

An aerial photograph of a dense urban landscape, likely a major city, featuring numerous high-rise buildings and residential structures. The sky is a clear, bright blue with some light clouds. A semi-transparent light blue rectangular box is overlaid on the upper portion of the image, containing the title text. To the left of this box is a vertical orange bar.

# **Peace in Our Cities in a Time of Pandemic**

# Peace in Our Cities



- Brings together political leadership of Mayors, commitment of local and international civil society & the imperative of the SDGs to boldly assert that we have many of the tools and knowledge to build peace and save lives **if we choose to put those practices to use.**
- 19 cities and more than 24 organizational partners, representing over 25 million people globally
- Working together through evidence-based approaches to cut urban violence in half by 2030 (SDG16)

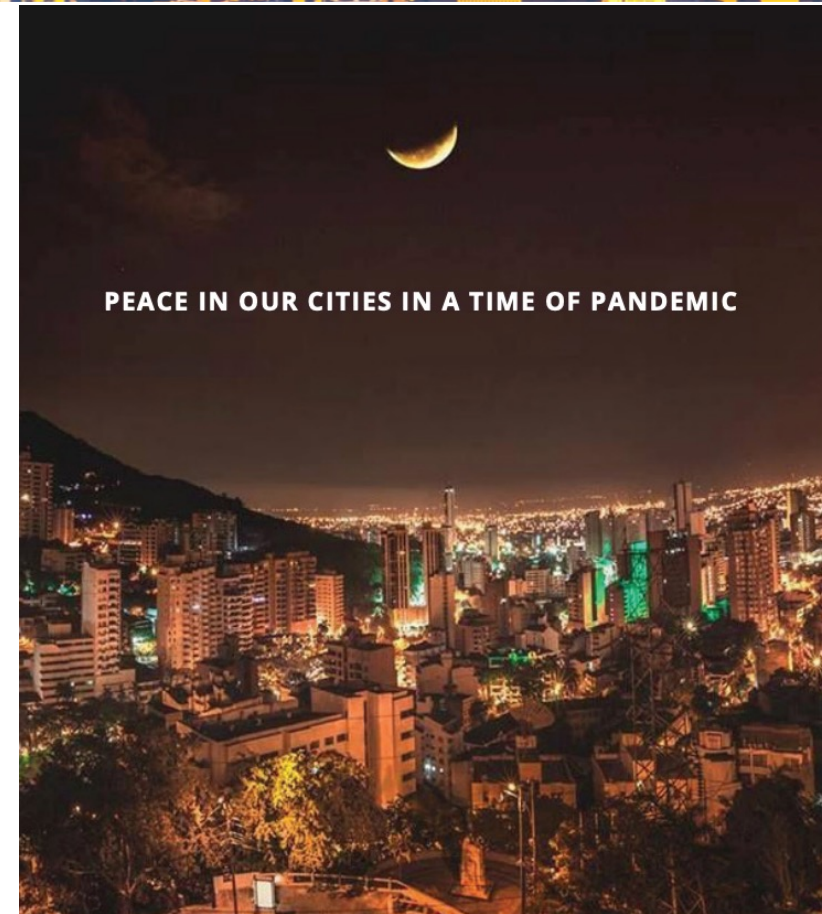
# COVID-19 and Cities



- (Relatively) Consistent Effects: Social destabilization, violence within the home, the most vulnerable made more vulnerable, misinformation and manipulation of fear, xenophobia and “othering,” constrained budgets and shifts in work practice (including preventive practice)
- Varied Effects: Spike in purchase of arms, spike in violence, political manipulation, dialogue and cease fires.

# Urgent Research Needs

- Informal Settlements
- Violence Against Women
- Digital Threats
- Organized Criminal/Armed Groups
- Community – Police Relationships
- City – National Government Relationships
- **In all instances, a huge reservoir of action being taken immediately to protect individuals, build resilience and prevent violence**



PEACE IN OUR CITIES IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

PEACE  
IN OUR CITIES



# Informal Settlements



- Increased risk factors for violence, where inhabitants are already at heightened risk for negative health and violence outcomes, and food insecurity.
- **Recommendations:** increase access to food; provide social and economic alternatives for young people; support public health interventions; rethink policing interventions; and reform justice sector access.
- **Examples:**
  - Medellin used FAO City Region Food Assistance Toolkit providing guidance to help link cities with surrounding regions. Observatory for food security.
  - In Quito the Participatory Urban Agriculture scheme trains vulnerable urban residents in organic farming techniques and established open-air markets to sell their surplus produce. 2,500 urban gardens and 16,700 people trained.

# Violence Against Women



- VAW became the top concern for PIOC members, mirroring global trends. Women experienced increases in physical, economic, and online violence, as well as an increase in trafficking.
- **Recommendations:** strengthen and adapt response and protection systems; adopt justice and law enforcement interventions; raise awareness; control environmental risk factors; not just IPV
- **Examples:**
  - In NYC and Mexico City, services for victims of violence were deemed “essential”, allowing them to remain open. In Mexico City this was enhanced by an online mapping of services for victims.
  - In São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, police allowed online domestic violence reporting, as well as allowed judges to grant emergency protective measures virtually and through WhatsApp.
  - In Madrid the government launched the NoEstásSola campaign focused on IPV, human trafficking, etc. to share information and raise awareness both virtually and on radio, TV.
  - In Valparaiso, Chile, the Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Initiative worked with the Mayor’s office to promote bystander interventions for VAW in public spaces during COVID-19.

# Digital Threats



- The pandemic triggered “infodemics” including false information about the spread of the virus, xenophobic attacks on who was at fault, fake cures and anti-vaccine messages.
- **Recommendations:** gather digital data for violence prevention; promote fact checking and digital literacy; provide public information; offer individual counseling and group meetings via social media; host hackathons and contests; make safety guidance available.
- **Examples:**
- In Cape Town, organizations have used social media to analyze polarization, divisive rhetoric and narrative manipulation related to xenophobia and COVID-19.
- In Mumbai the SafeCity app invites anonymous reporting of sexual and gender-based violence, which is then used to lobby local government and security forces to stop violence and harassment
- In Ghana, the Primero X app by UNICEF and Microsoft helps social service providers coordinate support to vulnerable children who may be experiencing violence in the home.

# Organized Criminal/Armed Groups



- OCGs adapted to the pandemic, using violence and threats to consolidate control. OCG involvement in property crime, trafficking, and drug & pharmaceuticals increased. Increased OCG activity impacts government legitimacy.
- **Recommendations:** build social capital at the community level; provide economic relief packages; empower communities and civil society to fight corruption; increase awareness about fraudulent medical products; center law enforcement around community priorities.
- **Examples:**
  - Los Angeles stopped companies from making false advertising and selling unapproved items, led to collaboration with US Attorney's Office to reinforce crack-downs.
  - In Patzicia (Guatemala) 150 households set up a Neighborhood Association to monitor COVID-19 initiatives run by the municipal government to prevent corruption.
  - In Mexico City, the *Barrio Adentro* (Inside the Neighborhood) program has a localized approach to provide social services to vulnerable communities and to prevent youth recruitment into organized criminal groups.



# Community – Police Relationships



- The COVID-19 pandemic further strained already fraught relationships between law enforcement and communities → exacerbated abuses and prevented partnerships between all actors committed to community safety.
- **Recommendations:** law enforcement should 1) proceed fairly; 2) narrow the focus of their duties; 3) engage with community partners; and 4) take part in healing; 5) listen to community priorities
- **Examples:**
- City of Singapore has fought the spread of disinformation about COVID-19 by law enforcement monitoring online content and dispelling rumors.
- Across Latin America, police agencies in 10 large cities have diversified channels of communication with the public, reduced number of arrests for minor offenses, and assisted with distribution of food, medicines and other essential goods.
- The Māori (New Zealand) set up roadside checkpoints to manage access areas, done with support of police and helped reinforce self-determination as regards safety provision.

# City – National Government Relationships



- COVID-19 laid bare the inconsistencies between city and national government actors, which prevent effective violence prevention at all levels. Also offers the opportunity for municipalities to take ownership of violence reduction strategies that can be contextualized to specific city needs.
- **Lessons:** relational conditions could amplify drivers of conflict; entrepreneurship breeds followers; “glocal” leadership is the future of prevention; persistence and planning help solve structural gaps; violence is intersectional challenge and requires intersectional prevention strategies.
- **Examples:**
  - In Cape Town local leaders recommended priorities to the national government in addressing group/gang violence, including creation of specialized police unit. Might be beneficial in short term, but could result in longer-term intensification of structural violence and systemic deprivation.
  - Barcelona’s City of Refuge program countered restrictions around migration, in direct defiance of national policy. The presence of the program was enlisted with COVID-19 to outreach to communities otherwise undocumented or left out of more official channels.

# Key Take-Aways

- Strength in community driven responses – with large credit to youth and women. Consider relative to general dispossession
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Immediate ability to leverage technology
- Dynamics between cities and national governments facilitated or prevented effective practice
- Importance of city networks

