ or newer approaches explored in this report include enhancement of urban safety and security through effective urban planning, design and governance; the development of community-based approaches to enhancing urban safety and security; reduction of key risk factors by focusing on groups most vulnerable to crime; and strengthening of social capital through initiatives that seek to develop the ability of individuals and communities themselves to respond to problems of crime and violence. The combination of several of these approaches — all of which are specially suitable for implementation at the local level — into a systematic programme, driven by a broad strategy and based upon a careful understanding of the local context, seems more likely to be successful than the *ad hoc* application of individual initiatives. International support of various kinds can help cities, particularly in developing and transitional countries, to improve their ability to effectively implement measures that address problems of crime and violence. Such direct assistance should be part of a package that also includes continuing and strengthening international cooperation in tackling various types of organized crime, such as trafficking of drugs, arms and people — all of which have international dimensions.

Chapter 1 provides a conceptual framework for understanding and addressing urban safety and security issues in general. Chapter 2 summarizes the main global conditions and trends in urban crime and violence, including the factors that determine the level of vulnerability to crime and violence, and the impacts of crime and violence on towns and cities. Chapter 3 examines policy responses designed to reduce the incidence of crime and violence so far adopted at the urban, national and international levels. Finally, Chapter 4 explores the most promising policy directions for reducing urban crime and violence. These include: effective urban planning, design and governance; community-based approaches in which communities take ownership of the various crime and violence prevention initiatives; and reduction of risk factors by focusing on groups that are likely to be perpetrators of crime, such as the youth.

It is my hope that policy makers at central and local government levels, civil society organizations and all those involved in the formulation of policies and strategies for reducing urban crime and violence will find this publication useful.



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KEY FINDINGS AND MESSAGES

KEY FINDINGS

Global trends indicate that crime rates have been on the increase. For instance, over the period of 1980 to 2000, total recorded crimes increased from 2300 to 3000 crimes for every 100,000 people. This trend is, however, not replicated in all regions of the world. In North America and Western Europe, total crime rates fell significantly over the two decades, whereas in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Eastern Europe and Africa, total crime rates increased.

Regional variations in crime and violence are more pronounced when specific types of crime are examined. In the case of homicides, which are indicative of violent contact crimes, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean report double-digit figures, while significantly lower rates are reported for Southeast Asia, Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean and the West Pacific region. At the national level, Colombia, South Africa, Jamaica, Guatemala and Venezuela have very high homicide rates, while Japan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Spain, Cyprus and Norway have considerably lower rates.

Crime and violence are typically more severe in urban areas and are compounded by their rapid growth. A recent study has shown that 60 per cent of urban dwellers in developing and transitional countries have been victims of crime over a five-year period, with victimization rates reaching 70 per cent in parts of LAC and Africa. In Latin America, where 80 per cent of the population is urban, the rapidly expanding metropolitan areas of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Mexico City and Caracas account for over half of the violent crimes in their respective countries. The homicide rate in Rio de Janeiro has tripled since the 1970s, while the rate in São Paulo has quadrupled. In the Caribbean, Kingston, Jamaica's capital, consistently accounts for the vast majority of the nation's murders.

In Africa, cities such as Lagos, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Nairobi account for a sizeable proportion of their nation's crime. Urban areas in Africa

also have the highest reported levels of burglary, with victimization rates of over 8 per cent of the population. Although a non-violent crime, burglary is a serious offence in developing regions such as Africa. Here, burglary tends to be partly motivated by poverty, even though material possessions are fewer.

Robbery also poses a major threat to urban areas in many developing countries. This is because it not only results in injury and property loss, but also increases the general fear of crime and feeling of insecurity. In South Africa, the police in 2000 recorded 460 robberies for every 100,000 people, with 30 per cent of residents in Johannesburg reporting to have been victims of robbery. Regionally, the victimization rates for robbery are much higher in Latin America and Africa than in other regions of the world.

The fear of crime and violence is pervasive in both developed and developing countries. Public opinion surveys in the US and the UK repeatedly show that people rank crime among the top concerns they have in everyday life. In Nairobi, more than half of the citizens worry about crime all the time or very often. Likewise, in Lagos, 70 per cent of respondents in a city-wide survey were fearful of being victims of crime, with 90 per cent being fearful of the prospects of being killed in a criminal attack.

In addition to the above, residents of cities in developing, transitional and developed countries have to contend with increasing levels of domestic violence, child abuse, proliferation of youth gangs, corruption and various forms of organized crime.

Cities are increasingly becoming targets of terrorist attacks. Notable examples include the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, the coordinated bombings of Madrid in March 2004, the London bombings of July 2005, and the bombing of commuter trains in Mumbai in July 2006. This Global Report notes that the incidence of terrorist attacks is significantly small in comparison to common crime and other types of violence. For example, the US National

Counterterrorism Center reported 13 terrorist incidents in the US between February 2004 and May 2005 and, for approximately the same period, the Federal Bureau of Investigation identified 10.32 million property crimes and over 1.36 million violent crimes. However, the impacts of terrorism on cities have been enormous. For example, the attack on New York left about 3500 people dead. It also resulted in the destruction or damage of about 2.8 million square metres of office space in Lower Manhattan and damaged the Port Authority Trans-Hudson train station at the World Trade Center.

A multiplicity of factors underlies the observed trends in crime and violence. These include social and cultural factors that might exacerbate or mediate crime. For instance, in cities such as Kabul, Karachi and Managua, violence is so interwoven into the fabric of daily life that it has become the norm for many slum dwellers. On the other hand, in Hong Kong and other parts of East and Southeast Asia, Confucianism-based family values and a generally compliant 'pro-social' population are major factors in keeping crime and violence low. Other factors associated with urban crime and violence include poverty; unemployment; inequality; intergenerational transmission of violence as reflected in the continuous witnessing of parental abuse during childhood; the rapid pace of urbanization; poor urban planning, design and management; growth in youthful population; and the concentration of political power, which facilitates corruption.

The impacts of crime and violence are multidimensional. Apart from injury and death, victims of crime and violence suffer long-lasting psychological trauma and continuously live with the fear of crime. At the national level, crime and violence are impediments to foreign investment, contribute to capital flight and brain drain, and hinder international tourism. In Jamaica, for instance,

KEY MESSAGES

Policies designed to reduce crime and violence fall into several broad categories. At the local level, these include effective urban planning, design and governance; community-based approaches, in which communities take ownership of the various initiatives; reduction of risk factors by focusing on groups that are likely to be perpetrators and victims of crime; and strengthening of social capital through initiatives that seek to develop the ability of individuals and communities to respond to problems of crime and violence. The combination of several of these approaches — all of which are specially suitable for implementation at the local level into a systematic programme, driven by a broad strategy and based upon a careful understanding of the local context — seems more likely to succeed than the *ad hoc* application of individual initiatives.

The preferred mechanism for supporting such a broad-based approach is usually the partnership mechanism. Local authorities can play an important role in organizing such partnerships, while central governments provide the resources, enabling environment and necessary policy framework. The best institutional structures for implementing such programmes are likely to be those that succeed in getting the key players involved in ways that commit them to the programme. Local authorities will often be the most appropriate leaders of such structures. Local communities need to be as fully involved as possible in these processes, not only in terms of consultation, but also as generators and implementers of such initiatives.

At the local level and from a human settlements perspective, urban planning can make a difference in terms of crime prevention/reduction. The role of urban planning in diminishing opportunities for crime and

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