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**Use and application of United Nations standards
and norms in crime prevention and criminal
justice**

**World crime trends and emerging issues and
responses in the field of crime prevention and
criminal justice**

# Letter from the President of the General Assembly transmitting the summary on the High-level Debate of the General Assembly on Urban Safety, Security and Good Governance: Making Crime Prevention a Priority for All, held on 22 April 2021 at the United Nations Headquarters

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[*] E/CN.15/2021/1.

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6 May 2021

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to inform you that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 75/196 of 28 December 2020, the High-level Debate on Urban Safety, Security and Good Governance: Making Crime Prevention a Priority for All, was held on Thursday, 22 April 2021, in the General Assembly Hall, United Nations Headquarters.

Pursuant to operative paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 75/196, a summary of the discussion is prepared for transmission to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and to all Member States.

I am pleased to enclose herewith the summary of the event and kindly request to make it available to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its next session, to be held on 17-21 May 2021, in Vienna, Austria.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Volkan BOZKIR

His Excellency
Mr. Alessandro Cortese
Chair of the Commission on Crime Prevention
and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)
Vienna

## Introduction

Pursuant to operative paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 75/196, the President of the General Assembly convened a high-level debate of the General Assembly on Urban Safety, Security and Good Governance: Making Crime Prevention a Priority for All on 22 April 2021, in United Nations Headquarters, New York, in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). In accordance with the resolution, the President of the General Assembly has prepared the subject summary of the discussion for transmission to all Member States and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

The High-level debate consisted of the opening segment followed by a general debate with interventions from Member States. The interactive panel discussion on "Addressing risks and challenges to city safety, security and good governance: the role of innovative practices and crime prevention strategies in building resilience in the urban environment" included discussion with participation of different stakeholders, followed by, a closing segment.

## Opening Segment and General Debate

H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly opened the high-level debate, delivering a statement on highlighting the importance of enhancing community resilience and prioritizing innovative measures to build and strengthen strategic partnerships on crime prevention, safety and good governance in cities. His remarks were followed by Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), delivering the message of H.E. António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and her own statement.

Participants emphasized the importance of the high-level debate as a unique platform to share national practices, and lessons learnt on the development and implementation of effective and innovative crime prevention policies. Several speakers referred to the recently adopted Kyoto Declaration as a criminal justice and crime prevention roadmap to meet this objective. Participants also welcomed the debate as an opportunity to discuss how Member States could promote safety, access to justice and good governance in urban areas more effectively. High-level speakers and government officials highlighted the need to develop and to implement inclusive urban designs and sustainable planning approaches as essential prerequisites to crime prevention and the development of safe cities and resilient communities, in accordance with SDG-11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG-16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions).

Participants underlined UNODC's central role in assisting Member States to implement and enforce relevant UN instruments, standards and norms as well as technical assistance to build the capacity of key national institutions to prevent and combat crime, including in urban settings. Equally, the role of UNODC in promoting multi-stakeholder dialogue to identify specific risks for each locality and development of urban safety policies was also highlighted.

The importance of **developing and strengthening education programmes and focusing on youth-tailored interventions in urban settings**, were underlined as important preventive tools that should form part of a comprehensive urban safety plan. Furthermore, the importance of dedicated programmes aimed at preventing repeat offenses, including through rehabilitative approaches, was highlighted.

Speakers emphasized the continued growth and rapid expansion of urban areas. 70% of the world population will live in urban setting by 2050. With the difficulties associated with inadequate infrastructure and service delivery, weak governance and criminal activity can further exacerbate pre-existing security challenges.

Participants repeatedly highlighted **socio-economic inequalities as a root cause of urban violence** and transnational organized crime, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Speakers expressed concerns on the rise of violence as a consequence of the pandemic.

Speakers called for the need to continue strengthening cooperation on urban safety and security to provide an adequate response to ever-increasing and complex challenges faced in urban settings worldwide. While recognizing geographical context and specific risk factors that require tailored policies, speakers acknowledged that the **increasing rates of violence that many cities experience demand integrated, participatory and cross-sectoral measures to address urban safety and crime prevention**. They highlighted the importance of strengthening and promoting coordination and cooperation mechanisms and the development of partnerships, including with civil society and the private sector, as well as between communities and local police to enhance public trust and support for law enforcement. Such a people-centered approach was deemed to be essential towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to achieve a sustainable and just world.

Several speakers also pointed to the use of new technologies for crime prevention and control in cities.

**Interactive Multi-Stakeholder Panel Discussion**

A panel of speakers from the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Igarapé Institute, the European Forum for Urban Security, National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice (Washington, DC) and Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (Geneva) engaged in an interactive discussion on "Addressing risks and challenges to city safety, security and good governance: the role of innovative practices and crime prevention strategies in building resilience in the urban environment", and responded to questions from Member States. The discussion was moderated by Mr. Jean-Luc Lemahieu, Director of the Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs of UNODC.

Panelists emphasized the importance of **whole-of-government approaches as the key to harnessing the benefits of urbanization**. These approaches bring together different levels and sectors of government, including social, development, law enforcement, and security, helping promote responsive, transparent, and accountable local governance. Such approaches could only succeed with the support of **whole-of-society responses**, with more inclusive and collaborative partnerships including on management of public spaces, and urbanization plans aimed at better integrating marginalized neighborhoods. Such cooperation involves city officials, the police, service providers, local civil society, and community members, ensuring a participatory and inclusive vision of urban security that favors social cohesion. In this respect, speakers referred to the important contribution of the UN system-wide Guidelines for

Safer Cities and Human Settlement. Panelists further reiterated that prevention programmes to address urban crime must be sustainable and integrated across government strategies to ensure the commitment of a wide range of service providers and stakeholders, at local and national levels.

Speakers underscored that **tailored crime prevention strategies and cooperation** are the pillars of any effective strategy, as stated in the Kyoto Declaration recently adopted at the 14th UN Crime Congress. Such strategies shall take into account local contexts, including by fostering among the general public a culture of lawfulness, cognizant of cultural diversity, based on respect for the rule of law, promoting positive conflict resolution, as well as community-oriented policing. Gaining the trust of the public to obtain information is the cornerstone of good urban governance plans. Investment into the virtual space as a continuum of the physical space should be encouraged. Policing approaches that aim to prevent crime and working with the community are useful in this regard. Combined with evidence-based approaches to problem-solving and crime reduction, community-oriented policing models have the potential to tackle a wide range of crimes and disorder. Focus should be on addressing the root causes of potential violence and to treating individual cases without applying general social and political stereotypes. Partnerships also need to occur at international levels, through networks or mechanisms which offer platforms to exchange views and share experiences on urban safety and security.

Panelists stressed the importance of **mainstreaming a gender perspective into crime prevention**. For women and girls, urbanization is often associated with greater access to education and employment. Unsafe urban spaces, however, also endanger women and girls, who are routinely exposed to sexual harassment and other forms of violence, affecting their ability to participate in school, work, and public life. In order to ensure effective action and the development of effective governance models on criminal justice policy issues, women should be fully involved in discussions on the development and implementation of crime prevention policies and programmes at all levels, including those that aim at urban upgrading and creating safe public spaces, such as transportation. Speakers stressed the need to prevent all forms of gender-related violence, crime and victimization, including gender-related killings, by undertaking an analysis of specific needs and circumstances, as well as by soliciting contributions from impacted groups.

Panelists highlighted that strong **data collection and analysis** are indispensable to understanding the root causes and addressing risks of urban crime. While the justice system is essential for crime prevention, it is the effective collaboration with other sectors that will address the root causes of urban crime, by moving from a focus on punitive measures to more evidence-based prevention. Panelists emphasized that effective data collection can help local governments drive impactful interventions to enhance safety, security and governance. Because the risks of crime and violence often converge in specific locations or neighborhoods, local authorities need community-level assessments, drawing on appropriate disaggregated data, to target interventions with greater accuracy. A regular analysis of the links between crime and other factors, for example demography, housing, income, or social conditions, is required to enhance the understanding of the relationship between location and crime and to address people's needs in terms of safety.

Panelists noted that young people are often affected by intersecting inequalities and factors that can leave them vulnerable to crime and violence. **Mainstreaming holistic approaches in youth crime prevention**, which emphasizes the importance of multi-sectoral approaches to the prevention of youth crime, and the development of prevention policies also reflecting varying needs of young persons can have positive impacts. Local administrations are well placed to reach out and benefit from the knowledge and capacities of youth, who are too often

left without a voice in local politics and policing. Better protected and empowered, they also can represent powerful agents of change in creating a better future and have great potential to advocate on behalf of themselves and their communities. Speakers emphasized that carefully targeted projects, which actively involve youth, especially those living in the most vulnerable communities, in decision making, education and skills training (including through sports), entrepreneurship and job creation, can build resilience by providing youth with alternative lifestyles to drug and gang involvement. Panelists also noted the effectiveness of developmental or early prevention to prevent delinquent behavior among young people. This means investing in the healthy development of children and youth, and to mobilize individuals, families, schools or communities to address the conditions that give rise to antisocial behaviour and crime.

Speakers noted that **corruption** is a critical systemic obstacle in building resilient, strong and efficient institutions that could be trusted and supported by citizens. At the urban level, corruption results in not only ineffectiveness, but also enables criminal gangs and organized crime networks to operate in cities. These trends, while not entirely within the control of local governments, affect the integrity of local institutions and often deem the implementation of local level crime prevention programmes inadequate to address the problems holistically.

The role of institutions at a national level, particularly in the delivery of public security, are critical. **Transparent, accessible and trustworthy institutions** that work together are crucial to build safe, inclusive and resilient cities. The importance of efforts to strengthen institutions and improve governance at the local level cannot be overstated in the fight to tackle urban crime. This is particularly the case in the post-COVID-19 urban environments in which funds may be allocated to cities for economic recovery. If the integrity of local institutions is compromised, the implementation of local level crime prevention programmes is impossible. Bolstering local governance and law enforcement institutions, while at the same time improving coordination between national and local government policies and practices to address lack of ethics, integrity and accountability, are key for providing sustainable results on the ground.

## Conclusion

The High-level debate featured informed and constructive contributions from high-level speakers, Member States representatives and panelists on urban safety, security and good governance with a particular focus on prevention. The event offered many practice and policy recommendations that were aimed at underlining the benefits of multi-dimensional and collaborative approaches to finding practical and sustainable solutions through increased partnerships between national and local institutions, the United Nations, civil society and the private sector in effective and just crime prevention and criminal justice responses.

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