Guiding Principles and Inspiring Actions

Operationalizing the Resolution to Reduce Urban Violence

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PEACE
IN OUR CITIES

Contents

Foreword

Mayors have a wide agenda of crucial city services: health, education, water, sanitation, and economic development. But nothing is as important as keeping communities safe. When people do not feel safe, we all suffer the consequences. And the toll this violence takes in our communities is not just physical in nature. The psychological and emotional trauma left in its wake leaves invisible scars for generations. Violence is overwhelmingly an urban challenge. Most people in the world today live in cities, and urban areas are increasingly contested spaces in which the needs for progress and innovation bump against inequality, lack of opportunity, and the absence of peace.

In June 2020, the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM) together with the Peace in Our Cities Network launched the first ever global resolution to reduce urban violence, committing cities to a 50 percent reduction by 2030. The signatories to the resolution represent over 1,500 cities and metropolitan areas from across the world, facing a variety of violence challenges of different intensity. But one thing we share in common is our determination to keep their communities safe and build peaceful societies.

This report is a fitting follow up and a roadmap on how they can do this. It marks a critical next step in offering these cities and networks a set of inspiring actions on how to implement their public commitments.

In Bristol, we have experienced the national trend of a reduction in serious violence through the pandemic, but then an escalation back to prepandemic levels. Our focus is on immediate interventions to keep young people safe while maintaining sight on the long-term conditions exposing young people to street violence. Our 10-year partnership strategy for reducing child criminal exploitation and serious violence prioritizes working with community and grassroot services to build capacity to support young people. We know we need to work upstream and end the cycle of exposure to violence in childhood and domestic abuse, education exclusion, family involvement in the criminal justice system, and exploitation.

As leaders and citizens, we often know who in our communities are most vulnerable to violence, as both perpetrators and victims. We know about the manifestations of violence. We know it concentrates in specific places. We know it is often clustered around predictable times. And we know that violence is associated with certain behaviours.

Knowing all this means that as leaders we can create the conditions to address the problem and its root causes. This roadmap demonstrates that we can do it informed by the best evidence and inspiring examples from other cities, all while advancing human-rights-informed approaches that prioritize dignity and the well-being of all. To address these vulnerabilities, we must tackle the drivers of violence, including poverty, inequality, joblessness, and hopelessness. It is our job to help our most vulnerable not only because of the immediate and important impact that makes for individuals themselves, but also to break the cycles of violence that limit our full potential across society.

Goodwill and good intentions are not enough on their own. Our people need training, mental health services, good homes, recovery, and opportunities. This requires spending, which is a critical investment in the resilience, productivity, and wellness of our societies.

We are most influential when we work collaboratively, across borders, and on shared goals. Together we can increase our ability to leverage the scale of investments needed to build more-inclusive communities, and we can directly impact the lives of so many people. Now is the time to increase action at the city level. It is time for us to lead.

Marvin

—Mayor Marvin Rees
Bristol, United Kingdom

GPM member Mayor Marvin Rees of Bristol (United Kingdom), has led the resolution as rapporteur together with Robert Muggah, expert and Co-Chair of the GPM Advisory Committee.

Key Messages

Most violent deaths are not conflict related but intentional homicides occurring in urban areas.

According to the latest available data, 80 to 90 percent of global violent deaths occur outside of conflict zones.[1] In an increasingly urban world, most of these deaths take place in cities.[2] Cities are the centers of social, economic, political, and cultural lives for the bulk of the world's population, in particular young people, and every individual should have the right to safely enjoy them. Despite the magnitude and significance of the problem of urban violence, only recently have we witnessed the emergence of international networks with specific mandates to convey the scale of the problem, bring evidence to bear on solutions, and connect local leaders working to address these challenges.

Local leaders and international networks have signed a first-of-its-kind resolution to reduce violence in cities by 50 percent by 2030.

On June 15, 2020, spearheaded by two international networks, Peace in Our Cities (PiOC) and the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM), leaders from 60 cities and urban networks representing more than 1,500 cities and metropolitan areas in 33 countries across five continents signed a resolution committing themselves to halve urban violence by 2030. The resolution includes 11 commitments related to both the goals and process to reduce violence in cities. On November 18, 2020, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres "welcomed the effort [...] to step up the campaign against urban violence," demonstrating the resolution's relevance and timeliness.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, and its fallout, halving urban violence is more important than ever.

Recent data indicates that between 2016 and 2020, interpersonal violence leading to the loss of life had actually decreased substantially. These were important gains in moving toward Sustainable Development Goal 16.1 targets.[3] But the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, which are a facilitating factor for individual and social violence. And after a decrease in some violent crimes during the first wave of COVID-19 lockdowns in early 2020, homicides have spiked in many countries.[4] Violence against women has also increased.[5] Rapid urbanization has slowed due to pandemic-related deaths, migratory restrictions, and exodus to less densely populated environments, and as a result of the pandemic and these shifts, cities have also lost billions of dollars in revenue.[6]

Meanwhile, the invasion of Ukraine has not only devastated the country but also displaced millions of people, both internally and internationally—more than 5.3 million across Europe. The war has impacted the global economy through fuel and fertilizer shortages, with ensuing food insecurity and rampant inflation extending far beyond Ukraine's borders, in many areas exacerbating already significant shortages to meet basic needs.[7] Local governments across the world will have to develop or update programs to address different types of violence—and other social issues—in the face of this unfolding reality. This report provides urban decision makers with actionable guidelines to carry out such tasks.

There are tried and tested approaches to reduce urban violence.

This report outlines basic principles and inspiring actions drawn from a sampling of cities and urban networks that have endorsed the resolution or support its principles to serve as inspiration

Addressing urban violence is often presented to the public as a choice between tough-on-crime policies directed at violence, or social-prevention policies aimed at its root causes. However, this dichotomy is misleading.

for other cities working toward the goal of halving urban violence. While this goal might seem ambitious, many cities have already reduced violence by as much if not more.[8] Thus, the report includes examples of inspiring actions related to each of the 11 commitments in the resolution. The analysis draws on evidence-based initiatives and is also based on interviews with local authorities and civil society representatives from various cities. It draws on secondary sources, such as scholarly literature, white papers, and media archives.

It does not purport to have solutions for every type of violence in every city, and it recognizes that each city has its own violence dynamics, which must be addressed with tailored responses. Nonetheless, basic principles of violence prevention can travel across contexts and be applied to different problems, from gender-related violence to violent extremism or homicides caused by organized crime groups.[9]

Violence-reduction efforts must be balanced, focused, interrelated, and legitimate.

The first part of the report focuses on the *content* of policies that have shown greater successes in reducing urban violence, particularly in the short and medium terms. Scholarly consensus establishes that governments should find a balance between law-enforcement and social-prevention policies; target interventions toward specific, higher-risk individuals (whether perpetrators or victims), neighborhoods, or behaviors; address multiple, interrelated types of violence; and bolster the legitimacy of state agencies, particularly the police.

Violence reduction requires data, political commitment, and partnerships.

The second part of the report engages the process of urban-violence-prevention policymaking. It contends that policies should be informed by data and evidence-based studies, mobilized by the political commitment of local leaders as well as their state and national counterparts, and supported by partnerships with local and international actors. The joint GPM-PiOC resolution on reducing violence is unique in its nature as it offers a concrete set of principles to create city-level action. It provides opportunities for advocacy and policy engagements given that it is spearheaded by two urban networks with more than 67 cities (23 cities in PiOC and 47 mayors at the GPM) representing over 31 countries (17 in PiOC and 20 in the GPM), leaders of city networks, and representatives of international organizations and civil society organizations. The GPM-PiOC resolution also offers a blueprint to "build back better" in cities after the pandemic that can be translated into a concrete set of implementation guidelines while offering practical support (per request) to encourage sustained commitment and facilitate successful lessons on violence reduction as presented in this report. The resolution has also garnered the political commitment and support of more than 60 cities and urban networks that represent more than 1,500 cities and metropolitan areas.

The report concludes with an appendix that highlights various city initiatives.

Local NGOs and community organizations can provide essential territorial knowledge, remove roadblocks, and help ensure government interventions are addressing community needs, which also helps to legitimize the government's intervention.

Resolution on Reducing Violence in Cities

Resolution developed in partnership with Peace in Our Cities and adopted by a majority of GPM votes on June 15, 2020.

Introduction

A key global priority is reducing violence, especially in our cities. Over 600,000 people are killed every year around the world in situations of conflict—much of it playing out in cities—extremism, crime, and interpersonal violence. Yet there are also remarkable examples of cities preventing and reducing violence, especially where there is smart leadership, data-driven and evidence based interventions focused on hot spots, and social and economic prevention measures. Even so, there continues to be an absence of strong intercity action to accelerate violence-reduction measures around the world.

As the coronavirus pandemic continues its spread around the globe, it will interact with these existing violence dynamics in predictable and nonpredictable ways. We are already seeing, for example, consistent trends of increased violence within the home primarily against women and children. While in some cities street violence has gone down as a result of stay-at-home orders, in others street or community violence is increasing, placing additional burdens on public safety agencies already overburdened as a result of COVID-19. It is essential as we advance efforts to respond to the pandemic to not lose sight of ensuring broader safety for our urban residents, including measures to reduce and prevent violence.

The GPM is well situated to drive a global city-led violence-reduction agenda. In 2019, the Durban Declaration underlined the GPM's commitment to reducing violence by 50 percent by 2030. It stressed the importance of comprehensive and integrated strategies based on evidence of what works. The GPM is not alone. Specifically, Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies—a multi-stakeholder coalition of dozens of governments, international agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—has also committed to reducing violence by 50 percent by 2030. Another city-based initiative, Peace in Our Cities, was co-launched by the Pathfinders, Impact:Peace, and PlusPeace, and includes GPM city members like Amman, Jordan, and Dayton, United States.

The GPM has an opportunity to accelerate action on the 50-percent-reduction agenda. The goal would be to engage other city networks to join a common declaration and set of evidence-based actions to halve violence by 2030. The actions will necessarily be retrofitted to apply to the current context of coronavirus pandemic, including the restrictions placed on in-person interaction as well as heightened stresses of our systems. In this way, the GPM not only strengthens city network collaboration, but it scales up activities in a key issue aligned to its mandate and policy priorities.

There are also remarkable examples of cities preventing and reducing violence, especially where there is smart leadership, data-driven and evidence-based interventions focused on hot spots and social and economic prevention measures.

Resolution

1. We commit to significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates within our urban jurisdictions by 50 percent by 2030. This is in line with our commitment to implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16 in our cities, which also calls on governments to reduce all forms of violence and related death rates.

2. We urge national governments to provide political and financial support to ongoing efforts to reduce violence by 50 percent by 2030. We support adopting and investing in data-driven and evidence-based public-security and safety solutions.

3. We support the exploration of partnerships with international organizations promoting city safety including, but not limited to, the African Forum for Urban Security, European Forum for Urban Safety, UN-Habitat, Peace in Our Cities, and other relevant groups.

4. We will explore relevant partnerships, and coordinate prevention, within our own cities, drawing on the expertise from all sectors, including those working on criminal justice; in the health, education, and social protection systems; and on community and economic development.

5. We acknowledge that many communities most impacted by COVID-19 are also those communities most impacted by violence and traditionally most disadvantaged. As we advance, we will pay particular attention to substantially increasing our support, including trauma support, to these communities to make all our cities and communities more equal.

6. We will work with communities to promote peace, including providing platforms for leadership by survivors of violence, and by communities and groups who face the highest risks of violence.

7. We will develop strategies to tackle the interrelated nature of different forms of violence, rather than treating them in isolation. We will focus on the most vulnerable parts of our cities (in relation to gender, at-risk young people, and poverty), where levels of violence are highest, working to achieve rapid increases in safety and security.

8. We will work to break intergenerational cycles of violence, in particular by confronting violence against children and young people at home, in schools, in communities, and online. We acknowledge the increased risks of violence, including trafficking in children, that is resulting from shelter-at-home orders and the disruption to schooling for nearly 90 percent of the world's children and youth.

9. We encourage cities and city networks to work collaboratively to document and disrupt online extremism where it leads to violence in cities. We urge social media platforms to stand together with us in this endeavor to reduce the spread of misinformation and bigotry.

10. We urge cities to pursue public safety and security policies that minimize harm and human rights violations. We support the UN System-Wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements and encourage their adoption by cities.

11. We will mainstream a gender perspective into everything we do, recognizing the different ways women and men experience violence, tackling gender-based violence, and providing platforms for leadership by women peacebuilders.

There continues to be an absence of strong intercity action to accelerate violence-reduction measures around the world.

City Signatories

Mayor Yousef Shawarbeh
Amman, Jordan

Mayor Rohey Malik Lowe
Banjul, The Gambia

Mayor Alec von Graffenried
Bern, Switzerland

Mayor Juan Maria Aburto
Bilbao, Spain

Mayor Ricardo Rio
Braga, Portugal

Mayor Adrian Schrinner
Brisbane, Australia

Mayor Marvin Rees
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Mayor Dirk de Fauw
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Mayor Gergely Karácsony
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Mayor Dan Plato
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Mayor Emil Boc
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Mayor Steve Benjamin
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Mayor Nan Whaley
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Mayor Mxolisi Kaunda
Durban, South Africa

Mayor Thomas Geisel
Dusseldorf, Germany

Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr
Freetown, Sierra Leone

Mayor Aleksandra Maria Dulkiewicz
Gdansk, Poland

Mayor Mathias De Clercq
Ghent, Belgium

Mayor Lutfi Haziri
Gjilan, Kosovo

Mayor Josep Mayoral Antigas
City of Granollers, Barcelona Province, Spain

Mayor Einat Kalisch-Rotem
Haifa, Israel

Mayor Taysir Abu Snienah
Hebron (Al Khalel), Palestine

Mayor Eckart Würzner
Heidelberg, Germany

Mayor Jan Pellervo Vapaavuori
Helsinki, Finland

Mayor Grace Mary Mugasa
Hoima, Uganda

Mayor David Balaba
Iganga, Uganda

Mayor Ibrahim Janko Sanneh
Janjangbureh, The Gambia

Mayor Erias Lukwago Ssalongo
Kampala, Uganda

Mayor Marcin Krupa
Katowice, Poland

Mayor Abdül Batur
Konak Municipality, Izmir, Turkey

Mayor Jawara Saihou
Kuntaur Area Council, The Gambia

Mayor Peter Soulsby
Leicester, United Kingdom

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Mayor José Luis **Martínez-Almeida** Navasqüés
Madrid, Spain

Mayor Hélder Sousa Silva
Mafra, Portugal

Lord Mayor Abid Latif Chohan
Manchester, United Kingdom

Mayor Peter Kurz
Mannheim, Germany

Mayor Giuseppe Sala
Milan, Italy

Mayor Jefferson Koijee
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Tapei, Taiwan

Mayor Ahmet Ataç
Tepebasi, Turkey

Mayor Lisa Helps
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Mayor Baikuntha Nath Neupane
Vyas, Nepal

Mayor Jacek Sutryk
Wroclaw, Poland

Organizational Signatories

Peace in Our Cities

UN Habitat

The United States Conference of Mayors

Africa Forum for Urban Safety

UNICEF

European Forum for Urban Security

Mayors Migration Council

Strong Cities Network

The Importance of the Resolution to Halve Urban Violence

> We commit to significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates within our urban jurisdictions by 50 percent by 2030. This is in line with our commitment to implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16 in our cities, which also calls on governments to reduce all forms of violence and related death rates. (Commitment no. 1)

The resolution's main goal (cited above) is to halve urban violence by 2030. Reaching this goal would require an average 10 percent annual decrease in urban violence, a realistic goal according to experts.[10] According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, a sample of 68 cities reduced their homicide rates by 34 percent in 10 years.[11] The Igarapé Institute and the Inter-American Development Bank estimate that Latin America—home to 47 of the 50 most violent cities in the world—could reduce its murder rates by 50 percent within 10 years as well.[12] The 10 subsequent commitments recognize the comprehensive and complex nature of urban violence and signal mayors' dedication not just to a goal but to the process by which the goal should be achieved.

First, the resolution acknowledges **multiple, interrelated types of violence**. Some cities may suffer from rampant homicides resulting from interpersonal violence, gang activity, or organized crime, while in others violence against women and children might proliferate. Nonphysical aggressions, such as verbal abuse and bullying, whether in person or online, can also spur young people to hurt others and obstruct their personal development. The state, which is meant to remedy violence, often also engages in human rights abuses. Furthermore, these types of violence generally feed each other, either in the short term—as when gang members retaliate against their rivals and trigger a spiral of homicides—or the long term—as when children who suffer or witness abuse grow up to perpetrate it themselves.

Second, the resolution recognizes that just as there are multiple types of violence, **there are manifold ways to address violence**. More-effective policing—a typical first response—has proven a necessary but insufficient intervention to reduce different types of violence. More policing can also carry the potential for increasing harm to specific individuals and reinforcing harm to entire groups. Incorporating preventive measures, investing in communities, and kick-starting profound cultural or social transformations should also be among local governments' priorities.

Finally, the resolution acknowledges that **violence must be addressed in a coordinated manner by a variety of local, national, and international actors**. While city governments can lead the effort, they require cooperation from state and national-level governments as well as from civil society organizations and international partners. Indeed, in contexts where national governments work at cross-purposes to cities, this can create a significant impediment to violence prevention. It is in this spirit of shared learning that this roadmap conveys multiple experiences from various cities as well as evidence-based initiatives to reduce urban violence.

Reaching the goal to reduce urban violence by half by 2030 would require an average 10 percent annual decrease in urban violence, a realistic goal according to experts.

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What: Balanced, Focused, Interrelated, and Legitimate Violence-Reduction Policies

Balance between Law Enforcement and Social Prevention

Addressing urban violence is often presented to the public as a choice between tough-on-crime policies directed at violence, or social-prevention policies aimed at its root causes. However, this dichotomy is misleading.

Tough-on-crime responses have in many instances proven ineffective and harmful, because they are "unfocused, imbalanced and deeply unfair."[13] However, an appropriate deployment of law enforcement is necessary for most violence-reduction interventions to succeed. Cities have effectively deployed the police through strategies such as focused deterrence, hot-spot policing, and community-oriented policing. (Specific city examples are provided later in this section.)

But the work of police, law enforcement, and other peacekeeping agencies is insufficient to reduce violence by itself. For example, while increasing police presence can decrease criminal violence in the short term, it is not sustainable, or even desirable, in the long term. Increased police presence might be inappropriate to address other types of violence, such as gender-based violence or violence in school. Many local governments do not have their own police force but are equipped with various policy instruments for social prevention, such as public health, housing, sports, culture, and urban infrastructure.

The amount of time and resources needed to resolve the root causes of violence, such as inequality and marginalization, is beyond the scope of most local governments due to their limited resources and mandate. However, this should not be a reason for discarding social-prevention policies. Delivery of social services to a few high-risk individuals and neighborhoods can be more impactful (and efficient) than directing policies toward entire cities. Providing social services, whether conditional cash transfers, career mentoring, or cognitive behavioral theory,[14] to vulnerable individuals can steer them away from harm and violence while increasing the perceived fairness of the state's response, showing that it reserves the use of force for when groups break the peace.[15]

Pacto Pelotas pela Paz (Pelotas Pact for Peace) implemented in the southern Brazilian city of **Pelotas** shows a balanced plan at work. This strategy has two central components: law enforcement, including order maintenance, and social prevention, which involves educational, sport, cultural, and housing opportunities for at-risk youth as well as urban redevelopment and reintegration of convicted individuals. Four years after its launch in August 2017, the program had reportedly reduced homicides by 73.5 percent and different types of robberies by 61 to 84 percent from 2017 to 2021.[16]

PELOTAS, BRAZIL

Focus on High-Risk People, Places, and Behaviors

We acknowledge that many communities most impacted by COVID-19 are also those communities most impacted by violence and traditionally most disadvantaged. ... We will work with communities to promote peace, including providing platforms for leadership by survivors of violence, and by communities and groups who face the highest risks of violence. (Commitments no. 5 and 6)

Violence is not randomly distributed in cities. Violent acts are concentrated in a few places, carried out by a minority of individuals (overwhelmingly young males), and associated with specific behaviors, such as gun possession, intergroup rivalry, and alcohol consumption.[17] Government efforts to reduce violence must begin with a detailed diagnosis of its main characteristics, particularly its temporal and geographical distribution, to develop targeted solutions and avoid stigmatizing entire communities.

Focused deterrence, a strategy originally deployed to address youth violence in Boston during the 1990s, is one of the most proven violence-reduction interventions in the United States.[18] It involves "selecting a particular crime problem [...] identifying key offenders," and, in line with the balancing principle described above, "implementing a blended set of law enforcement, informal social control, and social service actions" directed at those offenders. This strategy combines law enforcement efforts with targeted street outreach, as government officials work with social facilitators to offer targeted services to the high-risk population, such as immediate protection from harm; acquisition of drivers' licenses and other identification documents; food, clothing, and shelter; and assistance with outstanding criminal justice issues.[19]

The city of **Oakland, United States**, has applied the principles of focused deterrence to reduce group violence through its Ceasefire strategy. In this program, the California Partnership for Safe Communities joined forces with the Oakland Police Department and state and federal agencies to identify and engage high-risk individuals. The partners assembled those individuals in group and one-on-one meetings and "relayed a twofold message of caring and consequences," offering tangible benefits in return for keeping the peace.[20] This initiative reduced gang-involved shootings by at least 20 percent and halved the city's homicide rate.[21]

Another application of focused deterrence can be observed in **Cali, Colombia**. The legitimacy of the city's Roman Catholic Archdiocese in marginalized neighborhoods and among gang leaders enabled it to direct high-risk youth to government programs that provided them with an economic subsidy for 18 months to undertake an alternative life project. The following testimony from a representative of the archdiocese illustrates the importance of outreach workers.

> "When the government directly recruited youth in violent conditions , it was insane. [The youths] used the money to buy drugs and weapons. We built our relationship over four months of contact. We generated bonds of trust, met [the youths] in the corners where they consumed psychoactive substances, listened to them, found out how they got there. They had to [first] recognize themselves as people with rights, with dignity, understand that their history leads them to violence [before] recognizing others (their family and community)."[22]

Another policing strategy focuses on high-risk places rather than people. Hot-spot policing refers to targeted police actions, such as increased patrols, in specific city blocks where risk factors or violent behavior are higher.[23] Systematic reviews show that these programs can reduce crime without displacing it to neighboring areas.[24] After its original formulation in the United States, it has been deployed in some of the most violent neighborhoods of Latin American cities such as **Medellín, Colombia, Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Montevideo, Uruguay**.[25]

Hot-spot policing has worked well in tandem with urban development and community-building initiatives. Finding this alignment between urban upgrading, which is managed at the city level, and policing strategies, which are often governed at the state or national level, can be challenging. However, urban upgrading is an important element of violence prevention. The work of the nonprofit company Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading in conjunction with the government in **Cape Town, South Africa**, shows how improved infrastructure, such as the diminished presence of alcohol outlets, is associated with a 34 percent reduced exposure to interpersonal

OAKLAND, UNITED STATES

CALI, COLOMBIA

MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

violence. More generally, improving street lighting, recovering vacant lots, and increasing green spaces through the city have all shown a positive impact in reducing violence.[26]

Community-building initiatives, such as community-oriented policing, are more ambiguous and harder to turn into concrete policies. For example, in **Chicago, United States** sociologist Robert J. Sampson points to "regular meetings of police and residents on neutral turf (e.g., in a school or church) where both sides identify the location of the problems" as a useful mechanism to increase collective efficacy.[27] However, in spite of the popularity of community policing in some academic and policy circles, the evidence that most of its standard components reduce crime or even improve trust in the police is uneven.[28] Nonetheless, governments should aim to restore relations between police and communities through targeted efforts that combine law enforcement interventions with nonrepressive approaches, such as the ones described above.

Foster an Interrelated Approach to Violence

We will develop strategies to tackle the interrelated nature of different forms of violence, rather than treating them in isolation. (Commitment no. 7)

Violent incidents are not independent but rather are linked through time, place, and social relations, whether in the short term or long term. In the short term, a gang-related homicide might trigger a spiral of killings, harming other community members—and even police—in the process. Furthermore, individuals who carry out one type of violence (e.g., gun violence) are more likely to perpetrate other types (e.g., gender-based violence). Over the long term, violence can also be transmitted intergenerationally. Children who suffer abuse or witness violence in their home and school are more likely to either suffer from or perpetrate violence in the future.

Therefore, cities should adopt a comprehensive approach to reduce violence, as addressing one type can have beneficial impacts on tackling other types. By recognizing and addressing the interrelated nature of violence, local governments can develop different responses tailored to the highest-risk individuals, groups, and neighborhoods that produce more substantial effects without an overreliance on punitive measures. While more-immediate mitigation responses can be part of focused deterrence programs such as those described above, here we address policies targeted at reducing reproduction of violence in the medium and long terms.

Interrupt Intergenerational Violence

We will work to break intergenerational cycles of violence, in particular by confronting violence against children and young people at home, in schools, in communities, and online. (Commitment no. 8)

We encourage cities and city networks to work collaboratively to document and disrupt online extremism where it leads to violence in cities. (Commitment no. 9)

Violence is not just concentrated within a few neighborhoods and blocks but also within families and households, spurring vicious cycles of aggressive behavior. Abused children may learn that force is the primary way to resolve disputes. Children who grow up in violent neighborhoods or are bullied at school may assume that they need to act tough or everyone will prey on them.

CHICAGO, UNITED STATES

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Youths who perpetrate or suffer violence outside of school are more likely to perpetrate or suffer violence inside school as well.[29] Violent behavior might get children suspended and expelled from school, decreasing their life opportunities, narrowing their connections, and often motivating them to join gangs to gain a sense of safety and self-respect.

To break this vicious cycle, local governments must act to prevent violence against children at home and in school. Addressing bullying, whether carried out in person or remotely, requires interventions that "incorporate facets of emotional control, conflict management, stress coping, and social skills training."[30] School violence interventions should also target broader audiences rather than simply students, including parents, teachers, school administrators and even the community at large. As with street violence, punitive interventions—such as zero-tolerance mandatory expulsions—and more-visible safety measures—such as video surveillance devices and security guards—have not proven effective at reducing violence in schools.

Another important intervention to interrupt intergenerational violence is to support victims and survivors of different types of violence, particularly children and youth. Addressing the trauma of youth who have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, or survivors of families torn by violent crime or drug addiction, can decrease the likelihood that they will reproduce these destructive behaviors against themselves or others. In **Dayton, United States**, for example, the city's police department and community hospital are involving youth in outdoor activities that, according to one of the officers leading the program, "helps them to get out, to see that there's more to life, helps create bonds with other kids, and increases trust in law enforcement."[31]

Stopping school violence is not limited to interventions in educational buildings. It also concerns cyberbullying, where intentional aggressive behavior is carried out through electronic devices against victims who cannot defend themselves. In this sense, a group of researchers in Spain created a program—Prev@cib—which has been effective in preventing bullying and cyberbullying through three educational modules (information, awareness, and involvement) spread through 10 sessions with youth from 11 to 17 years old.[32] The average score measuring the likelihood of carrying out bullying and cyberbullying fell by 10 percent and 6 percent, respectively, in the experimental groups, while in their respective control groups the drops were 5 percent and less than 1 percent.

The city of **Mechelen, Belgium**, also adopted initiatives to prevent cyberbullying, to address mental health issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to offer a platform for active citizenship where young people could reach policy makers. The city also engaged youth to prevent them from falling prey to recruitment by online extremists. These can be either Islamic fundamentalist groups trying to recruit fighters or right-wing bands that proclaim the loss of "white national identity." As Werner Van Herle, the city's head of the Unit of Prevention and Public Safety, said:

> "Our response was to have offline and online safe spaces for young people to express their frustration about controversial issues, where professionals can ask them questions, raise sensitive topics, and get personal messages that are a cry for help. These forums are organized by outreaching young workers that they know, people they can relate to."[33]

Adopt a Gender Perspective

We will mainstream a gender perspective into everything we do, recognizing the different ways women and men experience violence, tackling gender-based violence, and providing platforms for leadership by women peacebuilders. (Commitment no. 11)

DAYTON, UNITED STATES

MECHELEN, BELGIUM

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Although most victims and perpetrators of lethal violence are men, cities should not disregard the frequency, intensity, and consequences of violence against women and girls, as well as nonbinary and trans individuals. Focusing particularly on women, one in every three suffers from violence worldwide, ranging from verbal aggressions, psychological abuse, rape and sexual assaults to femicides, where women are killed because of their gender.[34] Such acts constrain women's freedom, obstruct their personal and professional growth, and reduce countries' human capital and development potential. Violence against women contributes to the intergenerational cycle of violence: children who grow up watching violence are more likely to resort to violence themselves.

Preventing violence against women demands addressing the problematic aspects of toxic masculinity, such as impulsiveness, aggressiveness, and a sense of inherent superiority. One of the most effective approaches for doing so has been cognitive behavioral therapy, which involves deconstructing individuals' histories, perceptions, and values to understand and subsequently modify their behavior.

Two applications of this method are the Raising Voices' SASA! (Start, Awareness, Support, Action) approach, carried out by the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention in **Uganda**, and the Becoming a Man (BAM) Youth Guidance program, borne out of **Chicago, United States**.[35]

The SASA! approach engages individuals and communities to reflect on and transform the power relations that legitimize intimate partner violence and the spread of HIV. Communities that have implemented this approach have experienced a 52 percent reduction in the risk of violence against women.[36]

The BAM program, a school-based counseling intervention directed at middle- and high-school children, inculcates values like integrity, accountability, and respect for womanhood. The program has increased its participants' graduation rates by 20 percent and reduced crime arrest rates by 50 percent, while also affording a major return on investment given its low cost and high benefits in terms of future employment and reduced dependence on public welfare.[37]

Such interventions can be directed at victims as well as perpetrators. The Division of Health and Social Welfare at **Rijeka, Croatia**, in charge of addressing violence against women and children, works with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that apply similar guidelines. As explained by its director, Maja Pudic:

> "Women in shelters are given basic psychological support, based on behavior theory. It's about empowering, being here and now, and going forward to break the cycle of victimization."[38]

Reduce Violence by Protecting Human Rights

We urge cities to pursue public safety and security policies that minimize harm and human rights violations. (Commitment no. 10)

Unless state institutions, particularly but not only the police, are viewed as legitimate, efforts to reduce violence while upholding the rule of law will not be successful. Illegitimate police departments ultimately lose effectiveness, as citizens are less likely to cooperate with police. Police-community relations are currently, and have been historically, fraught in various cities, both in developed and developing countries.[39] Demonstrations against police abuse of force have proliferated in places such as Brazil, the United States, Colombia, India, and Nigeria. In light of this context, city governments responsible for the police should not abandon the principles that lead to greater police legitimacy but, on the contrary, seek to strengthen them. After the 2015 riots in Ferguson, Missouri, many

KAMPALA, UGANDA

RIJEKA, CROATIA

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cities in the United States, such as **Boston**, **Los Angeles**, and **Philadelphia**, committed themselves to strengthen their control over the police and improve their relationship with the community.[40]

These police interventions should be built on the foundations of **procedural justice**, which has been established as the main way to increase citizen perception of police legitimacy. Procedural justice's main components are citizen participation in the proceedings leading up to a decision, perceived neutrality of the authority in making the decision, whether the authority showed dignity and respect toward citizens, and whether the authority conveyed trustworthy motives.[41]

Procedural justice is most effective when implemented across entire police—and other state—departments. However, it can also improve outcomes in specific situations. Researchers in **Queensland, Australia**, found that police officers' use of a standardized procedural justice script during traffic stops increased levels of confidence and trust as opposed to conventional protocols.[42]

More generally, local governments can increase their legitimacy by promoting fairness, transparency and accountability. Fairness is central to balanced interventions. Governments should convey that violent actors may receive social benefits if they keep the peace, but that police and prosecutors will enforce the law strictly if they deviate from that arrangement. Local authorities should also share reports of their activities, outputs, and outcomes with the community and be open to criticism from its members. This demand for greater transparency applies particularly to the police, which are often secretive organizations. Finally, communities should be able to hold governments accountable when they fail to achieve their intended goals. Regarding the police, outcomes, such as reduced victimization, should take precedence over outputs, such as more stops, searches, and arrests, when judging their performance, as focusing on outputs can incentivize overenforcement, especially against racial minorities or vulnerable subgroups, which can increase community resentment.

How: Data, Commitment, and Partnerships

Design Evidence-Based and Data-Driven Policies

> We support adopting and investing in data-driven and evidence-based public security and safety solutions. (Commitment no. 2)

During the last decades, the number of violence-prevention policy interventions supported by scientific evidence has ballooned. Scholars have published several systematic reviews on different aspects of urban violence prevention, producing online repositories of programs and policy initiatives, such as the US Department of Justice Crime Solutions or the United Kingdom's College of Policing What Works Centre for Crime Reduction. Meanwhile, governments are regularly collaborating with academic institutions and civil society organizations to collect and analyze data to improve policy design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Local governments should ground their policies on evidence-based studies and conduct post-implementation impact evaluations, preferably by independent reviewers. This is particularly important to discard interventions that have been proven ineffective or harmful. However, governments should also innovate policy designs, adjusting existing frameworks to their local context, as opposed to directly reproducing initiatives formulated in other cities or countries. Adequate evaluation of such policy initiatives can help expand the body of evidence-based practices that other cities can consider.

BOSTON, UNITED STATES

LOS ANGELES, UNITED STATES

PHILADELPHIA, UNITED STATES

QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

In some cases, state agencies cannot collect relevant data because of lack of resources or trust from the public. In such situations, data provided by victims of violence can help prevent its recurrence. The Safecity initiative uses crowdsourced data to map cases of gender and sexual violence across India, and other countries including Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, and Nepal, revealing patterns of aggressions, fostering interpersonal solidarity, and mobilizing community engagement for policy solutions. Consequently, police have modified their routes to patrol streets where women were more often subjected to verbal or physical harassment. Cities have fixed their lighting to make it safer for women to go outside after dark, allowing them to further their education, employment, and social interactions. Having the data makes it harder for public agencies and social groups to deny reality and is the first step to changing it.[43]

Harness Political Leadership and Coordination

> We urge national governments to provide political and financial support to ongoing efforts to reduce violence by 50 percent by 2030. (Commitment no. 2)

Having better data and analytical tools will not translate into effective policies unless political leaders are committed to implementing (and thus funding) them. In this sense, local government officials' direct accountability to their constituents as well as their more intimate knowledge of citizens' main concerns can be a powerful incentive to provide better policy solutions. Furthermore, local governments can often serve as laboratories for policy initiatives that can then be duplicated across the country. As the mayor of **Pelotas, Brazil**, Paula Mascarenahas, said:

> "The mayor is the main leader that has legitimacy. They can change the culture of public servants, shake entrenched bureaucratic processes, move people out of their comfort zone. Leadership is showing that [reducing urban violence] is a priority."[44]

Mayors show that they make reducing urban violence a priority with words and, more importantly, actions. Two actions are particularly essential. First, it is advisable to set up a central coordinating unit or task force that reports directly to the mayor's office to avoid jurisdictional disputes between local agencies. Second, this coordinating body, as well as other offices implementing violence-reduction strategies, must be "sustainably staffed and substantially funded."[45] Without proper resources, even the best government actors cannot fulfill their promises of security or social services, and the targeted community will lose faith in the program.

As much as city governments can lead this effort, they cannot address all violence issues by themselves. Cooperation between local, state, and national governments is fundamental, whether to acquire legal authorizations and financial resources or to provide more-holistic solutions to the problem. Political rivalries can obstruct such cooperation, as when national governments deny cities fiscal resources or undermine local leaders' decisions.

Beyond formal institutions, repeated face-to-face interactions are fundamental to build trust and cooperation between government actors. In systems where the local government does not control the police, mayors need to constantly coordinate their operations with state and federal governments. Christian Specht, the first deputy mayor of **Mannheim, Germany**, explained that his city carried out regular meetings with both the regional police authority and the state government to ensure a smooth relationship:

> "We invited the regional police chief to a meeting with the entire cabinet every week so they could know how our government works and how we are addressing problems of safety.

MANNHEIM, GERMANY

[With the state government officials], the first two or three meetings are getting to know each other, we don't talk much about policy. It is a process of dialogue to convince the other to consider your priorities, which might be different from theirs."[46]

Promote Partnerships and Buy-In from the People

We support the exploration of partnerships with international organizations promoting city safety including, but not limited to, the African Forum for Urban Security, European Forum for Urban Safety, UN-Habitat, Peace in Our Cities, and other relevant groups. (Commitment no. 3)

We will explore relevant partnerships, and coordinate prevention, within our own cities, drawing on the expertise from all sectors, including those working on criminal justice, in the health, education, and social protection systems, and on community and economic development. (Commitment no. 4)

Partnerships between city government and civil society are crucial to ensuring successful policy implementation. Local NGOs and community organizations can provide essential territorial knowledge, remove roadblocks, and help ensure government interventions are addressing community needs, which also helps to legitimize the government's intervention. By contrast, policies that do not have broad societal support are more likely to be short lived and implemented half-heartedly. The power of nonprofits to reduce violent crime has been measured in the US context: in a given city of 100,000 people, every new organization formed to confront violence and build stronger neighborhoods led to about a 1 percent drop in violent crime and murder.[47]

Civil society organizations can also increase policy sustainability and accountability. In **Guadalajara, Mexico**, the fact that the organization Jalisco Como Vamos has taken up the promotion of social prevention of violence and has updated information to measure it helps to ensure that the government keeps these programs in its agenda.[48]

Partnerships should not be limited to local borders. International networks and city partners can provide multiple benefits to local governments, such as peer-to-peer learning experiences, connections to facilitators, or funds to kickstart policies.

International networks can also serve as a bridge between communities, local authorities, and national governments. In this sense, the Strong Cities Network supported the establishment of a community action team (CAT) in **Kumanovo, North Macedonia**, to strengthen social cohesion and build community resilience toward hate, polarization, and extremism. Preliminary results indicate the CAT has had a positive effect on these outcomes.[49]

Meanwhile, the city of **Palmira, Colombia**, has used international collaboration to circumvent its dialogue deficit with the national government. Its engagement with Peace in Our Cities helped to finance its PAZOS (Peace and Opportunities) strategy, aimed at reducing urban violence by removing and disentangling young men from illicit economies. International funds and connections with other cities in the network provided the financial and knowledge resources to involve civil society actors in implementing this strategy.[50]

GUADALAJARA, MEXICO

KUMANOVO, NORTH MACEDONIA

PALMIRA, COLOMBIA

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Conclusion

Cities all over the world face the challenge of reducing urban violence in its different forms. Many of them have recently recognized the severity of this problem and, collaborating through international urban networks, committed themselves to halving urban violence by 2030. Despite the challenges that forces such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and global inflation pose to this effort, there are a multitude of strategies and inspiring actions that cities can adopt to reach this goal.

This report has highlighted some principles of violence-reduction strategies. These need to balance between law enforcement and social-prevention interventions; focus on the most vulnerable people, places, and behaviors; approach violence as an interrelated phenomenon; and buttress state legitimacy, particularly of the police. Adopting such approaches requires, among other things, collecting and analyzing relevant data; benefiting from existing, evidence-based interventions; mobilizing political resources; coordinating with other government actors; and partnering with civil society organizations, both domestic and international.

None of these suggestions are necessarily easy to apply. Cities may face multiple political, financial, and logistical obstacles along the way. However, the expanding number of cities committed to reduce urban violence and share experiences toward that end strengthens the hope that this goal of halving urban violence can be achieved, if not surpassed, by 2030. Every individual has the right to live in a peaceful community. Working together, cities can achieve this goal and lead the way in building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

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Appendix: City Stories and Resources

1. **Los Angeles, United States:** Gang Reduction and Youth Development
The Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development was launched in 2007 to address gang violence in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. It currently provides services in 23 zones throughout Los Angeles.

2. **Oakland, United States:** Ceasefire Strategy
The City of Oakland's Ceasefire Strategy aims to reduce gang/group-related homicides and shootings through a partnership-based, intelligence-led, and data-driven violence-reduction strategy.

3. **Chicago, United States:** Becoming a Man
This school-based group-counseling program integrates clinical theory and practice, men's rites of passage work, and a dynamic approach to youth engagement to guide young men to learn, internalize, and practice social cognitive skills, make responsible decisions for their futures, and become positive members of their school and community.

4. **Dayton, United States:** Police-Community Relations Initiatives
The City of Dayton's initiatives to encourage positive police-community relations include establishing an LGBTQ police liaison, publicizing police policies, hosting community engagement events, and establishing formal partnerships with local faith-based organizations.

5. **Mexico City, Mexico:** Reduction of violence through focused deterrence
Violence in Mexico City was reduced to the lowest levels in the last 26 years, in part due to the dismantling of groups involved in criminal networks that generate violence. Local authorities credit the success to coordination between federal and local security forces in addition to addressing root causes of violence.

6. **Guadalajara, Mexico:** Jalisco Como Vamos (civil society program)
This program studies the perception of citizens on various issues, including health, education, mobility, housing and security. The goal is to measure and improve residents' quality of life.

7. **Cali, Colombia:** Cure Violence model
Cure Violence is a public-health-based methodology that sees violence as learned behavior and uses a three-pronged approach toward prevention: (1) interrupting transmission, (2) reducing risk, and (3) changing community norms.

8. **Palmira, Colombia:** Peace and Opportunities (PAZOS)
PAZOS is Palmira's social strategy for the prevention of violence, which seeks to interrupt the cyclical trend of violence and to create opportunities for the development of individual, local, and community resilience. With this program, all mayor's offices must focus resources on youngsters (between 14 and 29 years old).

9. **Pelotas, Brazil:** Pacto Pela Paz
Pacto Pela Paz serves as an international example in the fight against violence through evidence-based strategies, with an 89 percent reduction in homicides in only four years.

10. **Belo Horizonte, Brazil:** Fica Vivo! (Homicide Control Program—Stay Alive!)
This program focuses on reducing intentional homicides of people between the ages of 12 to 24 years old. It utilizes two courses of action: social protection and strategic intervention.

11. **Mechelen, Belgium:** Integration to prevent extremism
In Mechelen, officials are fighting to prevent radicalization by creating safe, clean neighborhoods and an inclusive community.

12. **Palermo, Italy:** Doing away with the Mafia
The city of Palermo is using money seized from crime bosses to fund regeneration, investing in new social, environmental, and cultural spaces.

13. **Spain:** Prev@cib (antibullying and cyberbullying program)
Prev@cib is a school bullying and cyberbullying prevention program that consists of three modules, focused on (1) informing adolescents about these problems, (2) psychological and legal consequences, and (3) creating an active role for adolescents to stand up for their peers.

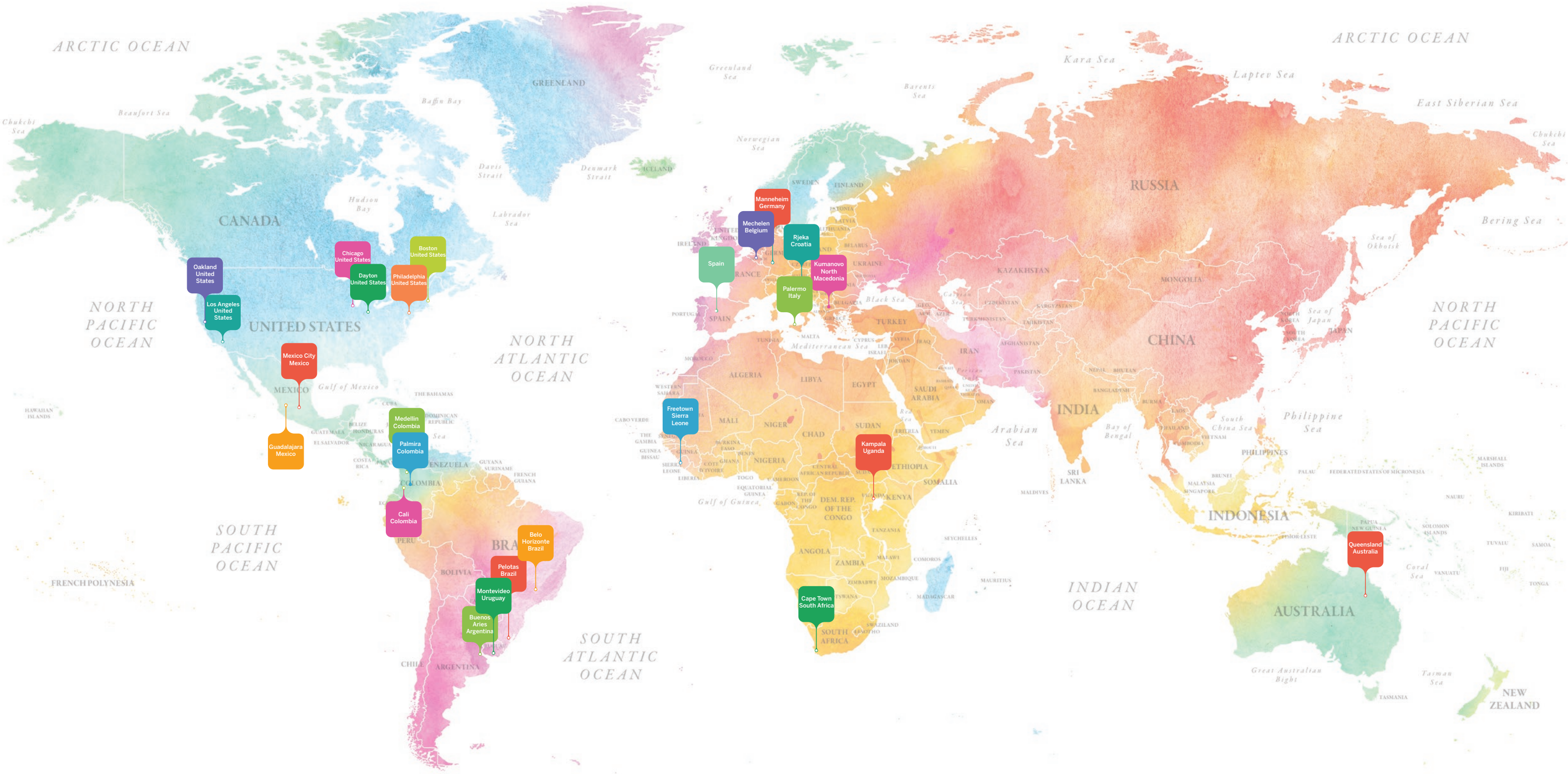14. **Kumanovo, North Macedonia:** Community Resilience Project
The Strong Cities Network's programmatic activities in Kumanovo supported the local government to establish and implement a Local Prevention Network, a municipality-based, multiactor mechanism for coordinating and delivering local prevention.

15. **Cape Town, South Africa:** Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU)
VPUU is a participatory research-based approach, featuring a strategy that incorporates international best practices with the concept of asset-based development. The work is informed by the local context and community knowledge within South Africa.

16. **Kampala, Uganda:** Center for Domestic Violence Prevention
The Center for Domestic Violence Prevention works with communities, institutions, civil society, and the government to promote the rights of women and girls to create safer, healthier, and happier relationships, homes, and communities.

17. **Freetown, Sierra Leone:** Family Support Unit against Gender-Based Violence
Family support units aim to improve services and systems, while also improving access to and developing the capacity of a gender-based violence-prevention-and-response system. Through this support, links have now been formed between the units and relevant social and legal services, including the courts, which are accessed by victims as they go through the trial period and recovery.

Map of Inspiring City Stories

Oakland
United States

Los Angeles
United States

Chicago
United States

Dayton
United States

Boston
United States

Philadelphia
United States

Mexico City
Mexico

Guadalajara
Mexico

Medellin
Colombia

Palmira
Colombia

Cali
Colombia

Belo
Horizonte
Brazil

Pelotas
Brazil

Montevideo
Uruguay

Buenos
Aries
Argentina

Manneheim
Germany

Mechelen
Belgium

Rjeka
Croatia

Spain

Kumanovo
North
Macedonia

Palermo
Italy

Freetown
Sierra
Leone

Kampala
Uganda

Cape Town
South Africa

Queensland
Australia

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Acknowledgments

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About Peace in Our Cities

PEACE IN OUR CITIES

Peace in Our Cities is a growing network of cities and community partners and international organizations working together to reduce urban violence by 2030. The network creates evidence-based, participatory exchange platforms to reduce and prevent violence in member cities while building a global advocacy movement for urban violence reduction. The network:

– **Amplifies** knowledge of the scale of the urban violence problem and solutions that have proven to work.

– **Advances** evidence-based policy solutions and peacebuilding approaches to reduce violence in urban contexts.

– **Accompanies** city leaders and community and civil society partners through peer exchanges and information access to realize ambitious targets for violence reduction.

Peace in Our Cities is cofacilitated by three organizations: the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego; Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, Center on International Cooperation at New York University; and the Stanley Center for Peace and Security. Find out more about Peace in Our Cities: www.sdg16.plus/peaceinourcities.

About the Global Parliament of Mayors

Global Parliament of Mayors

The Global Parliament of Mayors is a unique governance body of, by, and for mayors that functions as a parliament and brings cities to the world fore. It aims to organize and amplify the voice and influence of mayors across the globe, and strengthen the relationship with national governments, networks, multinational institutions, civil society groups, and business. The GPM envisions a world in which mayors, their cities, and networks are equal partners in building global governance for an inclusive and sustainable world.

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