

CHAPTER 1

Human security at the dawn of an Urban Century

FAST FACTS AND FIGURES

- > In 2005, global urbanization crossed 50 percent for the first time in human history, and will reach 60 percent by 2030.¹
- > Cities of the developing world now account for over 90 percent of the world's urban growth.
- > The global rural population will begin to decline after 2015.
- > In Latin America, 64 percent of the poor live in urban, not rural, areas.
- > The mayor of Mexico City, which is home to about 20 million people, governs more people than the leaders of 75 percent of the world's states.²

For the first time in human history as many people now live in cities as in rural areas. By 2030, it is estimated that 60 percent of the world's population will live in cities.³ We have entered what some are calling the "Urban Century."⁴ Conceptions of local and global governance are changing in an age when the mayor of a mega-city such as Mexico City now governs more people than the leaders of 75 percent of the world's states. With a third of all urban dwellers living in slums, rapid urbanization is also reshaping the security and development challenges facing the global community.

Urbanization is not a new phenomenon. Much of human history has been shaped by shifts from agrarian to urban societies. What is new is the unprecedented speed and scale of recent demographic shifts. At the dawn of the 19th century, just three percent of the world lived in cities. This number increased to 13 percent in 1900. By 1950, still less than 30 percent of the world was urbanized.⁵ Since then, the global urban population has *quadrupled*,⁶ with urban population

growth significantly outpacing rural growth (see Figure 1.1).

The speed of this demographic shift is without precedent in human history.⁷ The population of metropolitan Dhaka, Bangladesh, for example, exploded from 400,000 in 1950 to almost 10 million in 2006.⁸ The scale of urbanization we are witnessing today is also staggering. As Figure 1.2 shows, it took roughly 10,000 years for the world's urban population to reach one billion, whereas it is expected to take only 15 years to grow from three to four billion.

A "city" can be defined in many ways. This book will focus on cities with populations greater than 100,000 people.

Today's urbanization is also occurring primarily in the cities of the developing world, which now account for over 90 percent of