

## **Biennial conference series on 'Reviewing the State of Safety in Cities'**

### **Concept note**

Prepared by the UN-Habitat and the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform  
Geneva and Nairobi, 13 December 2016

### **Summary**

- Building on the need for safer cities for people and for stronger enabling conditions to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and implement the New Urban Agenda, this document sets out the key elements for a biennial conference series on 'Reviewing the State of Safety in Cities' in Geneva, with the first conference to take place 26-28 June 2017.
- Over the next 15 years, the biennial conference series has the overall objective to facilitate stronger partnerships between local and national governments, international organizations, academia and other relevant stakeholders to ensure commitment for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also aims to leverage existing practice and capacities for change through facilitating direct access for local and international actors relevant for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda to the solutions available within or via the institutional, practical and intellectual ecosystem of International Geneva.
- The conference series is integrated into UN-Habitat's Global Partnership Initiative on Safer Cities that advances action in knowledge management, tool development, training and capacity building and networking in order to implement the New Urban Agenda.
- The biennial conference draws on the comparative advantage of Geneva as a global hub for peace, rights and well-being with a near universal representation of UN Member states and with specialized international and non-governmental organizations that are working on all aspects related to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda.

### **The century of cities: A new strategic landscape**

- With more than 50 percent of the world's population now living in urban areas – and projections that this figure will increase to 75 percent by 2050 – cities are increasingly where the people are, and that makes them the primary site for the promotion of sustainable development. Cities today are economic magnets and a source of real opportunity for many. Yet they are also sites of great poverty and inequality in terms of access to services, including all of the basics – housing, schooling, health care, food, transport, security, and justice.
- Crime, violence, and exclusion are three of the most important problems for contemporary cities, given the trends of rapid urbanization and continuous increase of global inequalities and marginalization. The Latin American region is more than 70 percent urban, with a large part of social exclusion located in these urban areas and with rates of violence and crime reaching epidemic levels. Other regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-

East Asia, which were previously considered as having highly rural driven economies, now exhibit the fastest growing urbanization trends in the world. But in Europe and North America as well, social exclusion and violence tend to be concentrated in urban areas.

- In many poorer neighborhoods and slums, socio-economic deprivation goes hand-in-hand with high levels of crime and violence. Analysts of “fragile cities” see the potential for chronic and intense forms of violence to spread to other city areas and intermediate towns, especially in cases where there is a failure in local social contracts between governments and citizens, a generalization of corrupted practices and a weak rule of law.
- At the same time, responses to violent conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia require a strong focus on peace and safety at the city level, and so do responses in Europe and other regions to migration flows from conflict and disaster-affected zones.
- This new strategic landscape in cities requires a new cross-sectorial perspective including issues such as energy, environment, employment, health, education, and sanitation which are shaping safety in cities. Other issues are resource mobilization and taxation and are especially important because the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda will occur through national processes and mainly rely on domestic resource mobilization, opening the sensitive issues of informal taxation and service delivery in cities as well as associated questions about the legitimacy of state and non-state actors.

### **Background to the biennial conference series**

- Since 2014, UN-Habitat, United Nations Office at Geneva, and the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform<sup>1</sup> collaborate on a Technical Working Group (TWG) on the Confluence of Urban Safety and Peacebuilding Practice. The TWG brings together focal points on urban safety with practitioners from the community of peacebuilding, peace mediation and conflict prevention in order to help craft solutions to the rapidly increasing risk of violence and insecurity in urban settings. By late 2016, the TWG comprises focal points of over 100 city administrations, peacebuilding organizations or experts from academia or international organizations.
- Another building block towards the biennial conference series was the Habitat III Cross-Cutting Expert Group Meeting “Reviewing the State of Safety in World Cities: Safer Cities +20”, Geneva, 6-8 July 2016. The conference brought together over 120 representatives from city administrations, governments, international organizations, and academia.
- This conference confirmed that urban leaders can find lasting solutions for urban safety and insecurity through the expertise and practice available in or via Geneva. Geneva is a unique global hub with 35 international organizations, 174 diplomatic missions and 400 NGOs, as well as many research organizations, companies and foundations. These organizations collectively work to achieving peace, rights and well-being. There are few better places to access expertise and practice that are relevant for city leaders in their quest to achieve safe and inclusive cities.

### **Objectives**

- The biennial conference series has the overall aim of facilitating stronger partnerships between local and national governments, international organizations, academia and other relevant stakeholders to ensure commitment for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda over the next 15 years. It is not intended to become a new

---

<sup>1</sup> The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform is a joint project of four institutions: The Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies; the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP); Interpeace; and the Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva (QUONO). See <http://www.gpplatform.ch>.

network or institution but stands to leverage existing work to find solutions against crime, violence, and exclusion in cities.

- The biennial conference series aims to:
  - a) Ensure complementarity between the monitoring of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals 11 and 16 and other related goals;
  - b) Create periodic review and stock-taking opportunities with respect to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda on urban safety issues;
  - c) Strengthen sustainable, people-centered and integrated approaches for the prevention and reduction of crime, violence, and conflict in cities by building new partnerships called for in SDG Goal 17;
  - d) Facilitate access to expertise and practice on humanitarian, peace mediation, conflict prevention, migration, and disaster risk issues to help craft solutions to the rapidly increasing risk of violence and insecurity in urban settings; and
  - e) Provide a global hub to leverage the complementarity of the numerous regional and sub-regional city-level networks on urban safety at the global level.
- The biennial conference series leverages the complementarity of the know-how and expertise available in International Geneva to strengthen existing global, regional and sub-regional networks, and to facilitate direct access for mayors and urban safety professionals to such knowledge and expertise in the fields of humanitarian action, human rights, development, disaster risk, peace mediation and security.

### **The first biennial conference – Geneva, 26-28 June 2017**

- The first conference *Reviewing the State of Safety in Cities: Partnerships and Solutions for Localized Implementation* takes place at Maison de la Paix and Palais de Nations in Geneva, 26-28 June 2017.
- The overall aim to match knowledge and experience about “what works” with identified needs to foster safe and inclusive cities. Key questions are: How to reduce crime, violence and insecurity in cities? How to scale and replicate what works? How to build cross-cutting partnerships to co-produce safe and inclusive cities? What are new resource mobilization models to finance and scale effective programmes, initiatives and policies? What monitoring mechanisms are necessary to track progress?
- The conference is organized by UN-Habitat’s Safer Cities Programme and the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform with the support of a Core Group including representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), the Graduate Institute’s Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), and the Small Arms Survey (SAS).
- The conference is also supported by a reference group of over 25 organizations representing the complementarity of the know-how and expertise in Geneva in the fields of humanitarian action, human rights, development, disaster risk, peace mediation and people-centered security.

### **Contact**

- Mr. Juma Assiago, Lead, Global Network on Safer Cities (GNSC), Safer Cities Programme, UN-HABITAT, Nairobi, [juma.assiago@unhabitat.org](mailto:juma.assiago@unhabitat.org).
- Dr. Achim Wennmann, Executive Coordinator, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, Geneva, [achim.wennmann@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:achim.wennmann@graduateinstitute.ch).