

## Conflict-resilient cities

The prevention and mitigation of violent conflict is a core human security priority. Fortunately, the population density and corresponding social capital potential in cities presents a range of unique local conflict management opportunities. This urban conflict resilience can help 'buffer' a city and its citizens from the impacts of national-level conflict or help 'block' the escalation of local violence beyond urban boundaries. Cities can also actively oppose violent state policies, as the mayor of Belgrade attempted to do in 1996-1997.<sup>48</sup> The experiences of Mogadishu and Sarajevo also illustrate the potential role for cities in post-conflict recovery. Both survived their respective state conflicts and were quicker to rebound in the post-conflict phase.<sup>49</sup>

To bolster conflict resilience, some cities have turned to another tool to prevent and manage conflict – 'city-to-city' diplomacy. Through these efforts, cities work with each other to share best practices, display solidarity, and focus efforts to address local root causes of conflict. The Municipal Alliance for Peace, a network of Palestinian and Israeli cities that have worked to build bridges and cooperative discourse between two conflict-ridden peoples, is one such example.<sup>50</sup>

### Conflict resilience and social capital

Urban conflict resilience is a product of many factors, including security and crisis-management capacities, inclusive governance, and equitable resource distribution. The ability of cities to manage the potentially negative impacts of rapid urbanization is another factor. While cities in more developed countries often have such capacity, many in developing countries do not. Nonetheless, many developing world cities are largely peaceful on a day-to-day basis. This may be because urban spaces are particularly concentrated areas of social capital, where the sheer density and numbers of people, proximity of individuals of varied backgrounds, daily interconnectedness

<sup>48</sup> Zoran Djindjic, leader of the Serbian Democratic Party, was one of three Serbian opposition leaders who led 88 days of mass street demonstrations in late 1996 against the Milosevic administration's attempt to annul the Democratic Party coalition's victory in municipal elections. Milosevic eventually capitulated and Djindjic became mayor of Belgrade. However, Milosevic starved Serbian municipalities that chose opposition candidates of funds, undermining Djindjic's coalition and reformist agenda. Djindjic was forced to resign several months after taking office when the coalition collapsed. See "Zoran Djindjic," *Daily Telegraph*, March 13, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Mogadishu's continued instability, however, illustrates the degree to which lasting peace requires stability on many levels (urban, state, regional, etc.). The urban lens is a necessary, but not sufficient, level of analysis.

<sup>50</sup> For more information on the Municipal Alliance for Peace, see <http://www.palestine-pmc.com/pdf/16-11-05.pdf>.