

## Executive summary

This discussion paper posits that with the phenomenal growth of urban populations in the last century, cities have become powerful actors that can profoundly influence human security. In recognition of this fact, adopting an "urban lens" through which to view human security issues allows for a better understanding of peacebuilding or conflict-generating trends that are unique to cities, so as to strengthen and improve upon human security policy and programming.

This paper is divided into four parts. Part I explores how major demographic shifts from rural to urban areas has led to the **mushrooming of slums** – informal, and often illegal settlements which are home to larger and larger populations of the marginalized poor. Today, roughly one billion people live in slums, or one in six people. This number is projected to increase to two billion by 2030. Achieving "Cities Without Slums" – Target 11 of the seventh United Nations Millennium Development Goal – underscores the need to examine the complex development and security challenges presented by rapid urbanization.

Absent a corresponding investment in **public security**, a lack of police presence or effectiveness is a common characteristic of slums. 48% of cities in Latin America and the Caribbean have areas considered inaccessible or dangerous to the police. On the flip side, "social cleansing," excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, and collusion with gangs contributes to high levels of distrust of police in many poor communities. This mutual contempt widens the gap between police and civilians, fostering an environment in which people are left to fend for themselves.

It is in this way that **private security** provision emerges in parallel to the public system. Privatization creates a bifurcated security structure in which wealthy elites move into "gated communities" and hire private guards, while in slums, gangs use extortion to "sell" security services to residents. To cite an extreme example, in Rio de Janeiro the longstanding conflict between police forces and the "parallel government" of the drug gangs has been described as a "civil war."

Part II discusses how the above trends can give rise to the potentially explosive combination of **kids, guns, and gangs** in urban areas. In the absence of effective law enforcement, well-armed, organized gangs, many of which are financed by lucrative drug trafficking, control city streets and neighbourhoods. For example, in Cape Flats, South Africa, an estimated 130