

# Executive summary

With the world now over 50% urban, and cities growing in size and power, the Human Security Policy Division (GHS) at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) conducted two Fast Talks on human security and cities (HSC) in October 2005 and March 2006, in an attempt to identify how this emerging issue impacts human security. Ten experts (four in the first session and six in the second) were engaged to provide insight on this topic.

The March 2006 Fast Talk asked its experts to consider the ways in which **failed and fragile cities, slum insecurity, urban conflict prevention, and local governance and democracy** impact human security. General insights from the October 2005 Fast Talk have also been integrated into this discussion.

## Fast Talk results

On **city fragility**, respondents noted both external and internal sources of failure. Externally, terrorism has increasingly targeted cities for maximum disruption, while the growth in 'infrastructural wars' — perpetrated by states against the roads, water, and electricity systems that support the urban centres of enemies, or by insurgent groups who attack urban vitality using urban features like car and truck bombs — has posed a threat to urban civilian life and security. Internally, the implosion of global national politics into the urban world has been exacerbated by the militarization of gangs, police, and other armed groups, rapid urbanization and an urban youth bulge, social polarization in horizontally unequal cities, and resource scarcity/urban unemployment.

In many cases, scarcity, economic distribution, identity, and other types of conflict are playing out in cities. These conflicts are not merely reflectors of state-level tensions, but actually have internal local dynamics that can spill over urban boundaries.

Urban scarcity conflicts have developed in Brazil, Guatemala, South Africa, India, and elsewhere, often over water, food, jobs, and especially land. Zimbabwe's razing of homes in Harare, leaving 700,000 homeless, is the most prominent example of this type of conflict, which also highlights the nexus between state activities and local resistance.

Economic distribution conflicts can be more pronounced at the local level, given frequent lack of oversight of city councils, and rampant corruption and