

Letter on Violence and Conflict Prevention

To the attention of the United Cities and Local Governments' network and esteemed Policy Councilors:

We are [Peace in Our Cities](#), an urban network of cities, civil society organizations and multilateral institutions committed to reducing serious forms of violence in municipalities around the world. Through our **Amplify, Advance, and Accompany** approach, we connect policymakers and practitioners with peers and experts; develop, curate and disseminate resources and research; and guide global investment into urban violence prevention through elevating city voices.

We believe that cities should be safe for all their residents and that through collective and concerted action, we—including both local governments and those supporting their work— have the tools to increase peace and reduce violence. The larger the movement, the more power we have to assert that no-one deserves to live a life of fear. We invite you to join us by reaffirming your commitment to prevent violence and build safer communities.

1. The Context: Violence Beyond and Within Borders

Last year, the world experienced a record high number of inter-state conflicts, with [more than half](#) of United Nations member states actively involved in conflict beyond their borders. Their increased internationalization, compounded by the intersecting interests of the various actors involved in conflict zones (including paramilitary groups, organized criminal groups, and groups associated with terrorism), makes their resolution more difficult. Indeed we're seeing a serious decline in the number of negotiated peace agreements, and our multilateral institutions are struggling to provide timely and effective solutions.

Nonetheless, conflict-related violence only represents a fraction of the scale of intentional violence in the world, most of which takes place outside of conflict zones, concentrated instead in our cities, towns and homes. While conflict-type violence receives significant attention given its potential to subvert or challenge the state, it's becoming increasingly clear that non-conflict violence can not only do massive damage to individuals and communities, but is increasingly also confronting and coopting state structures.

Intentional homicides are responsible for [3.7 times](#) more deaths than conflict and terrorism combined. Organized criminal activity, for its part, contributes [22 percent](#) of intentional homicides globally, and in Latin America is responsible for a staggering [50 percent](#) of all intentional homicides. In many areas, organized criminal groups subvert the authority, capacity, and structures of the government, both at the local and national levels.

While lethality statistics tend to be the most accurate, violence is far broader and more insidious than just incidents that result in death. [One in three](#) women will face physical, emotional or psychological violence in her lifetime. [Less than 10 percent](#) of children in the world live in countries with laws that protect them from all forms of violence. [More than 6 percent](#) of the global population report having been assaulted or mugged in the last 12 months.

Furthermore, violence can be both physical and acute, as well as structural and prolonged. Certain neighborhoods are denied clean water, certain skin colors face prejudice under the law, certain gender-identities magnify vulnerabilities. These less fatal and more prolonged forms of violence are harder to accurately measure, but can be exceptionally destructive as we can identify in unequal measures of life-expectancy, earnings opportunities and learning outcomes.

As a backdrop to this, the world is confronting an acceleration of inequality, polarization and authoritarianism, all of which are having [the effect](#) of pitting communities against one another and increasing a sense of tribalism and antagonism. Manipulated strategies of disinformation are also reinforcing efforts of 'othering' or divide and rule. And, in many instances, such dynamics are pitting national and local governments against one another in ways that undermine the ability to forge integrated, effective public safety for all.

2. The Solution: BELIF Strategies

These are complex challenges that require both individual and collective responses. and in many locales, cities are proactively demonstrating that –with political will and tailored support– they can create safe environments for all residents. There's real momentum for local governments to rise to the challenge and help to create more peaceful and safe communities.

The first step to confronting this issue is to understand the risks for violence unique to each place. This may sound simple, but all too often assumptions drive our understanding of violence, rather than accurate diagnosis of actors, incentives and facilitators of violence. For example, in many cases entire neighborhoods are labeled as violent, when in fact it is typically less than [5 percent](#) of a community's population that is engaged in serious violence.

Based on this established knowledge of the specific local context, urban leaders and their partners should commit themselves to developing prevention strategies that are **B**alanced, **E**vidence-based, **L**egitimate, **I**nter-related, and **F**ocused. Here is what each of those tenets stand for:

- **Balanced:** for public safety interventions to be successful, they need to be designed with a balance between service provision and law enforcement. While there is an important role for law enforcement, it should only be deployed to interrupt imminent threats of violence, while service provision needs to preventatively reach the communities and individuals most at-risk of being affected by violence to ensure long-term sustainability of gains.

- **Evidence-based:** successful violence prevention strategies need to be based on a thorough, nuanced and in-depth knowledge of both local dynamics and what has historically worked to prevent violence in similar contexts. Human-centered and data-backed strategies avoid the risk of being misled by biases and assumptions.
- **Legitimate:** interventions will only be sustainable in the mid and long-term if they are embraced by the community, executed within the competencies and authority of the implementing actors, and anchored in human-rights principles.
- **Inter-related:** violence is a multi-faceted issue, and interventions to address it need to be thought of as a whole-of-government and whole-of-society matter. They need to be thoroughly coordinated across government departments and civil society. In that sense, integrated [offices of violence prevention](#) (OVPs) have proven to be particularly effective in the implementation of these strategies.
- **Focused:** violence is hyper-localized, concentrated in relatively small areal segments, and most at-risk of affecting selected demographics. These areas and demographics are unique to each local context, and need to be identified and understood. Interventions need to focus its resources and efforts in working with these communities to provide them with alternative pathways for meaningful engagement in society, rather than violence.

Practical Examples from Cities Around the World

- [Rosario, Argentina](#) - Facing increasing rates of homicides and other forms of violence, the government of Rosario implemented a coordinated and integrated prevention strategy focusing on bringing down levels of violence through collective effort. With coordinated action at the local, provincial and national levels, Rosario's focused intervention contributed to a 64 percent drop in homicides from 2023 to 2024. By relying on a robust data collection system, the city was able to identify and monitor patterns of violence, and tailor action to the specifics of each neighborhood.
- [Bristol, United Kingdom](#) - The city has been working with civil society partners to provide critical alternatives to their youth, help to reduce engagement in violent behavior, and offer a broader perspective than law enforcement only responses. By engaging young people through sports, and embedding psychologically informed support to these activities, the city and its partners have created a reliable and effective pathway to help young individuals to break away from cycles of violence.
- [Oakland, United States](#) - Oakland was one of the first cities in the United States to implement a centralized office of violence prevention. Applying a public health approach to violence prevention, the Department of Violence Prevention (DVP) focuses on community-led interventions to provide sustainable safety to those most impacted by violence. The department integrates a gender-lens to all their activities, including by partnering crisis responders and violence interrupters with gender-based violence experts to assess if violent incidents were motivated by gender.

3. Call to Action

Policy Councilors, we urge you to take heed of the above and act decisively to prevent and reduce violence within your communities and beyond. To support these efforts and develop effective violence prevention strategies, we call on you to commit to the following:

1. **Prioritize preventative action over repressive action** with an aim to break intergenerational cycles of violence. Preventative action needs to start with addressing the needs and providing services to the more at-risk communities, and limiting the use of law enforcement to interrupt imminent threats of violence.
2. **Adopt human-centered and data-driven solutions** to diagnose the root causes of violence, and support efficient allocation of resources towards violence prevention. Equally, ensure proper monitoring and evaluation of implemented strategies to sustain and scale up effective action.
3. **Ensure that actions are legitimate**, both in regards to national context and human rights principles, and that they are developed with meaningful participation of the communities affected by it. This should include a commitment to mainstream a gender perspective into all prevention strategies, recognizing the different ways individuals experience violence according to their gender.
4. **Coordinate preventative action across sectors and levels of government**, including but not limited to: criminal and justice systems to reinforce rehabilitative accountability; health, education, and social protection systems to create the conditions for communities to thrive; and on community and economic development to ensure that all individuals have pathways to meaningfully participate in society. National governments should also be called to support these efforts, both financially and politically.
5. **Develop strategies that recognize the hyper-localized and interrelated nature of violence**, and focus on those most at-risk in order to maximize the impact and efficiency of prevention efforts. Allocating efforts and resources to those that are closest to the violence is crucial to break its cycle and prevent its spread.