

AUGUST 2003

## Prevention and Response to Urban Crime and Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean

**O**n April 30, 2003, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Woodrow Wilson Center organized a conference on public safety and the prevention of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean. Experts from different countries, current and former governmental officials, researchers, and NGO activists attended the event. The aim of the conference was to share experiences and studies carried out in various contexts in order to identify international trends related to the prevention of violence and the promotion of public safety. A summary of the conference program can be found at the end of this publication.

### THE LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to develop solutions to combat high crime rates and citizens' perception of insecurity in the region, it is necessary to strengthen redemocratization processes, rethink the role of the local government, and emphasize the importance of the decentralization of authority.

On one hand, it is necessary to change the image of police institutions, which are marred by human rights violations committed during military regimes, instances of police abuse, and an increased demand from civil society for better monitoring and control mechanisms. The concept of community policing emphasizes the prevention of crime and favors greater respect for individual human rights. However, the number of police dedicated to community policing must be increased, the amount of rotation of police

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officers due to the centralization of police forces must be decreased, and the trend toward militarization must be reverted. Additional factors that must be taken into account are that these programs rely on stakeholders' cooperation, which requires a trust hardly ever present; they require the restructuring of the police force, which is seen as threatening by police officers; government agencies must be coordinated; and sustained community participation is necessary. In order to foster community participation in public safety issues, the project coordinators must promote a culture of legality and incorporate different stakeholders.

At the local level, the success of police reforms depends on the legitimacy of the police force (through mechanisms aimed at combating police abuse and corruption), the development of a strong institutional foundation, and the easing of the tension between resorting to authoritative measures to combat crime and social policies of community prevention. Regarding this last issue, the intervention of the armed forces in domestic security issues must be reduced.

The tendency of the conference, a tendency shared by both scholars and practitioners, was to promote crime prevention and improve the perception of security at the community level through an integrated approach, not limited to the promotion of police reforms. This is based



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on the comparative advantages of local programs as opposed to national initiatives. The participants stressed the need for different state agencies and permanent actors (such as universities) to participate at the local level. Permanent actors are not subject to changes in administrations and, therefore, allow for more sustainable policies and greater legitimacy. This “interagency” focus favors dialogue and institutional coordination.

It was also mentioned that it is advantageous for municipal programs to focus on the particular concerns of specific populations. The panelists, in turn, argued it was necessary to be able to count on an analysis of the context before a given program in order to map out crime, identify the territoriality of crime, and use this to design a preventive anti-crime strategy. Regarding measuring the situation in a community, the panelists emphasized the need for reliable police performance indicators, the design of which should be sensitive to the audience of the analysis, the methodology, the existence of reliable data, and prior community participation in order to determine the most relevant items that should be measured.

The Woodrow Wilson Center’s Latin American Program serves as a bridge between the United States and Latin America, encouraging a free flow of information and dialogue between the two regions. The Program provides a non partisan forum for discussion of Latin American and Caribbean issues in Washington, DC; and sponsors major initiatives on Decentralization, Citizen Security, Comparative Peace Processes, Creating Community in the Americas, and U.S.-Argentinian, U.S.-Brazilian and U.S.-Mexican relations.

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 For more informacion on IDB violence prevention activities please go to:  
<http://www.iadb.org/sds/violence>

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*It is possible to work with police officers in every jurisdiction on specific problems, and there is a tendency to do it at the local level. To do this, it is necessary to have institutional capacity building, mechanisms to assure the continuity of certain policies, consensus building based in social networks, and an interagency approach.* —ALBERTO FÖHRIG

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Finally, there was a consensus concerning the need for institutional capacity-building at the local level, especially prior to crime prevention tasks carried out in a given jurisdiction. This capacity-building work and the information networks should be oriented toward state municipal officials, police officers, and local agents that mobilize society. The strategies should, in addition, create incentives for the collaboration of different participants including civil society.

While the speakers emphasized the need to find solutions at the local level, the need to find mechanisms to coordinate different governmental levels was also stressed. Additionally, local initiatives should be complemented with structural solutions so that the selected mechanisms achieve continuity and must rely on the required political will to be successfully implemented and subsequently replicated.

## LOCAL INITIATIVES AND STUDIES

Various case studies of specific local programs to prevent crime and increase the community’s perception of security were presented. A plan implemented in Bogota, Colombia, for example, promotes a “culture of citizenship” in order to counteract cultural rules that involve and promote violence. This plan was carried out jointly among the authorities and citizens. The “Program to Control Homicides Committed by Youth”—crimes that are perpetrated mainly with firearms—was implemented in the Brazilian *favelas* or shantytowns of Belo Horizonte, which had high crime rates. This Program mobilizes the community through communication campaigns and a joint task force formed by the mayor’s office, judges, and district attorneys. In South Africa, a manual was prepared to help the national govern-

ment collaborate in the development of crime prevention strategies for the local level. A study carried out in five marginal settlements in Santo Domingo analyzed at-risk youth involved in crime related to drug use, gang activity, and the police's repressive practices. The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) carried out a study on youth gangs considered to be the center of organized crime in El Salvador. Representatives from the Eisenhower Foundation presented several examples of the youth-oriented programs it operates. The "Youth Safe Haven-Ministation" program, for instance, is a combination of the American concept of after-school programs and the Japanese idea of neighborhood-based police ministations. The "Quantum Opportunies" program includes a computer-based educational initiative for adolescents. The "Full Service Community Schools" program partners with local organizations to meet all of the students' needs. The goal of the "Delancey Street" program is to reincorporate youth that have participated in criminal activity into society. The PAHO "Safer Cities" program was implemented in Africa and Latin America to promote municipal management and local safety, from an urban perspective and through community-based prevention programs. The crime fighting strategy in Washington, DC was based on people's opinion regarding centers of violence and possible solutions.

According to the presentations, most of the community experiences implemented to face crime and the community's feeling of vulnerability and insecurity have had positive results.

## CONCLUSIONS

The overall conclusions of conference participants were that it is necessary to mitigate the vulnerability of groups at risk (particularly youth), to increase public awareness on safety and community participation, to build human and social capital (through

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*Community policing programs rely on the collaboration between the forces of law and order and the citizenry, and this requires creating long-term bonds of trust between them.*

—CATALINA SMULOVITZ

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Conference in session

information campaigns and capacity-building), to help the victims of violence, and to foment certain structural changes (for example, police and judicial reforms). In this sense, the creation of working relationships and networks of cooperation among community members, police officers, and local authorities is of vital importance.

There are varied mechanisms to achieve these goals, as multiple solutions for diverse problems are required. However, there is consensus on the need to approach this issue from a local perspective. This focus is favored by the participation of the different stakeholders, international donors (without the imposition of pre-established models), and the coordination among different levels of government. Past experiences have demonstrated that in order to effectively implement mechanisms to reduce crime and the perception of insecurity it is necessary to evaluate a given situation before and after any intervention.

Local urban violence prevention mechanisms should be created through that diagnostic processes, through the development of preventive strategies, the institutionalization of adopted measures, and subsequent assessment, evaluation and analysis of the outcomes. Such process may be replicated in different places, bearing in mind the particular circumstances of the area where the selected strategy will be implemented and that violence may have many causes.

## SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

World Bank Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean *David de Ferranti* opened the seminar and *Antanas Mockus*, Mayor of Bogota, was the first speaker. The first panel dealt with "Preparing



Municipal Crime and Violence Prevention Strategies: The Role of Diagnosis, Partnerships, and Stakeholder Consultations,” and included presentations by *Claudio Beato* of the Federal University of Minas Gerais in Brazil, *Tinus Kruger* of CSIR in South Africa, and *Allison Rowland* with the Center for Economic Research and Teaching in Mexico. The commentator was *Alberto Föhrig* of the University of San Andrés in Argentina; the moderator was *Shelton Davis* of the World Bank. The second panel, “Youth Crime and Violence Prevention Issues,” included presentations by *Father Jorge Cela* of the Bono Center in the Dominican Republic, *Alberto Concha Eastman* of PAHO, *Lynn Curtis* with the U.S.-based Eisenhower Foundation. The commentator was *Guadalupe López* of the Association of Honduran Municipalities, and the moderator was *Mayra Bwinić* of the Inter-American Development Bank. The third panel, “The Role of Police and Judicial System in Municipal and Local Crime and Violence Prevention Strategies,” was composed of *Hugo Frühling* of the Center for Development Studies in Chile and *Catalina Smulovitz* from Torcuato Di Tella University in Argentina. The commentator was *Carlos Basombrio*

*An intervention must be implemented through a working group composed of the mayor, judges, and prosecutors. In addition, it must mobilize the community through communication and campaigns to create awareness.*

—CLAUDIO BEATO

*Project monitoring and evaluation is essential. For it to be effective and useful, it must provide the information required by the interested party to which it is directed; that is, those who implemented the project, policy makers, donors, or academic analysts. It is also important to bear in mind what information is available in practice.*

—CHRISTOPHER STONE

of the Legal Defense Institute in Peru and the moderator was the Wilson Center’s *Joseph S. Tulchin*. The following panel, “The Role of Urban Environmental Design and Physical Planning in Crime and Violence Prevention Strategies,” was composed of *Severin Sorensen*, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; *Susan Liebermann*, CSIR, South Africa; and *Macarena Rau* of the Citizen Peace Foundation in Chile. The commentator was *Andrew Altman* of the District of Columbia Office of Planning. The panel was moderated by the World Bank’s *Roberto Chávez*. Panelists in the closing session, “Monitoring and Evaluation of Crime and Violence Prevention Programs,” were Wilson Center consultant *Julia Pomares* and *Christopher Stone* of the New-York based Vera Institute. The commentator was *Andrew Morrison* of Inter-American Development Bank and the moderator was *María Emilia Freire* of the World Bank. Closing comments were made by *Rodrigo Guerrero*, former Mayor of Cali, Colombia.

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