

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD HABITAT DAY

1 October 2007

We are at the dawn of a new urban era. Half of humanity now live in towns and cities. It is estimated that by 2030, two-thirds of the world's people will be urban dwellers.

At this turning point in human history, surveys show that crime in urban areas is on the rise everywhere. And fear of crime is one of the most influential factors shaping our daily lives. In too many cities around the world, it dictates where we choose to live, shop, work and play. This is bad for human progress and for economic development -- especially in a world where for the first time the number of urban slum dwellers is set to top the one billion mark. In many countries, crime has divided cities into areas of decline on the one hand, where guns, rape, robbery, and violence prevail, and wealthier districts on the other hand, where residents can afford better protection.

In slums and poor urban districts, people lack security of tenure, utilities and health services, and are most at risk to disasters wrought by climate change. World Habitat Day 2007 is an occasion to encourage city leaders to plan better for crime reduction, security of tenure, and climate change mitigation. As the theme of this Day aptly tells us, "a safe city is a just city".

As we pass the halfway point for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, let us also use this occasion to examine how we can improve urban governance. Many forms of urban crime cut across local and national boundaries, calling for better cooperation between all spheres of government and civil society. We must invest more in our children and young people, especially those at risk of becoming marginalized and turning to crime as an escape from the harsh realities of poverty and deprivation. Let us also step up efforts to be more energy-conscious. Our cities are our biggest polluters, and require big, innovative thinking commensurate with their size.

On this World Habitat Day, let us resolve to make cities around the world safer, greener, more inclusive and more secure places for everyone.