



**A safe city  
is a just city**  
WORLD HABITAT DAY  
1 OCTOBER 2007

## **Message of the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT on the occasion of World Habitat Day, 1 October 2007**

Urban crime and violence are today at the top of the agenda for those committed to sustainable urban development. Ask any woman: Crime is the number one worry, the biggest concern of all people in cities, particularly in the poorest neighbourhoods.

In the decade since UN-HABITAT started its Safer Cities Programme, we have noticed that cities around the world are demonstrating better leadership in the ways to address this scourge and bane of our daily lives. As a result, local governments are now taking up the challenge of urban safety and security.

We live in an unacceptably violent world. And this why we have chosen the theme, *A safe city is a just city*, to mark the occasion of World Habitat Day this year.

Indeed, as we reflect on these words, in every slum in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and in most cities around the world, someone is being stalked, a woman is being harassed, a gun is being pointed in someone's face, someone else assaulted, and many, many others murdered, and countless women are being raped. Homes are being burgled, vehicles hijacked. Not even children are spared. Why?

To an extent, we do know why: UN-HABITAT research tells us that today *cities are now home to half of humankind*. As we move irreversibly into the new urban era of our planet, it is projected that in another generation two thirds of humanity will be living in cities.

At the same time, an estimated 1 billion people are living in slums. Daily, their numbers are growing. More than half are under the age of 25, and 40 percent of them are under 19. These are the primary victims of poverty. Despite this potentially explosive situation, the problems of urban youth living in poverty are largely absent in urban policies and strategies.

These shocking facts and figures explain in part why young people are so vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies, early marriages, prostitution, drug abuse, crime, and AIDS. Deprivation leads to desperation, even terrorism. This is why we are investing in young people and consulting them.

Again, ask any woman: In countries around the world, social capital is lost because public areas in cities get taken over by gangs or are abandoned because of fear. Private guards and vigilante groups take over the protection of our lives and assets, while the State is often in a tactical retreat, unable to tackle the root causes of crime and disorder.

It is now accepted by most governments, at national and local level, that urban safety needs to be built locally, from street level up, incorporated into local and national planning.

It cannot be left to the police alone. Urban governance processes, and urban policies that target exclusion, social inequalities, as well as appropriate planning measures, are key to success. Indeed community security requires a holistic and coordinated approach.

We have a new strategy based on efforts by UN-HABITAT to work closely with our partners. It is anchored in three pillars:

- Firstly, to develop capacity for local crime prevention strategies that are gender and age sensitive and which address root causes of crime in a holistic, inclusive way.
- Secondly, to build safer urban spaces, particularly in the public realm, as hubs of social development and safety.
- Thirdly, there is a need for more safety sensitive urban development initiatives in all sectors.

This agenda is compelling and urgent, and calls upon specific partners within the UN to embrace the urban challenge.

How urgent, might you wonder? Ask any woman.