

United Nations Development Programme **PRESS RELEASE** Caribbean Human Development Report 2012

Press release 2

Gang violence takes rising toll in lives, threatens Caribbean economies, new UNDP report says



Port of Spain, 8 February 2012 – Violent crime has become the main challenge facing Caribbean countries, warns the *Caribbean Human Development Report 2012* launched here today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Report entitled *Human Development and the Shift to Better Citizen Security* shows that homicide rates –gang-related included– in some Caribbean countries are exceedingly high by world standards and have worsened over time in most of the assessed countries.

The Report analysed seven English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries –Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago– and found that with the exception of Barbados and Suriname, homicide rates have increased substantially after the year 2000.

Jamaica obtained in 2009 its worst results with a rate over 60 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. This rate fell down to 52 in 2010. Worldwide statistics collected by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime indicate that Jamaica’s homicide rate was only surpassed in 2010 by El Salvador (66) and Honduras (82.1). The number of murders in Jamaica slipped to 1124 murders in 2011 (number revealed after Report’s completion), a drop of more than 300 compared to 2010 and the lowest number in seven years. The Report notes that the murder rates increased five-fold over a decade in Trinidad and Tobago, peaking beyond 40 per 100,000 in 2008 and then declining to 36 in 2010.

The Caribbean Human Development Report 2012: *Human Development and the Shift to Better Citizen Security* was launched today in Port of Spain by UNDP Administrator Helen Clark with Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Trinidad and Tobago. The Report offers a set of recommendations (see **Press Release 1**) to reduce and prevent violent crime while advancing human development.

“Violence limits people’s choices, threatens their physical integrity, and disrupts their daily lives,” said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark. “This report stresses the need to re-think our approaches to tackling crime and violence, and providing security on the ground.



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Approaches centered on citizen security, which addresses the causes of increases in violent crime including social, economic, and political exclusion, need to be followed.”

Street gangs and homicide

Street gangs (defined as street oriented youth groups whose involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity) are major obstacles to development and social cohesion, the Report shows. They affect quality of life, erode human and social capital, and divert substantial resources away from more productive uses. The Caribbean Human Development Report highlights recent research estimating that for every additional “gang” in a community, homicide rates increased by about 10 percent and for every additional gang member, the number of homicides increased by 0.4 percent.

The Report states that gang-related homicides in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are “substantial and increasing”: The number almost doubled in both countries from 2006 to 2009. In 2006, Jamaica experienced 1,303 homicides of which 32.5 per cent were gang-related. By 2009, the number of homicides had increased by 377 and 48.1 percent of the total figure was gang-related. In 2006, Trinidad and Tobago experienced 371 homicides, 26.4 per cent of which were gang-related; by 2009 the country reported 506 homicides, 34.8 per cent of them classified as gang related.

The Caribbean HDR deplores the impeding impact of violent crime on the region’s development, especially in terms of capital and population flight. It erodes confidence in the future development of countries, reduces the competitiveness of existing industries and services by, for example, imposing burdensome security costs on them, and may negatively alter the investment climate, the Report says. Insecurity leads to loss of skilled and educated citizens. Education and health care suffer because of diversion of scarce resources to control crime. Tourism is vulnerable too, while tourists expend their money in locations where there is less threat to personal safety.

The Report highlights Caribbean Community (CARICOM) estimates revealing that youth-related crime carries economic costs representing between 2.8 and four percent of a country’s gross domestic product (GDP) in expenditures to fight crime and lost revenues (jailed youth and decline in tourism). According to the study, Jamaica alone had incurred US\$529 million in annual economic costs. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Report claimed that a one percent reduction of youth crimes would boost tourism revenues by US\$35 million per year. The *Caribbean Human Development Report* invokes other effects that remain unrecorded in statistics: Youth’s low educational achievement and poor health, physical and psychological pain, suffering and trauma caused by youth violence, lower quality of life, youth’s marginalization and negative stereotypes fuelling further aggressive behaviour among youth.

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.” Past the embargo time, the Caribbean Human Development Report 2012 is made available on <http://hdr-caribbean.regionalcentre-lac-undp.org/>. Other global, regional and national HDRs are also available on <http://hdr.undp.org/en/>.

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