

## The failure of public security...

A lack of an effective police presence dedicated to the maintenance of the rule of law is a common characteristic of slum settlements. Thus, for a number of reasons, public security is failing where it is needed the most. Law enforcement may be lacking simply because police officers are not willing to risk their lives by entering these dangerous areas. Almost half of cities in Latin America and the Caribbean have areas considered inaccessible or dangerous to the police.<sup>8</sup> Mexico City alone is divided among 1,500 competing gangs.<sup>9</sup> Police in developing countries also tend to lack incentives to take the risks necessary to maintain public security. Police in Kabul, Afghanistan, for example, earn as little as US\$17 a month.

In some slums, it is not always clear what is worse for public security: police absence or police presence. Excessive force is commonly used by police who patrol slum communities. As an Amnesty International study in Brazil found that inhabitants of *favelas* lacked effective protection by police, but

*"...when the police do intervene, it is often by mounting "invasions" – violent mass raids using no warrants or, on rare occasions, collective warrants that label the entire community as criminal."*<sup>10</sup>

Residents of socially excluded neighbourhoods also report extrajudicial executions, the use of torture, and high levels of corruption among the police force.<sup>11</sup>

Distrust of police is common in major cities on every continent, and not without cause. Corrupt state police forces have long been known to collude with gangs, providing arms or information, or turning a blind eye to criminal activity. In Rio de Janeiro, most officers are actually killed while off-duty, usually due to involvement in criminal activity or as private security guards.<sup>12</sup> Worse, "social cleansing" – the deliberate targeting of youth, gang members, ethnic groups, or other "undesirables" for torture and murder – is used as a thinly disguised effort to "clean up" violent neighbourhoods. In recent years, police have arbitrarily arrested hundreds of refugees from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo living in Nairobi's

<sup>8</sup> 48% according to UN-Habitat, "Urbanization: Facts and Figures," <http://www.unhabitat.org/Istanbul+5/bg10.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Department of Public Information (1995) "Urban Crime: Policies for Prevention," <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/crime/dpi1646e.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International (2005), p.6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International (2005), p.23.