



Freedom from fear in urban spaces

Discussion paper

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Preface

The purpose of this discussion paper is to introduce and explore the emerging nexus of human security and cities, with the objective of generating policy-relevant research. This document does not attempt to establish new policies for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) or the Government of Canada. **Thus, the views and positions provided by this paper are solely those of the contributors to this research project and are not intended to reflect the views and positions of DFAIT or the Government of Canada.**

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Executive summary

This discussion paper posits that with the phenomenal growth of urban populations in the last century, cities have become powerful actors that can profoundly influence human security. In recognition of this fact, adopting an “urban lens” through which to view human security issues allows for a better understanding of peacebuilding or conflict-generating trends that are unique to cities, so as to strengthen and improve upon human security policy and programming.

This paper is divided into four parts. Part I explores how major demographic shifts from rural to urban areas has led to the **mushrooming of slums** – informal, and often illegal settlements which are home to larger and larger populations of the marginalized poor. Today, roughly one billion people live in slums, or one in six people. This number is projected to increase to two billion by 2030. Achieving “Cities Without Slums” – Target 11 of the seventh United Nations Millennium Development Goal – underscores the need to examine the complex development and security challenges presented by rapid urbanization.

Absent a corresponding investment in **public security**, a lack of police presence or effectiveness is a common characteristic of slums. 48% of cities in Latin America and the Caribbean have areas considered inaccessible or dangerous to the police. On the flip side, “social cleansing,” excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, and collusion with gangs contributes to high levels of distrust of police in many poor communities. This mutual contempt widens the gap between police and civilians, fostering an environment in which people are left to fend for themselves.

It is in this way that **private security** provision emerges in parallel to the public system. Privatization creates a bifurcated security structure in which wealthy elites move into “gated communities” and hire private guards, while in slums, gangs use extortion to “sell” security services to residents. To cite an extreme example, in Rio de Janeiro the longstanding conflict between police forces and the “parallel government” of the drug gangs has been described as a “civil war.”

Part II discusses how the above trends can give rise to the potentially explosive combination of **kids, guns, and gangs** in urban areas. In the absence of effective law enforcement, well-armed, organized gangs, many of which are financed by lucrative drug trafficking, control city streets and neighbourhoods. For example, in Cape Flats, South Africa, an estimated 130

armed gangs with 100,000 members cause 70% of all crime. Some gangs have expanded into organized criminal empires with thousands of members, complex organization, and aggressive recruitment strategies, competing in open armed combat for territorial expansion.

These trends underline the need for robust and effective security sector reform. Efforts to develop more responsive law enforcement have led to innovations such as community policing, in which local residents and police work together over time to establish relationships of mutual cooperation and trust. In Bogotá, Colombia, community policing has helped to cut homicide rates in half in the past decade, and has inverted community perceptions of the police, from predominantly negative to overwhelmingly positive.

The affordability and availability of **small arms** in cities means that some gangs are better armed than police. Many of these guns end up in the hands of children living in slums, who are at heightened risk of gang recruitment. Between 1978 and 2000, more people, particularly children, died in armed violence in the slums of Rio de Janeiro than in Colombia, a country that is actually experiencing civil conflict. Yet urban armed violence is largely neglected by international actors.

An exploration of the human security risks faced by children growing up in slums is overdue. In the past two decades, a substantial international framework has emerged to protect war-affected children and child soldiers. A focus on these "**urban child soldiers**" calls into question the distinction between urban and rural settings of armed conflict, and calls for special protection for these vulnerable civilians.

The remaining two sections explore the unique aspects of cities that can enable opportunities and mitigate challenges for human security. Part III examines the notion of "**conflict-resilient cities**" – cities in which population density and social capital potential can provide valuable conflict prevention opportunities. This resilience can help buffer a city from external conflict, or help prevent the escalation of violence beyond urban boundaries. Cities can attempt to oppose violent state policies, as the mayor of Belgrade attempted to do in 1996-1997. In post-conflict contexts, resurgent cities can symbolically or financially support national peace processes, for example, Sarajevo's swift ethnic reconciliation which contributed to Bosnia's recovery from civil war.

Part IV proposes that **urban governance** is one of the key human security tools that can be used to combat conflict and the failure of public security. Since cities host the level of government that is closest to the people, this

suggests that local authorities can be more sensitive to the needs and aptitudes of their constituents, and touch the daily lives of citizens through delivery of services, including those services that may enhance human security.

City governments are also key entry points for disseminating the democratic principles of tolerance, equity, participation, and representation – principles that are conducive to conflict resolution. Representative and inclusive local democratic governments can also help combat alienation that can make slum inhabitants the targets of organized crime, and manage the tensions which can spark urban unrest.

In post-conflict environments, cities should be focal points for **peacebuilding** activities. Following violent conflict, cities can fulfill immediate needs of civilians by providing housing, water, and social assistance. Locally-based and participatory peacebuilding projects in cities can help sow the principles of conflict resolution at the local level, building sustainable peace from the ground up.

Introduction

Canadian human security initiatives have tended to focus on the protection of individuals from threats of violence associated with war, genocide, war crimes, and terrorism. Over 90% of conflicts now take place within states. Civilians are very often the primary victims of these modern conflicts, many of which are shaped by ethnic or religious violence and state-sanctioned executions, and involve brutal paramilitaries, child soldiers, landmines, small arms, and terrorism.

Human security and state security are, in theory, mutually supportive. Human security is realized when states are effective in fulfilling their international and national security obligations. However, it is threatened when states are at war internationally, repressive domestically, or simply lack the capacity to provide for public security. It is equally true that large-scale human security failures tend to undermine the legitimacy and security of states.

Human security, as shaped and experienced by individual citizens and state actors such as soldiers or police, is very often determined by local security conditions. Human security is violated or provided within specific geographical locations, for example, rebel territories, ethnic enclaves, safe zones, or refugee camps. With half of the world's population now living in cities, human security is increasingly being shaped by the unique dynamics of urban realities.

This is not a new phenomenon. Long before the emergence of the modern state system, cities were the first geo-political structures capable of supporting human security. They were the first sites of a conscious social bargain through which individual freedoms were traded for a set of common rights and responsibilities maintained by civic authorities. However, it took almost 4,000 years for cities to grow to the point at which, by the year 1800, they hosted just 3% of the world's population. Just 100 years later the urban population had grown to 13%. By 2005, it was 50%. And by 2030, 60% of the global population will live in cities.

Cities have grown to the point at which the mayors of some of the largest cities in the world now govern more people than the majority of the world's sovereign states. Indeed, some cities are now capable of exerting powerful effects upon peace and security independently of state actions. The phenomenal growth of these increasingly powerful entities presents a host of human security challenges, as well as opportunities, with implications for the human security agenda.

The goal of this paper is not to unearth root causes of conflict, nor is it to present concrete policy initiatives. Rather, its objective is to explore the normative link between the human security paradigm and urban security and governance issues, and stimulate debate around these issues. Finally, this paper will not discuss broader developmental concerns – such as poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, economic development, and natural disasters – important as these issues are.

Fearscapes: The failure of public security in urban spaces

The human security challenges posed by cities are not only vast, but also largely overlooked. Rapid urbanization in the past three decades has resulted in the mushrooming of slums in and around major cities. Today one in six people live in slums – poor, overcrowded urban communities that are among the most dangerous places in the world in which to live. This figure is expected to increase to a quarter of the world's population by 2030. In some cities, *most* of the population lives in slums: 60% of Nairobi's population lives in slums on only 5% of the city's land.¹ While slums are not restricted to the developing world, 43% of people in developing country cities live in slums, compared to only 6% in developed country cities.²

Major urban centres often serve as regional hubs of criminal activity. In Nigeria, an estimated 15 million children have been transported from rural areas to cities for child labour, slavery, or to be trafficked to other cities as prostitutes.³ The most dangerous slums have high percentages of unemployed and uneducated youth. The "youth bulge" – a disproportionate percentage of youth in the population – is particularly pervasive in cities in the Arab world, where youth under the age of 24 often make up 50% to 65% of the population.⁴ Slums with these characteristics can become breeding grounds for gang activity.

Cities in Africa and Latin America are the most dangerous in the world. Here, at least two-thirds of people living in major cities are likely to be victims of crime.⁵ In Asia, where roughly 40% of the region's 1.2 billion urban residents live in slums, incidents of violent crime are much lower.⁶ However, in the past 10 years there has been a marked rise in organized armed violence and drug trafficking in Asia. Human trafficking and child prostitution pose considerable human security risks, particularly for women and girl children, in many Asian cities.⁷

¹ UN-Habitat, "Background Information," WHD Feature, p.4.

² UN-Habitat, <http://www.unhabitat.org/mdg>.

³ "Nigeria: 15 million children toil in slavery" November 18, 2005, <http://www.crin.org/violence/search/closeup.asp?infoID=6608>.

⁴ Fuller (2003), p.6. For example, in 2003, the percentage of the population under 24 was 65.3% in Yemen, 62.3% in Saudi Arabia, 61.7% in Iraq, and 61% in Pakistan.

⁵ UN-Habitat, "Changes in Asia's fast growing cities are closely watched across the world."

⁶ Statistic from 2001. UN-Habitat, *ibid*.

⁷ UN-Habitat, *ibid*.

The failure of public security...

A lack of an effective police presence dedicated to the maintenance of the rule of law is a common characteristic of slum settlements. Thus, for a number of reasons, public security is failing where it is needed the most. Law enforcement may be lacking simply because police officers are not willing to risk their lives by entering these dangerous areas. Almost half of cities in Latin America and the Caribbean have areas considered inaccessible or dangerous to the police.⁸ Mexico City alone is divided among 1,500 competing gangs.⁹ Police in developing countries also tend to lack incentives to take the risks necessary to maintain public security. Police in Kabul, Afghanistan, for example, earn as little as US\$17 a month.

In some slums, it is not always clear what is worse for public security: police absence or police presence. Excessive force is commonly used by police who patrol slum communities. As an Amnesty International study in Brazil found that inhabitants of *favelas* lacked effective protection by police, but

*"...when the police do intervene, it is often by mounting "invasions" – violent mass raids using no warrants or, on rare occasions, collective warrants that label the entire community as criminal."*¹⁰

Residents of socially excluded neighbourhoods also report extrajudicial executions, the use of torture, and high levels of corruption among the police force.¹¹

Distrust of police is common in major cities on every continent, and not without cause. Corrupt state police forces have long been known to collude with gangs, providing arms or information, or turning a blind eye to criminal activity. In Rio de Janeiro, most officers are actually killed while off-duty, usually due to involvement in criminal activity or as private security guards.¹² Worse, "social cleansing" – the deliberate targeting of youth, gang members, ethnic groups, or other "undesirables" for torture and murder – is used as a thinly disguised effort to "clean up" violent neighbourhoods. In recent years, police have arbitrarily arrested hundreds of refugees from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo living in Nairobi's

⁸ 48% according to UN-Habitat, "Urbanization: Facts and Figures," <http://www.unhabitat.org/Istanbul+5/bg10.htm>.

⁹ United Nations Department of Public Information (1995) "Urban Crime: Policies for Prevention," <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/crime/dpi1646e.htm>.

¹⁰ Amnesty International (2005), p.6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹² Amnesty International (2005), p.23.

approximately 130 slums, sometimes in massive military-style operations.¹³ In Rio de Janeiro, the longstanding conflict between police forces and the “parallel government” of the drug gangs has been described as a civil war.

...and the rise of private security

With police often unable or unwilling to protect civilians in urban areas, public security can become a private commodity. Wealthy elites move into “gated communities” – heavily guarded urban fortresses with sophisticated alarm systems, electrical fences, closed circuit TV surveillance cameras, guard dogs, and private security guards. Elite residential enclaves are increasingly common in societies that are highly divided, whether along racial lines (such as Cape Town) or along income lines (such as Managua). In South Africa, the number of private security guards has increased by 150% since 1997, compared to a 2.2% *decrease* in the number of police officials in the same period.¹⁴ As a result, private security personnel now outnumber police by three-to-one. Even state police forces have turned to private security companies to protect police stations and headquarters.

For the less privileged, filling the security vacuum is neither as easy nor necessarily as voluntary. Unable to afford private security services, people living in poor communities develop adaptive strategies, ranging from community watch programs to private firearms purchases. Gangs also play a role in filling the security vacuum. In Nigeria, Muslim youth gangs enforce Sharia law in lieu of the state.¹⁵ In Nicaragua, youth gangs have been able to fill the security void, becoming an institutionalized presence in poor communities and protecting residents from inter-gang warfare.¹⁶

However, for many gangs the expansion of the drug trade since the 1990s shifted their activities from vigilante policing to direct violence towards their own communities.¹⁷ In these scenarios, gangs and vigilante groups use extortion and coercion to “sell” security services to community residents, to varying degrees of effectiveness. For instance, in Medellín, militia groups (composed primarily of youth and children) “tax” local businesses by forcing them to pay hefty sums for “protection.”¹⁸ This type of black market justice breeds a climate of distrust and fear, in which security is bought and sold,

¹³ Human Rights Watch (2002).

¹⁴ “Security guards outgun cops 3 to 1,” April 4, 2006, <http://iafrica.com/news/sa/170380.htm>.

¹⁵ Hagedorn (2005), p.159.

¹⁶ Moser and Rodgers (2005), p.23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹⁸ Amnesty International (2005).

and might equals right. As one female gang leader in August Town, Jamaica, put it, "We have our own justice, the state does not provide justice."¹⁹

Security privatization can also exacerbate insecurity among the urban poor. In communities home to thousands of bored, poor, young men, public officials have established vigilante groups to conduct violent counter-attacks on gangs. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, Brazilian military police have led private vigilante groups to drive out gangs and take control of slums in paramilitary style operations. The extent to which vigilante groups hired to crack down on crime are protecting civilians from gangs involved in criminal activity, or actually are gangs themselves, is often unclear. For example, in the impoverished suburbs of Cape Town, South Africa, a vigilante group called People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (Pagad) was formed to rid the community of gangs by murdering gang leaders. This led gangs to seek vengeance on Pagad, exacerbating inter-gang warfare and creating a vicious circle of violence.²⁰

Security privatization tends to exacerbate the gap between the rich and the poor, creating pockets of wealth amidst sprawling poverty. Evidence from Brazil indicates that social segregation and territorial exclusion are directly linked to higher levels of urban violence. Among the 28 most territorially segregated cities in São Paulo, 25 of them had the highest homicide rates.²¹ The bifurcation of security services also tends to reduce pressure on the state to provide these services, thereby deepening social stratification. Correspondingly, predatory pressure on slum dwellers to provide their own security increases both the supply and demand of firearms, gangs, and vigilante groups. These groups lack access to legitimate channels of justice, exercising instead extrajudicial punishments – including torture and murder – that violate fundamental human rights. And since many such groups are comprised partially or even predominantly of youth, the threats to human security among vulnerable children are compounded.

Building the capacity for public security provision is at the heart of addressing these problems. At the local level, community policing has emerged as an innovation that combines collective self-help and public sector capacity-building. Community policing is one way to respond to failures in public security provision. In these schemes, police officers are assigned to specific neighbourhoods for lengthy periods of time, allowing mutually-supportive trust relationships between civilians and police to be fostered. In Bogotá, community policing helped to reduce homicide rates from 7,144 in 1993 to 3,194 in 2002, such that per capita homicide rates are now the lowest of

¹⁹ Dowdney (2003), p.237.

²⁰ Botha (2001).

²¹ Moser and Rodgers (2005), p.27.

Colombia's major cities.²² In Mumbai, residents' organizations in slums have organized with police officers to bolster minor dispute resolution so that police can focus on combating crime.

At a broader level, security sector reform can engage outside actors (including the United Nations and bilateral donors) in helping to strengthen police, justice systems, and legislation, particularly in countries emerging from conflict. Security sector reform undertaken by the UN force in Sierra Leone, for example, helped to revitalize Freetown's depleted police force by providing technical support and training in the wake of the civil war.

²² Quesada (2004).

Kids, guns, and gangs

The failure of public security in rapidly mushrooming slums creates a security vacuum which is increasingly being filled by organized armed gangs that take advantage of readily available weapons and a vast pool of unemployed youth from which to recruit members. This toxic mix of kids, guns, and gangs presents serious human security challenges. In fact, this combination is so dangerous that in some cases more young people are dying due to urban violence in countries that are not at war than those in countries that are. A 2002 case study of children in organized armed violence found that between 1978 and 2000, more people, particularly children, died in armed violence in the slums of Rio de Janeiro (49,913) than in Colombia (39,000), a country that is actually experiencing civil conflict.²³ Examining human security through an urban optic reveals that poorly-policed slums with kids, guns, and gangs are generating conditions for what are effectively "urban child soldiers".

Urban gang warfare

Roughly 35,000 Salvadorians, 40,000 Hondurans, and 100,000 Guatemalans are members of gangs. These gangs, or *maras*, are the main cause of violent crime in Central America.²⁴ So too are gangs in major cities such as the Fatherless Crew (Kingston, Jamaica), the Bakassi Boys (Igbo, Nigeria) and the Cape Town Scorpions (Cape Town, South Africa). In Guatemala, gang warfare has been a main cause of the 20,000 murders that have been committed over the past five years.²⁵ In Cape Flats, an estimated 130 well-armed criminal gangs with 100,000 members cause 70% of all crime in the South African city.²⁶ In Colombia, urban militias, some of which are made up of 85% youth, have close ties to paramilitary and rebel armies waging civil war against government forces.²⁷

These gangs are not just committing ad hoc, petty, or anomic crime. Using the definition from the Children and Youth in Organized Armed Violence (COAV) program of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Viva Rio, it is the existence of "children and youth [who are] employed or otherwise participating in organized armed violence where there are elements of a

²³ Dowdney (2003), p.12.

²⁴ Boccanera (2003).

²⁵ Rosenberg (2006).

²⁶ Standing (2005), pp.2-3.

²⁷ Amnesty International (2005).

command structure and power over territory, local population or resources” that creates a human security problem.²⁸

Some of these groups have expanded into major entities – described as “organized criminal empires” – with thousands of members, complex internal organization, and aggressive recruitment strategies, competing in open armed combat for territorial expansion.²⁹ Organized armed groups very often have structured hierarchies and complex rules regarding membership. Leaving is extremely difficult. Defectors may be socially outcast at best, tortured and killed at worst. However, in many cases youth have no desire to leave their gangs, such as in Guatemala City where only eight of 290 gang members interviewed in one study wanted to leave their gang to “become good citizens.”³⁰ The complexity of gang membership renders finding effective and sustainable policy solutions extremely difficult.

Young men are most likely to be both the victims and perpetrators of organized armed violence. In Puerto Rico, the estimated homicide rate in 1999 among men aged between 15 and 24 was 101 per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to only 6.8 per 100,000 for women of the same age. In Brazil, 91% of gun deaths are among men.³¹ Urban gang violence is overwhelmingly committed by males towards males.

Yet these statistics should not justify neglect of the gendered impacts of urban armed violence on women and girls, who are victimized by male-dominated gang warfare in different ways. Threats, psychological abuse, intimidation, and community insecurity affect women and girls in ways that are largely overlooked. Rape is a widely-used, even systematic, tool used by gang members who target young girls in particular. Ubiquitous violence in city streets has led girls and women to drop out of school, increasing their social isolation. Social segregation along gender lines is reinforced since most gangs do not allow girls to join. While the impacts of gang warfare on men and women are different, the general threat to everyone’s human security is no less severe.

A 2005 survey by the Human Security Centre found that people consider criminal violence the greatest single threat to their personal security, followed by terrorism or war.³² This underlines the need for a better understanding of urban gang warfare, insofar as it plays a key role in exacerbating human

²⁸ Dowdney (2003), p.12.

²⁹ Standing (2005), p.2.

³⁰ Winton (2004), p.89.

³¹ Viva Rio (2006).

³² *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* (2005), p.51. Source data commissioned from Ipsos-Reid by the Human Security Centre; see Ipsos-Reid website, <http://www.ipsos.ca>.

insecurity. Doing so may also enable the identification of entry points for existing international efforts to combat armed violence and protect civilians.

Armed and dangerous

The widespread use of weapons in encounters between gangs, police, and vigilante groups has been on the rise in recent years, increasing the lethality of urban warfare. In Brazil, more than 100 people are killed by firearms every day, and the gun-related death rate in Rio de Janeiro is more than double the national average.³³ Almost 2000 children and youth were killed in violent street gangs in Honduras in the past four years, and throughout Central America thousands more are killed every year in gang-related turf wars or as police targets. In Colombia, firearm-related deaths among youth under 18 have increased by 284.7% in the past two decades.³⁴

The ubiquity of weapons means that some gangs are better armed than police officers. Weapons are illegally bought, used, and sold. In Nigeria, children as young as seven belonging to the gang known as the Arewa Peoples Congress were found illegally selling petroleum products to buy arms.³⁵ Half of the roughly 17 million guns in Brazil are held illegally, some purchased from police for as little as \$350 per pistol. In Rio's *favelas*, 53,526 revolvers were confiscated by the police between 1990 and 2001. Not only have these numbers increased 15-fold in the past four decades, but more lethal weapons such as assault rifles, machine guns, and sub-machine guns are becoming increasingly common. Rio police have also seized from Rio drug factions grenades, mortars, bazookas, and land mines, likely obtained illegally from the military.³⁶

Cité Soleil in downtown Port-au-Prince illustrates how the failure of public security threatens not only public safety, but also the effectiveness of UN peace support operations. This densely-populated slum in Haiti's capital is run by armed gang members, many of whom are children and youth. There are an estimated 32 gangs in Cité Soleil, each one controlling areas of a few city blocks. A study in this slum reported that 51 people were killed and 84 went missing in just over three months in 2005 due to gang warfare.³⁷ Shoot-outs between rival gangs, in streets littered with mounds of garbage, render these neighbourhoods impenetrable by state police. As a result, pressures on

³³ Viva Rio (2005).

³⁴ Dowdney (2003), p.127.

³⁵ Dowdney (2003), p.251.

³⁶ Amnesty International (2005), p.19.

³⁷ Cavallaro (2005), p.45.

peacekeepers to police slums distract these forces from fulfilling their mandates.

The dangers posed by small arms are well known. The UN describes these weapons as posing a “serious threat to peace.”³⁸ Yet they remain disturbingly accessible: an estimated one in five schoolboys in the Caribbean carries a gun and belongs to a gang.³⁹ Major international efforts have sought to reduce the quantity of these weapons in circulation, control illicit transfers, and address demand to prevent their acquisition, particularly by children. Many initiatives have emerged to redress violence caused by small arms – broad-based NGO advocacy campaigns, International Gun Destruction Day (July 9), and performances by hip hop musicians whose lyrics cry out against gun use, to name a few. At all levels, from multilateral commitments right down to voluntary, community-based weapons collections, disarmament programs need to be deepened, strengthened, and strongly supported.

Kids: Nothing to do and nothing to lose

In some countries – including those that are not at war, such as Guatemala – the most common cause of death among youth is by firearms.⁴⁰ For children involved in organized armed gangs, the use of weaponry, the types of confrontations with state forces or rival groups, and the death tolls, are shockingly similar to those associated with war-affected countries. Children growing up in crowded households (a common feature of slums) spend more time on the streets, making them easy targets for gang recruitment. And, with nothing to do and nothing to lose, youth often perceive organized criminal gangs as appealing economic and social opportunities.

The average age for recruitment into urban gangs is between 11 and 14 years old. Every year, younger and younger children are recruited into gangs, provided with weapons, and paid to undertake violent criminal activities, often earning more than their parents. In many gangs, children make up a significant minority, or even a majority of the membership. In Medellín, an estimated 60% to 70% of gang members are children.⁴¹

The flourishing of lucrative drug trafficking in the past three decades has enabled gangs to become highly organized, expansive, and financially self-reliant entities. As such, they are better able to recruit more and more

³⁸ *UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects* (2001).

³⁹ USAID (2002).

⁴⁰ Winton (2004), p.86.

⁴¹ Dowdney (2003), p.182.

disenfranchised youth. Some children are targeted at school, bribed with gifts, and offered high-paying jobs. Others are coerced, threatened or kidnapped. Worldwide, some 20,000 children are used as drug runners in cities.⁴² For young people, gangs can be surrogates for families and friends, or sources of fear and insecurity.

Youth in gangs are disproportionately at risk of injury or death. Like child soldiers, the youngest gang members are generally sent into armed confrontations first. On average in 2000, two people under the age of 18 were killed every day in Medellín.⁴³ Young gang members are considered expendable and are relegated to the lowest tasks, including punishing disobedience with murder. As both victims and perpetrators of violence, children in armed gangs can be particularly dangerous if they are expected to prove themselves on the urban battleground.

In addition to organized armed groups, children growing up in slums face other human security threats. High levels of infectious disease threaten their health and lives. Children who have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS are at particular risk of abduction into gangs or domestic servitude. Moreover, in addition to risks of organized gangs, drugs, and small arms, children living in cities are also at heightened risk of involvement in human trafficking and the sex tourism industry. According to UNICEF, about one million children worldwide enter into the sex trade every year.⁴⁴

Youth-based initiatives have emerged as a positive approach to tackling gang problems. The NGO Viva Rio in Brazil has been a leader in integrating low-income youth in demobilization and empowerment efforts. Viva Rio helps to engage youth in community activities – including weapons collections and destruction, job creation, a student radio station, a boxing club, and microcredit schemes – to keep them off the streets. In Nigeria, the Niger Delta Youth for Peace programme was established in 2002 to collect small arms for cash. In juvenile prisons of Westbury, South Africa, youth use drama presentations and peer counselling to promote drug awareness and peaceful dispute resolution.⁴⁵ Taking a preventive approach can be particularly effective, since it is more difficult to access and negotiate with youth who are already involved in gangs. In Guatemala City, for example, youth organizations played a key role in helping persuade their peers to leave gangs by challenging the widely-held perception of gangs as a “rite of passage.”⁴⁶

⁴² UN-Habitat (2004), p.139.

⁴³ COAV (2006).

⁴⁴ Olori (2003).

⁴⁵ Dowdney (2003), p.309.

⁴⁶ Winton (2004), p.90.

Protecting “urban child soldiers”

In the past two decades, a substantial framework has emerged to protect war-affected children and child soldiers. The international community has increasingly recognized the need for special attention to the rights of vulnerable children, resulting in the development and strengthening of international norms, bodies, and laws:

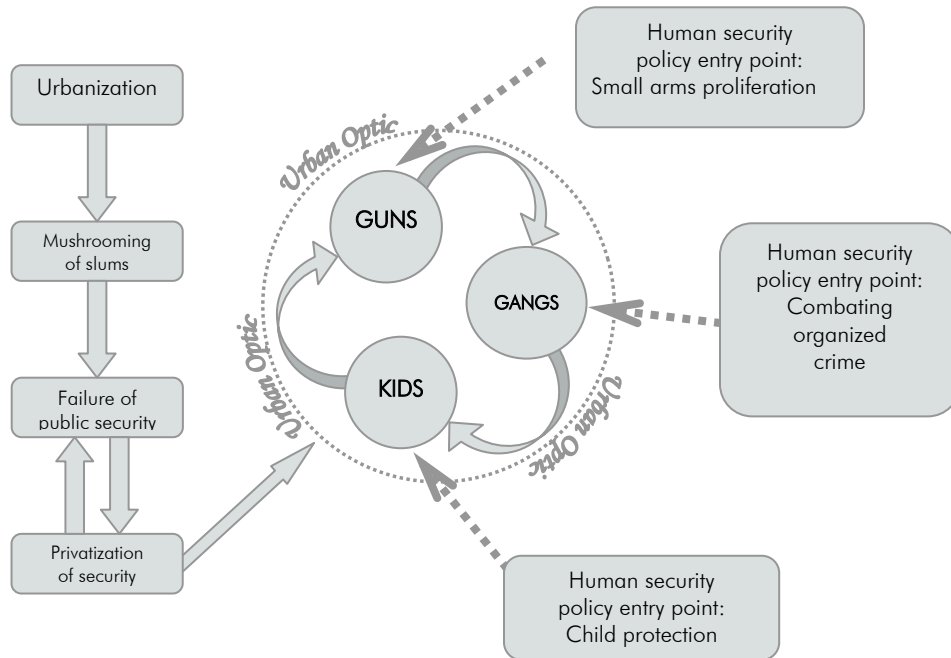
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child, with its Optional Protocol established in 2000, raises the age of conscription and involvement in conflict from 15 to 18 years and establishes a ban on compulsory recruitment below 18 years.
- Six UN Security Council resolutions have explicitly recognized the need to put an end to egregious violations of children’s rights and the recruitment and use of child soldiers,⁴⁷ and each year the Security Council holds a debate on the issue based on an annual report of the Secretary-General.
- The International Criminal Court, established in 1998, defines the conscription, enlistment, or use in hostilities of children under the age of 15 as a war crime.

Children living in cities and child soldiers face comparable threats to their human security. Since many of the differences between them are a matter of semantics (gangs vs. rebel groups, slums vs. internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, police vs. armies, etc.) these “urban child soldiers” warrant special protection.

⁴⁷ Security Council Resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), and 1612 (2005).

Examining the human security issues that emerge from the preceding discussion allows for identification of potential entry points for future policy. The following flowchart illustrates how these entry points fit into the logical sequence:

Entry points for human security policy



Having provided a context for this discussion, the next two sections will explore the unique aspects of cities that can enable opportunities and mitigate challenges for human security.

Conflict-resilient cities

The prevention and mitigation of violent conflict is a core human security priority. Fortunately, the population density and corresponding social capital potential in cities presents a range of unique local conflict management opportunities. This urban conflict resilience can help 'buffer' a city and its citizens from the impacts of national-level conflict or help 'block' the escalation of local violence beyond urban boundaries. Cities can also actively oppose violent state policies, as the mayor of Belgrade attempted to do in 1996-1997.⁴⁸ The experiences of Mogadishu and Sarajevo also illustrate the potential role for cities in post-conflict recovery. Both survived their respective state conflicts and were quicker to rebound in the post-conflict phase.⁴⁹

To bolster conflict resilience, some cities have turned to another tool to prevent and manage conflict – 'city-to-city' diplomacy. Through these efforts, cities work with each other to share best practices, display solidarity, and focus efforts to address local root causes of conflict. The Municipal Alliance for Peace, a network of Palestinian and Israeli cities that have worked to build bridges and cooperative discourse between two conflict-ridden peoples, is one such example.⁵⁰

Conflict resilience and social capital

Urban conflict resilience is a product of many factors, including security and crisis-management capacities, inclusive governance, and equitable resource distribution. The ability of cities to manage the potentially negative impacts of rapid urbanization is another factor. While cities in more developed countries often have such capacity, many in developing countries do not.

Nonetheless, many developing world cities are largely peaceful on a day-to-day basis. This may be because urban spaces are particularly concentrated areas of social capital, where the sheer density and numbers of people, proximity of individuals of varied backgrounds, daily interconnectedness

⁴⁸ Zoran Djindjic, leader of the Serbian Democratic Party, was one of three Serbian opposition leaders who led 88 days of mass street demonstrations in late 1996 against the Milosevic administration's attempt to annul the Democratic Party coalition's victory in municipal elections. Milosevic eventually capitulated and Djindjic became mayor of Belgrade. However, Milosevic starved Serbian municipalities that chose opposition candidates of funds, undermining Djindjic's coalition and reformist agenda. Djindjic was forced to resign several months after taking office when the coalition collapsed. See "Zoran Djindjic," *Daily Telegraph*, March 13, 2003.

⁴⁹ Mogadishu's continued instability, however, illustrates the degree to which lasting peace requires stability on many levels (urban, state, regional, etc.). The urban lens is a necessary, but not sufficient, level of analysis.

⁵⁰ For more information on the Municipal Alliance for Peace, see <http://www.palestine-pmc.com/pdf/16-11-05.pdf>.

through economic interactions, and forced coexistence compels urban citizens to develop trust and practice mediation, tolerance, and understanding as a way to avoid conflict.⁵¹

There are three types of social capital: *bonding capital* refers to relationships among people who see themselves as sharing a common background; *bridging capital* refers to relationships between people without a common background; and *linking capital* refers to relationships among people of different power levels.⁵² Research suggests that a failure to pursue all three elements of social capital can generate *negative* social capital. Programs that aim to build only bonding social capital between members of the same age group, for example, may only serve to strengthen urban gang cohesion and social isolation where their membership overlaps, if bridging and linking capital with other groups are not built simultaneously.⁵³

Field research suggests that social capital is a key factor in the development of conflict-resilient cities. Urban social capital developed between potentially antagonistic communities can help buffer particular cities against conflict dynamics before they emerge or escalate. Resilient cities with strong levels of trust between communities can provide an immune system against outside viruses at the state or global level, such as identity-based violence. For example, Lucknow and Surat, two Indian cities with vibrant and mixed urban civil societies, were able to avoid the urban violence that plagued the more segregated Hindu-Muslim cities such as Aligarh and Admedabad.⁵⁴ A study of three communities in Greater Belfast since the 1960s found that only the community with high levels of bridging social capital – with mixed associational and sports clubs – was able to avoid the human insecurity that was plaguing much of Northern Ireland.⁵⁵

Resilient cities and peacebuilding

As noted in a recent Tufts University Humanitarianism and War Project study, “As conflict recedes, local people move quickly beyond their need for protection from violence (physical security) to a wider range of needs, including employment, health care, and education (human security).”⁵⁶ Cities represent the level of governance closest to populations. As such, they can be an effective focal point for peacebuilding activities because they are accessible entry points for peacebuilding that recognize the natural capacities of cities and their residents, and empower the provision of human

⁵¹ For more information on the idea of social capital, see Snoxell et al. (2006).

⁵² Ibid., p. 68.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 77.

⁵⁴ Varshney (2002), p.228.

⁵⁵ Darby (1986).

⁵⁶ For more information, see <http://hwproject.tufts.edu/pdf/sr48.pdf>.

security at the most grassroots level. This suggests the need to complement the policies and practices of state-building with city-building in order to efficiently build a state's capacity – through its cities – to protect its citizens.

Urban centres often have a greater capacity to rebuild following conflicts and thus project an image of recovery and peace that can build confidence in larger peace processes. Sarajevo suffered four years of siege by Serbian forces in the 1990s, with 11,000 deaths. However, the city has since been rebuilt, with ethnic inter-marriages and inter-group youth collaboration again the norm. The rebirth of Sarajevo has served as a source of symbolic and practical peacebuilding for Bosnians.⁵⁷ Similarly, Kabul regained its cosmopolitan nature soon after the Afghanistan war, and is undoubtedly the most secure area in Afghanistan.⁵⁸

In one example of peacebuilding via city-to-city diplomacy, the local governments of Tuzla (Bosnia), Osijek (Croatia), and Novisad (Serbia) worked together – and in conjunction with civil society groups – during the Balkan wars to protect and conserve their multi-ethnic societies. In the post-war period, the three cities contributed to the peace process at the local level by signing a *Protocol on the Promotion of Interethnic Tolerance*.⁵⁹ Similarly, local city councils in the region of North Cauca, Colombia, have banded together to resist the conflict between the Colombian state and insurgent groups. In this they were supported by several visits from mayors of European cities, demonstrating the solidarity and symbolic support that cities can give one another.

The value of conflict-resilient cities in bolstering human security and contributing to peace and security objectives is gradually being acknowledged. There are a number of organizations that are working on this topic, such as United Cities and Local Governments, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the Dutch NGO VNG International. These groups have supported citizen participation and city diplomacy efforts in urban centres in South Africa, Iran, Uganda, Serbia, and elsewhere. For the most part, however, few international peacebuilding efforts by large organizations have explicitly targeted strengthened urban resilience as a key conflict prevention tool.

⁵⁷ "Sarajevo finds love after the war," BBC, February 28, 2006.

⁵⁸ "Good times roll in city where fun was banned," *The Times*, March 15, 2006.

⁵⁹ See <http://www.citizenspact.org.yu/protocol.htm>.

Human security, urban governance, and democratization

The role of governance and democracy in helping prevent conflict at the state level is well established: democratic states protect their citizens, respect minority rights, and rarely go to war, among other measures that safeguard human security.⁶⁰ With the day-to-day contact between civilians and the state occurring at the local level, however, the potential for *urban* governance and democracy to equip local communities with non-violent responses to conflict needs to be explored further. Democratization at the local level can empower people to work with local authorities to safeguard their human security, sow the principles of fair and reasonable behaviour at the local level, and help ensure that local governance mechanisms respond to the needs of the demos, rather than the whims of the mob.

Given their innate vitality and diversity, urban spaces are also natural incubators for liberal democratic tendencies and focal points of opposition towards autocratic regimes — witness the largely peaceful urban revolutions in Ukraine (2005) and Lebanon (2005), and urban protests in Thailand (2006), Belarus (2006) and Nepal (2006).⁶¹ Of course, where repressive states are threatened by this urban democratic impulse, human security is imperilled, such as in the razing of thousands of homes in Harare by a Zimbabwean regime suspicious of urban support for the democratic opposition, leaving 700,000 civilians without homes.

Weaving local governance and democratic principles into the urban fabric

Today, weak or ineffective local governance is a source of human insecurity. Many local governments and security apparatuses, especially in the developing world, do not empower their constituents, are controlled by a single individual or group, and are rife with corruption. Many are unable to employ governance tactics designed to resolve and mediate conflict. Some local governments are parties to local conflicts or pawns for armed groups that control public budgets and economic redistribution.

With the majority of the world's people now living in cities, local governments can be encouraged to respect the rule of law and empower people by

⁶⁰ *Human Security Report 2005* (2005), p.151.

⁶¹ On Thailand, for example, see McGirk (2006).

extending decision making to the grassroots, which can contribute towards non-violent conflict management. The urban 'value-added' is that the municipal level is where democracy truly hits the ground and turns democratic principles into daily practice. Consequently, local democracy may be one of the best ways to combat the rise of private security and the segregation of urban groups as developing world cities get ever larger and more impersonal. If cities are democratic, responsive, adaptable, flexible, and representative, they can empower their constituents to work with local authorities to ensure their security. Democratic systems are more likely to respond to alienated and underrepresented slum populations, as they can secure property rights and regulate the provision of public services. The growing trend of decentralization,⁶² or the devolution of power from the state to the urban level, also places local authorities in a better position to respond to the needs of the people, if this transfer of power is done in conjunction with adequate resources and inclusive decision making.

Democratic systems at the local level serve three functions that strengthen human security. First, in contexts of decentralization, they can provide a people-centred approach to governance. This empowerment can build human security by establishing trust, a sense of inclusion and responsibility, and consistent lines of communication between groups. Second, in terms of attacking some of the long-standing root causes of violence, local democracy broadens the basis of peace by extending it to the community, municipal, and city level. Third, responsive and representative local democratic systems are more effective at managing violent "disruptions from below" – the spontaneous eruption of violence that can occur in fragile cities – than are municipal authorities lacking in legitimacy and the consent of the people.

The role of local governance and democracy in conflict contexts

Local democracy may be especially important to cities that are in, or emerging from, conflict. Vibrant local democracies tend to cultivate leaders that can guide cities to peaceful outcomes. The role of the mayor of Diyarbakir (Turkey's major Kurdish city) in publicly encouraging peaceful relations between Kurds and Turks through intercommunal activities points to the importance of leadership. The courageous attempt of Zoran Djindjic, the mayor of Belgrade mentioned above, who attempted to oppose the genocidal policies of Slobodan Milosevic's regime in 1996-1997, is another example.

⁶² 63 of 75 (84%) countries with a population greater than five million are engaged in some form of power transfer to local government. See "Democratic Governance: Local Government," National Democratic Institute, <http://www.ndi.org/globalp/localgov/localgov.asp>.

Governance and local democracy are also critical in the post-conflict attempt to rebuild state security, because sowing the seeds of democracy at the local level may be more practical and productive in the immediate term. In a post-conflict situation, citizens no longer trust the state to protect their human rights, nor do they rely on the state to provide them with basic services. Instead, neighbours rely on each other, trusting close-knit networks of support. For this reason, local rather than national governments become very important in efforts to rebuild failed states. Reinforcing small networks and re-establishing strong local governments which can garner the support and trust of the population can be a productive step forward in achieving human security.

This is precisely the goal of one of the largest recent efforts to bolster democracy at the local level. USAID's Local Governance Program in Iraq has held 22,000 local democracy dialogues, rebuilt and strengthened hundreds of accountable and responsive local councils, spearheaded local council elections, and supported civil society participation.⁶³ The program has spent hundreds of millions of dollars in efforts to inculcate democratic values at the grassroots level, positing that if democracy is instilled in daily life (the city), it will percolate up to higher levels of government (the state) over time.

Urban democracy and peaceful change

Finally, democratic practices can help to channel urban dissent into less violent forms of political expression. Increasingly, urban environments are sites of largely peaceful mass protest against state policies (Bolivia, Thailand, Ukraine, Nepal), as globalization, the acceptance of the responsibility to protect civilians, and the spread of mass communication has made mass urban protest a viable and feasible alternative to an armed approach. In Bolivia, for example, urban protesters from the slum of El Alto flooded the capital of La Paz in late 2003, and again in mid-2005 to protest government plans to privatize and export natural gas, forcing the government to back down.⁶⁴ In 2006, urban protesters in Kathmandu and other Nepalese cities also forced Nepal's king to reintroduce democratic institutions. Many of the most active protesters were Kathmandu youth, indicating the potential value of democratic participation for disaffected youth.⁶⁵ The growth and strength of 'people power' may even have convinced Nepal's Maoist rebels to

⁶³ See "Assistance for Iraq: Local Governance," USAID, <http://www.usaid.gov/iraq/accomplishments/locgov.html>.

⁶⁴ For events in 2003, see "Bolivia: Exercise Restraint in Response to Protests," Human Rights Watch, October 15, 2003, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2003/10/15/bolivi6460.htm>. For 2005 events, see Forero (2005), A4.

⁶⁵ Lancaster (2006), A16.

abandon more violent tactics in their attempt to topple the Nepalese regime.⁶⁶

Urban protest does present a human security challenge, however, as some states respond violently to this urban threat. In the Bolivian example above, about 80 people were killed in clashes with police, while dozens were killed in the Nepalese protests. As noted earlier, one of the most extreme examples of a state's attempt to throttle urban dissent was in Zimbabwe, where 700,000 citizens of Harare were left homeless after a government razing program.

Building on international action

A number of groups are working to improve local governance and infuse democratic principles at the municipal level. International IDEA, the National Democratic Institute, and the World Bank have developed programs aimed at exploring the benefits of local democratization, and have produced resources such as the Local Democracy Assessment Guides.⁶⁷

Urban governance and democratization remain critical issues which impact developed countries as well. Peace support operations (PSOs) will increasingly need to operate in urban environments, and consider the role of strong and well-governed cities in state stabilization. The port of Berbera, Somaliland, which was once a source of conflict, provided 60% of government revenues in the immediate post-conflict phase. PSOs which do not attempt city-building and strengthening municipal partners will neglect a key element in strengthening human security overall.

⁶⁶ As a former Indian official remarked, the viability of the urban protest movement meant that "instead of the old three-phase struggle [moving from rural to urban areas, and then to the capital], they are now waging a two-pronged struggle—an armed struggle in accordance with classic Maoist tactics all by themselves in the rural areas and a revisionist democratic struggle in association with the mainstream parties in the urban areas and Kathmandu." Raman (2006), <http://www.saag.org/papers18/paper1772.html>.

⁶⁷ For International IDEA's work, see, for example, http://www.idea.int/news/local_level_africa.cfm. For NDI's local governance programs, see <http://www.ndi.org/globalp/localgov/localgov.asp>. For the World Bank, see http://info.worldbank.org/etools/mdfdb/Conf_Workshops_11.htm.

Conclusion

The normative link between human security and cities is still in its infancy. The urban lens may allow the human security agenda to expand into new territory, building upon past successes such as the promotion of “the responsibility to protect” and the anti-personnel landmine ban. The aim of this discussion paper has been to stimulate debate and galvanize future research. However, much work remains to be done to gain a better understanding of the profound implications of rapidly growing cities, both in terms of the threats they pose to human security, and the opportunities they allow for protecting civilians and building peace.

As UN-Habitat has claimed, “a country’s global success rests on local shoulders.” For this reason, the human security agenda must begin to consider the impacts of the city in what is being called by many “the Urban Century.”

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