

United Nations Development Programme PRESS RELEASE Caribbean Human Development Report 2012

Press release 1

Crime prevention, citizen engagement and fair law enforcement can yield security in the Caribbean

First Caribbean Human Development Report shows paradox of high violent crime rates, but relative trust in the police



Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 8 February 2012 – Violent crime in the Caribbean can be overcome if a right mix of policies and programmes is carried out to prevent violence, according to the first Caribbean Human Development Report 2012 launched by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) here today.

The Report entitled *Human Development and the Shift to Better Citizen Security* reviews the current state of crime as well as the national and regional policies and programmes to address crime in seven English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

While crime rates have been decreasing or stabilizing in other parts of the world, they were still on the rise in most of the assessed Caribbean nations (with recent reductions, though, in the most affected ones, i.e. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago). The Report reveals other apparent paradoxes. The percentage of people who declared to be victims of theft or other non-violent crime in the region is as low as in Japan. The sense of security varies considerably from a country to another in a way that is negatively correlated to the level of violent crime: for example, Barbados and Suriname record low levels of officially reported violent crime, and high percentages of the respondents there indicated they felt secure from crime; in contrast, the violent crime rates in Jamaica and in Trinidad and Tobago are high, and respondents in these countries expressed more negative feelings about security. The majority of the people however trust their police forces (though confidence levels were lower in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Saint Lucia).

The Report highlights the need to beef up the public institutions' capacity to tackle crime and violence – including the criminal justice system – while boosting preventive measures. The Report recommends to: prevent youth crime involvement by offering education and employ-



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ment opportunities especially to the marginalized urban poor; shift from a state protection approach to one focussing on citizen' security and participation, and; promote a law enforcement that is fair, accountable and more respectful of human rights.

“The report argues that the sense of security is greatest where the level of confidence in the institutions of law enforcement and justice is high; and that what matters most is confidence in the capacity of states to protect their citizens and administer justice in a transparent and fair manner”, said Helen Clark during the launch today in Port of Spain with Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Trinidad and Tobago, other senior officials from the region and UNDP Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean Heraldo Muñoz .

“Caribbean countries need to build more institutional capacity to respond effectively to the problems of street gangs, organized crime, and gender-based violence. This comprehensive report offers policy recommendations which can be taken up at all levels of government. UNDP stands ready to support governments in their work to address these issues,” Helen Clark added.

The following are key recommendations from the Report, which results from extensive consultations with 450 experts, practitioners and leaders, and reflects a large-scale survey with 11,555 citizens in the seven assessed countries.

- High rates of violent crime can be turned around by seeking a better balance between legitimate law enforcement and preventive measures, with a stronger focus on prevention rather than repressive only measures. Barbados appears exemplary in this respect. The country kept a relatively low level of violence partly thanks to a programme involving police, government agencies and civil society that diverted more than 3,000 young people from the criminal justice system in 30 years. A government agency has also been helping unemployed youth start new businesses for 15 years. In addition, the Barbados' Community Policing Unit educates and informs citizens to help them improve their own neighbourhoods' security, and the country offers free legal aid for the poorest and minors.
- Governments should create or invest more in units to address gender-based violence, and adopt more preventive measures to ensure that violence against girls and women is no longer tolerated, the Report stresses. Domestic violence tends to show patterns of abusive behaviour that may be disrupted in the early stages before they degenerate into life threatening and life-taking physical violence. The Report's survey shows that 11 percent of respondents in the region had experienced some sort of sexual violence, including rape and sexual assault. Among surveyed Caribbean women who were physically or sexually abused that year and reported the incident to the police, the majority were dissatisfied with the police response. Trinidad and Tobago's Domestic Violence Act mandating police forces to respond and keep careful records of all reports has however emerged as a model legislation that has influenced Grenada, Dominica and Suriname, the Report says.
- Because crime is harmful to social cohesion, Caribbean nations must better address youth violence and street gangs (whose crimes still rarely lead to arrest or conviction). The Report calls for programmes to help and protect members wishing to leave street gangs. It encourages other measures to better integrate the marginalized urban poor, notably through providing them with education and employment opportunities. Police forces also need better training to face street gangs and better respect citizens' basic human rights. The Report also suggests creating a regional surveillance system of street gangs and organized crime.
- Public security requires community collaboration. Youth organizations and groups advocating for women's rights, victim's rights and human rights should become more active, and Governments should commit to more actively engaging citizens. But citizens will be



keen to cooperate if they trust the police and justice system. The Report advocates for a fair and accountable public security, and calls for incentives to increase positive police conduct and reduce misconduct. Corruption and excessive force should be punished by the police's chain of command and in courts.

Massive public support for prevention

According to the Report, the population does not view “crime prevention” and “crime control” as an either-or proposition: They want their governments to do both. Nearly 90 per cent of the citizens surveyed support social measures to prevent crime, such as increased investment in job creation, poverty reduction, education and other initiatives to build youth's skills and competencies. Meanwhile, some 80 per cent of surveyed citizens said that “criminals should be punished more harshly.” The poll also showed that four out of ten citizens considered their countries capable to solve or better manage the insecurity problem.

Other noteworthy poll results:

Security perception:

- 46 per cent said they felt secure or very secure in their country. The sense of security was strongest in Barbados (79 percent) and weakest in Trinidad and Tobago (25 percent).
- Nine percent of respondents were victim of a crime on the previous year.
- 12.5 per cent of residents in the region reported gangs in their neighbourhood.
- 48 percent of respondents worried at some time about being a victim of crime.

Trust in police forces

- Two-thirds (66 percent) of the surveyed citizens said that they trust their police to address crime
- Trinidad and Tobago respondents had the least confidence in their police (53 percent having a great deal of or some confidence in the police) and rated police performance as the poorest (17 percent of the respondents rating the police as good or very good for controlling robbery and 17 percent for burglary).

Citizens' participation

- 56.6 percent of the surveyed citizens were ready to cooperate with others to reduce violence in their countries.
- 72 percent said that their community had done something to address crime on the previous year.

Gender-based violence

- Some 11 percent had experienced domestic violence, ranging from a low of 6 percent in Jamaica to a high of 17 per cent in Guyana.
- 37.7 percent of young female respondents were fearful of sexual assault.

About youth's views and concerns

- 40 percent of youth aged 18-24 years reported feeling “secure” in their countries.
- Over the last decade, 19.4 percent of youth had been victim of a crime.



- 21.7 percent of the youth surveyed carried weapons at night, 16.2 per cent carried weapons during the day and 32.5 percent kept weapons at home.
- Youth responders' main concerns focussed on four issues: Unemployment (27.7 percent), Violent Crime (20.0 percent), Cost of Food (13.2 percent), and Cost of living (10.5 percent).
- Over 20 percent of youth lived in a neighbourhood where a murder was committed in 2010; 29.1 percent where a shooting occurred, 16.4 per cent a rape; 44.2 percent fights in the street; 16.1 percent gang violence and 29.7 per cent witnessed a community member threaten another.
- Over 50 percent of youth find their justice system corrupt and 47 percent consider the police incompetent.



The complete Caribbean Human Development Report 2012 is available on <http://www.regionalcentre-lac-undp.org/en/hdr-caribbean>

ABOUT THE HDRs: Since 1990, the UN Development Programme has been commissioning global, regional and national Human Development Reports prepared by independent teams of experts with a view to promote public debate and solutions to problems that preclude human development. The notion of “human development” is aimed at “creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive and creative lives in accord with their needs and interests.” Other global, regional and national HDRs are available on <http://hdr.undp.org/en/>

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