

# Fearscapes: The failure of public security in urban spaces

The human security challenges posed by cities are not only vast, but also largely overlooked. Rapid urbanization in the past three decades has resulted in the mushrooming of slums in and around major cities. Today one in six people live in slums – poor, overcrowded urban communities that are among the most dangerous places in the world in which to live. This figure is expected to increase to a quarter of the world's population by 2030. In some cities, most of the population lives in slums: 60% of Nairobi's population lives in slums on only 5% of the city's land.<sup>1</sup> While slums are not restricted to the developing world, 43% of people in developing country cities live in slums, compared to only 6% in developed country cities.<sup>2</sup>

Major urban centres often serve as regional hubs of criminal activity. In Nigeria, an estimated 15 million children have been transported from rural areas to cities for child labour, slavery, or to be trafficked to other cities as prostitutes.<sup>3</sup> The most dangerous slums have high percentages of unemployed and uneducated youth. The "youth bulge" – a disproportionate percentage of youth in the population – is particularly pervasive in cities in the Arab world, where youth under the age of 24 often make up 50% to 65% of the population.<sup>4</sup> Slums with these characteristics can become breeding grounds for gang activity.

Cities in Africa and Latin America are the most dangerous in the world. Here, at least two-thirds of people living in major cities are likely to be victims of crime.<sup>5</sup> In Asia, where roughly 40% of the region's 1.2 billion urban residents live in slums, incidents of violent crime are much lower.<sup>6</sup> However, in the past 10 years there has been a marked rise in organized armed violence and drug trafficking in Asia. Human trafficking and child prostitution pose considerable human security risks, particularly for women and girl children, in many Asian cities.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN-Habitat, "Background Information," WHD Feature, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> UN-Habitat, <http://www.unhabitat.org/mdg>.

<sup>3</sup> "Nigeria: 15 million children toil in slavery" November 18, 2005, <http://www.crin.org/violence/search/closeup.asp?infoID=6608>.

<sup>4</sup> Fuller (2003), p.6. For example, in 2003, the percentage of the population under 24 was 65.3% in Yemen, 62.3% in Saudi Arabia, 61.7% in Iraq, and 61% in Pakistan.

<sup>5</sup> UN-Habitat, "Changes in Asia's fast growing cities are closely watched across the world."

<sup>6</sup> Statistic from 2001. UN-Habitat, *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> UN-Habitat, *ibid*.