

Stop Crime

The Ninth United Nations Congress on
the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders

Urban Crime—Policies for Prevention

Cities are growing rapidly — less than a third of the world population lived in the cities in 1955; by 2005, urban settings will contain half of humanity.

But urban crime is growing even faster, according to the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch. A study conducted by the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) indicates that urban crime has become a frequent occurrence during this period — with more than half of the urban population worldwide likely to have been victimized at least once in the study period 1988-1993 — and that victimization rates tend to be the highest in large cities. Proud centres of commerce and culture like Los Angeles, Lagos, Moscow and Rio de Janeiro appear to many observers to be on the way to becoming armed encampments, unable to ensure the daily safety of average citizens.

Apart from the human suffering inflicted, crime is a major impediment to development. Corporate investors, international development agencies and local artisans and merchants alike are discouraged from initiating or sustaining economic activity by the threat of crime and violence. If the security of cities cannot be guaranteed, nations cannot be expected to move safely along the path of economic and social development.

The often-prescribed treatment — more cops, more courts, more correctional facilities — has proved ineffective. Rather than providing a solution, such measures are becoming a large part of the cost of crime.

The Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

pegs the annual United States crime bill at \$90 billion for criminal justice systems alone. In addition, \$65 billion is spent for private security, there is \$45 billion in property losses, \$50 billion written off to urban decay and loss of investment, and \$170 billion for ruined lives and medical expenditure. The cash-strapped Governments of developing countries devote between 10 and 14 per cent of their budgets to police and prisons, according to the United Nations.

Strategies for security

As the incidence of wars between nations appears to be declining in the 1990s, world attention is more clearly focused on threats to the security of individuals, families and ethnic groups within nations. Crime, increasingly an urban phenomenon, is high on the list of United Nations human security concerns. To move beyond reactive responses to crime after it has already occurred, the search for solutions is concentrated on preventive measures.

The March 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen is treating crime, breakdowns in family structures and traditional cultures and the sprawling growth of dysfunctional cities as interrelated aspects of social disintegration. As a preparatory activity, an International Colloquium of Mayors was convened in August 1994, allowing over 100 city leaders to trade views on dealing with crime and other urban ills.

Urbanization will be the focus of Habitat II when it meets in Istanbul, Turkey, in June of 1996, and exchange of experiences in reducing and preventing crime is on its agenda. The holistic approach endorsed by conference organizers



recognizes that employment, housing, provision of services and the presence of a sense of community directly affect the incidence of crime.

A major theme of the 1995 Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders concerns strategies for preventing urban crime and juvenile and violent criminality, including the question of victims' rights and redress, and a Crime Congress workshop will focus on urban policy and crime prevention.

Some of the strategies that will be discussed at the Crime Congress workshop and examples of their implementation are summarized below.

The establishment of central, provincial or state and local coordinating councils, involving both governmental and non-governmental actors, have long been urged by the United Nations. Cooperative efforts of this kind optimize scarce resources, create self-reliant communities and enhance quality of life and security.

In the 1980s, countries such as France and Spain pioneered city-level community action plans to prevent crime, which were adopted and developed in other European countries. France has more than 750 municipal crime prevention councils with joint planning between housing authorities, social services, schools and police. Evaluations of the French councils suggest that they are responsible for reducing crime by 15 per cent.

A multidisciplinary, partnership-based prevention committee was established in 1994 in Villa Maria, an Argentinian city of 70,000. Due to a joint effort by various city services, a police-youth branch, a parenting-skills training programme, secondary school prevention committees and a victim assistance service have been established or are being planned. A farm-school called Los Amigos is recognized as an innovative model for intervention with homeless street children.

"It is now a well-established fact that crime rates are higher in societies in which wealth is distributed very unevenly and there is tremendous disparity in access to education, employment, health care and culture", according to a supporting document prepared for the Crime Congress workshop. Affirmative action to help the disadvantaged is an imperative of the tenets of social justice as well as sound crime prevention.

Murder is the most frequent cause of death for the population of Cali, Colombia. The local government mounted a programme called DESEPAZ (Development, Security and Peace), based on the assumption that violence is a curable social disease. Its slogan is: "Peace is the respect of other people's rights. Peace is not provided by the government but is the result of everyone's involvement and effort." Every week, a two-hour problem-solving meeting attended by the mayor and community leaders and open to the public is held in one of Cali's 20 districts. The process has led to a small-business development programme for street vendors, youth groups and women at home. A home-building programme led to the development of 25,000 lots for low-income families, the largest residential project ever to be mounted in Colombia.

It is reported that there are 1,500 street gangs in Mexico City. The Institute of Social Research of the National Autonomous University of Mexico City first studied the gangs and then decided to rechannel the youths' energy by giving them a public voice. A live radio show ran for 144 consecutive Saturdays, with gang members performing music and reading prose and poetry. A music production company organized rock concerts and published a fan magazine. On a broader scale, the attorney general's office instituted an anti-drug programme throughout Mexico that works through the schools, parents and the media. Mural painting, paying jobs and sports are part of the programme, as is promoting regional identity and pride.

One of the participants in the Mayors' Colloquium, Mayor Nabila Fares of Rabiya, Lebanon, cited a programme to educate and train women in her city, as they are often forgotten in job training programmes, but are directly responsible for keeping families together.

Immediate steps can be taken to reclaim the urban environment and recreate a sense of community. Migrants in multicultural cities, who have internalized the culture conflict between two worlds, can be assisted in gaining new identities and allegiances.

Nairobi has seen an increasing incidence of pick-pocketing, car theft and robberies, and has also become a hub of international drug trade oper-

ating out of Asia. A citywide conference held in response, called "Nairobi We Want", was attended by 3,000 people. An action plan was drafted, to be implemented by the city government. Mayor Steve Mwangi says that the city's difficulties can be overcome through "faith and resolve". He is working to make sure that residents see Nairobi as their home and are willing to stay and work to ensure change.

In the city of Karachi, Pakistan, a second generation is coming of age in squatter settlements lacking adequate water supply, sewage, schools and public utilities. There has been constant struggle between the migrants of different ethnic groups, the indigenous local population and the police, and, in the late 1980s, car thefts, indiscriminate rifle fire and kidnapping for ransom became daily occurrences. In response, the Orangi Pilot Project created income-generating credit systems for the settlements, and the Edhi Trust has set up blood banks, ambulance services and drug rehabilitation services, while caring for destitute women and children who are victims of violence. A longer-range solution that has been suggested is to more fully involve settlement dwellers in city government, bringing their experience and ideas to bear.

From megalopolises like Mexico City and New York to smaller cities, urban management has been deployed to reduce the opportunities for crime through zoning, setting architectural standards and design of transport systems. But urban planning is increasingly going beyond "situational crime prevention" measures to look at cities as complex ecologies of economic development, social integration and neighbourhood life, all impacting crime and security.

Countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium and Israel have launched wide-ranging consultations of urban design professionals, to identify the elements of urban planning likely to promote security. For instance, a 1985 campaign in a crime-ridden housing project in Delft, the Netherlands, integrated recreational programmes, social workers, housing supervision and sanitation, environmental modifications of public spaces and reorientation of housing units. Residents were consulted systematically about all aspects of the programme. The measured results were nothing short of spectacu-

lar: the number of offences per 100 housing units was cut in half in only three years.

Despite an increase in property and drug-related crimes in recent years, Japan remains an industrialized country with an exceptionally low crime rate. Cultural factors such as a sense of honour, responsibility to the community and a high level of informal social control have been advanced as explanations; but the systemic design of police deployment surely also plays a role. There are 15,000 "Police Box" stations — small buildings outfitted with radio equipment, centrally and visibly located and open 24 hours a day. Police also are expected to visit homes and businesses regularly, especially concentrating on the elderly; prepare neighbourhood newsletters; go to community meetings; and organize sports events for youth. The Japanese brand of community policing has not detracted from hard-nosed law enforcement prowess; the police customarily solve more than 90 per cent of all homicides and three quarters of all thefts.

Last year, 10,557 people were killed by handguns in the United States, compared to 22 in the United Kingdom and 13 in Sweden. Programmes to control handguns and trace illegal weapons to their source have produced reductions in gun arrests and shootings of approximately 15 per cent and 25 per cent in New York City and Washington, D.C., respectively.

Montreal's Department of Community and Social Development has mounted a "Women and the City" programme ensuring adequate lighting and visibility, and safe design of public places and parking lots. "Tandem Montreal", implemented by the same agency, has neighbours working together for a safe environment. One neighbourhood moved prostitutes away without involving the police. Burglaries have been prevented when people let their neighbours know when they will be vacationing so that the home will be watched. Cleaning up and making continuous use of city parks rids them of drug dealers and addicts.

Self-help schemes have proven highly effective in well-organized communities. Specific crime prevention measures, such as neighbourhood block watches and neighbourhood courts, work best in partnership with local authorities, scrupulously avoiding vigilantism.

For a long time, China has used community mediation techniques to resolve conflicts. It has adopted a national law standardizing this practice and extending it to a wide variety of situations: family conflicts, behavioural problems of young people, neighbourhood quarrels and minor offences. It is believed that this practice reduces the incidence of crime and violence by promoting public skills in non-violent conflict resolution, facilitating effective rehabilitation measures and freeing the professional judiciary to concentrate on serious crime.

Neighbourhood groups throughout New York City are dealing with street crime. One such organization, the UMMA Group ("umma" is the Arabic word for "community" or "solidarity"), organizes volunteer civilian street and roof patrols as well as homework assistance for young people and regular monitoring of the safety of the elderly. Initiated by a Muslim congregation, the effort has expanded to include members of various races and religions, meets regularly with community leaders and elected officials and attends police precinct meetings.

A 1994 national crime prevention plan in the Philippines focuses on the the establishment of

community and student prevention committees. A comprehensive study of the programme is being conducted in the cities in cooperation with the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI).

The potential of criminal justice and law enforcement as a force for social justice is rarely appreciated. Marginalized segments of the population feel little stake in law-abiding conduct when criminal acts by elite groups go unchallenged; conversely, equality before the law mitigates in favor of justice and opportunity for all.

The United Nations Crime Congress promulgated standards for the conduct of police officials, attorneys and members of the judiciary as well as the treatment of prisoners, and the Ninth Crime Congress will look at the problem of corruption of public officials. Through its Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch, the United Nations fosters acceptance of these standards and educates criminal justice personnel in countries around the world. Particular attention has been paid to countries with UN peace-keeping missions and Governments attempting to make a rapid transition to democracy.

This archiving project is a collaborative effort between United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and American Society of Criminology, Division of International Criminology. Any comments or questions should be directed to Cindy J. Smith at CJSmithphd@comcast.net or Emil Wandzilak at emil.wandzilak@unodc.org.