

Cities can serve as early warning indicators of potential conflicts, and swift action at a city level can help forestall conflict, as it did in Turkey. The city of Barcelona supported the mayor of Diyarbakir in his struggle against imprisonment, preventing the escalation of a potential conflict between ethnic Turks and Kurds. In Columbia, several mayors have created, in close collaboration with civil organizations, 'peace guards' to protect various places, stabilizing those areas.

The idea of peace committees is also crucial to establishing peace at the local level, thereby building the foundation for peace at a higher level. In South Africa, a network of peace committees contributed to the larger peace process where local-level authorities were weakened by forms of political violence.

The opportunity for micro-credit and small-scale demonstrative projects is great in cities. Tangible successes can have strong symbolic effects magnified beyond their actual benefit. As the city is a mass of small moving parts, we need to feed and support those parts with small, targeted projects to be able to strengthen the resilience of variegated cities.

Cities and democracy

Is democratic, mass, and largely peaceful urban protest on the rise, and if so, why?

Mass urban protest is certainly on the rise, as local governments around the world are increasingly speaking for their citizens, while their citizens are increasingly fed up with governments in general. Mass urban protests are increasing the space of social justice.

Most protests are directed at national-level decisions, but actually find expression in cities, especially capitals, e.g. the recent unrest in Gabon or Liberia.

In post-conflict societies, should state-building be complemented with democratic city-building?

Local democracy is the first step in replacing violence in the streets with non-violent conflict management. A 2005 report by International IDEA found that there is recognition in the policy community that resuscitating local-level state capacities for security and service delivery is an important, if not critical,