



Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

26 February 2021

English only

Kyoto, Japan, 7–12 March 2021

Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
**Comprehensive strategies for crime prevention
towards social and economic development**

Statement submitted by the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice**

* [A/CONF.234/1/Rev.1](#).

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The Importance of Urban Safety Strategies in the situations of emergency and disaster

March 2021

Between October 2020 and February 2021, the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice convened a series of high-level discussions under the Banner, Change the World, to examine our collective efforts at promoting and enhancing global urban safety against the crisis generated by COVID-19.

In 2002 the Economic and Social Council adopted a set of Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime (Res 2002/13, Annex) which has ever since underpinned our efforts to promote proactive strategies to build safety. The Guidelines reaffirmed the importance of preventative safety strategies to:

- Promote the well-being of people and encourage pro-social behaviour through social, economic, health and educational measures, with a particular emphasis on children and youth, and a focus on the risk and protective factors associated with crime and victimization;
- Change the conditions in neighbourhoods that influence offending, victimization and the insecurity that results from crime, by building on the initiatives, expertise and commitment of community members and by broadening an understanding of urban safety principles.

Since then, investment in this field has produced an ever-growing body of evidence of what works underpinned by strategy and policy at international, regional and local levels which recognize the importance of investment in long-term social and spatial development alongside criminal justice responses to building safer communities.

Since its appearance in 2019, no sector has escaped the disruption caused by COVID-19 to strategies and plans adopted to move our safety agenda forward and ultimately our achievement of the SDGs. These disruptions include short-term diversion of funds to responses that divert sectors from their core business. We have also observed the disproportionate impact on indigent communities and the most vulnerable, the marginalization of women and a shrinking of space for civil society.

The negative consequences produced by approaches to address COVID-19, which have in many instances been characterized by abandonment of human rights principles in overly securitized responses, excessive criminalization of infringements and to emergency actions that are not subject to usual levels of scrutiny need to be reversed. If they don't our achievements in safety, risk being undermined.

The April 2020 United Nations report on COVID-19 and Human Rights, we are all in this together, notes:

- Unemployment and food insecurity have risen to unprecedented levels in many countries within a very short space of time.
- Widespread closure of schools has interrupted the education of more than 1 billion children.
- Reduction of care and protection services for children, including abrupt closure of care institutions and health services serving children, has increased children's vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse.
- Exacerbated COVID-19 risks in detention facilities.
- Women confined at home with abusers, without access to harm reduction services and shelters, are at greater risk of domestic violence, and rates of violence in the home are escalating.
- Strategies to contain the virus are difficult for those without good quality safe housing; physical distancing, self-isolation and handwashing are impossible for

the homeless or residents of slums where lack of access to clean water and sanitation is a fundamental issue.

- COVID-19 is sweeping through populous, high-density informal settlements and to refugee, IDP and migrant camps, where physical distancing is challenging, access of health services limited and populations especially vulnerable to disease.

As practitioners we know each of these examples is a key facet in a holistic and systemic approach to safety and unless reversed represents the undoing of decades of work. As an Alliance we recognize that this unprecedented public health and socioeconomic crisis is accelerating a human rights crisis and will risk becoming a political crisis as populations lose faith in arbitrary State responses.

The immediate future holds a risk of high rates of unemployment, frustrated youth and increasing economic crime against which unfortunately the political demand for tough repressive responses will continue unless we can demonstrate an alternative future.

We realize that emergencies and disasters and public health crises will remain a risk and that the body of knowledge built up in the prevention field is now more important than ever. As we seek to build back better, crime and violence prevention and community development practitioners need to be more astute. Public budgets will shrink, investment priorities will shift and short-term political gains might be the order of the day.

We have been encouraged by the proactive approaches of our treaty bodies and international and regional human rights organizations to reaffirm the importance of maintaining our rights obligations in the face of C19 management.

We reaffirm our conviction that this crisis requires a comprehensive multisectoral response and at the conclusion of our discussions we call on our partners to unequivocally confirm their commitment to a developmental rights based response to promoting safety.

This commitment should be evidenced across all the principles set out in the 2002 “Guidelines” which include:

- Government leadership
- Socioeconomic development and inclusion
- Cooperation and partnerships
- Sustainability and accountability
- Knowledge
- Human rights and rule of law
- Interdependence and
- Differentiation

In this regard we are heartened by the UNODC Africa Strategy recognition that effective prevention and pro-safety action requires multisectoral responses at the individual, community and society levels and their commitment that:

- Evidence-based prevention strategies will be scaled up to support and build the resilience of societies, institutions and at-risk and vulnerable groups.
- Increased collaboration with community- and faith-based organizations and key influencers (such as families, children, youth and sub-groups and their religious, traditional and indigenous leaders) will be a priority, alongside continued engagement with schools, academic institutions and the media.

We recognize that there is a critical role for partnership in almost every public health issue. We need to move away from insular or linear initiatives but rather see our

efforts as part of a comprehensive system of safety. We need to invest in strengthening civil society and building personal dispositions and attitudes towards active citizenship.

Accountability to our colleagues, to our partners and to our communities is key to successful prevention efforts. Mechanisms of accountability need to be practical and accessible to the public.

Human Rights frameworks have enormous value to offer in terms of problem-solving and should underpin all of our efforts.

Our emergency and disaster management plans were unprepared for the gender-based violence that erupted during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Our procedures exacerbated the risks here and in many other areas. As we develop responses to future emergencies, we need to be thorough and comprehensive in our planning and in our commitment to sustained collaboration. No sector can be left out, no sector can work in a silo, and no sector can work without the active participation of civil society.

We call on the international community and member States to continue to prioritize investment into safety strategies, particularly those at local level, which are proven to work such as:

- Support programmes for young families
- School aftercare programmes
- Housing and urban renewal
- Harm reduction initiatives
- Addiction treatment
- Participative, creative expression of human dynamism
- And many others

Mindful of the unique constrictions COVID-19 and possible future crises may place on developed approaches to promoting safety, we call on our partners to develop and disseminate relevant recommendations and advice that will identify and address key considerations in approach and implementation required under these circumstances.
