

PRESS RELEASE:

Reimagining Public Safety in the face of historical inequalities and emerging crisis in Cities

#BeyondTheOutbreak

With more than half of the world's population under lockdown conditions by early April, COVID-19 has cast a harsh light on inequalities and social distress in urban environments across the globe. Under lockdown conditions, there has been a spike in domestic violence, in civil unrest, and other crimes as movement restrictions, loss of income, isolation, high levels of stress and anxiety create tensions and strains at home.

We have also seen a spike in racial profiling, in mismanagement by authorities of situations that have led to violence, and thus of mistrust by our communities in the institutions that ought to protect them. The Live Learning Experience on Public Safety aimed at sharing local experiences on safer cities, and participants highlighted the importance of addressing inequalities as a cornerstone of more secure cities.

The Live Learning Experience on Public Safety held on June 25. The session was introduced by **Emilia Saiz**, Secretary General of UCLG, who acknowledged upfront the difficulties of dealing with this topic from a local and regional perspective. The spheres of government closest to citizens, she stated, deal with this issue even if often they do not have the power or resources to instigate changes. Still, it is up to local and regional governments, as the sphere closest to its communities, to trigger a conversation on security, from our own perspectives.

"It is painfully visible how fragile and vulnerable communities are. We need to gather the knowledge that we are putting together around this topic, we need to be creative, and we as UCLG, UN Habitat and Metropolis, need to contribute to develop a strong security agenda."

The Executive Director of UN-Habitat, **Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, stated that **"there can be no sustainable development without safety, and likewise no safety without sustainable development."** This imperative, she highlighted, is what led Member States of the UN to adopt the Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements. These, she highlighted, go from innovative practices that go beyond a 'police alone' approach to addressing **safety as an issue of better urban governance**, inclusive of all inhabitants, regardless of race, gender or age.

“Diverse societies require investment in social cohesion against discrimination and inequality by national and local governments and civil society,” she added.

Martha Delgado, Mexico’s Vice Minister for Multilateral Affairs and International Relations and President of the UN-Habitat Assembly, highlighted that security is a critical issue which has many interrelations with the Peace Agenda, and thus needs to be a goal in all of the global agendas. The Vice Minister argued, as well, that vulnerable communities such as LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and women, had suffered most the inequalities throughout the outbreak and were thus more vulnerable to insecurity.

“Vulnerabilities and exclusion, including domestic violence, have worsened in the context of the COVID. It is fundamental that we promote multilevel and multistakeholder alliances to achieve sustainable urban development, consider these vulnerabilities, and protect human rights”

Mxolisi Kaunda, Mayor of Durban, opened the first panel, which was moderated by **Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat**. He highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed existing inequalities, and in particular those regarding race and gender, and showcased the initiatives of Durban to curb the inequalities that lead to insecurity.

Luis Ernesto Gómez, Secretary of the Interior of Bogota, had a similar approach to security and laid out how, in the city of Bogotá, security calls for a new dimension, that of *economic security*. He also highlighted the importance of trust among communities, and the authorities, as the only way to increase compliance of social norms and help have economic security, bio-security, and traditional security.

The relationship between inequalities, urban security, and the outbreak was further addressed by **Carolina Leitao**, Mayor of Peñalolén Municipality, Santiago, who laid out the challenge of the spikes in the contagion being also concentrated in the areas of more vulnerabilities and crime. Strong inter-institutional coordination was identified by the Mayor, as critical to ensure security during the outbreak.

Mayor of Guadalajara, **Ismael Del Toro** shared how the city had aimed to transition from security *enforcement* to security *co-creation*, with an aim on tackling inequalities and that the goal now was to ensure public spaces were safe for all citizens, in particular women and people who are most vulnerable.

Guillermo Cespedes, Chief of Violence Prevention, Oakland City, highlighted how community inputs are critical to repair the relationship between institutions

and those same communities, in particular in a moment in which institutions seem more distanced than ever from their populations. To repair this credibility, Oakland argued that coordination between spheres of government is critical, as is re-evaluating where and how cities spend their budget in order to reduce inequalities that lead to unrest.

Franz Vanderschueren, Director of Urban Safety, Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile, wrapped up the first panel with an emphasis on working on urban budgets and coordination, and reimagining how the police needs to interact with communities in order to co-produce a transparent security.

The second panel was moderated by **Pablo Fernández**, from the UCLG World Secretariat. **Benjamin Magalong**, Mayor of Baguio City, argued for the need of local governments to work closely with the police, in order to ensure a transparent way of enforcing the law. Mayor of Bukavu **Meshac Bilubi Ulengabo** laid out how the efforts in the city had been geared towards curbing gender violence, and that security, in the aftermath, meant re-evaluating the relationship with the police, and ensuring a healthy recovery, from the economic and social aspect, in order to prevent the trauma of the pandemic to become violence in the future.

Paula Mascarenhas, Mayor of Pelotas, Brazil, shared the city's public security plan that is not limited to the police vision. Since 2017, she stated, Pelotas has worked on integrating the security forces and co-producing security, as well as in prevention and tending to the youth, in order to strengthen the social bonds in the community.

Santiago Saura, Councillor of Madrid, laid out the endeavors of the city in regards to curbing gender violence during the pandemic, with an increased response and resources, including more dedication in social services for women and children in line with the "Safe Cities for Women and Girls" guidelines. He further highlighted how Madrid is committed to building cities of Peace, building on the outcomes of the World Forum on Cities and Territories and Peace.

Stefanie Chetty, Director for urban policy and management at the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, South Africa, highlighted how the country aimed at responding to the spike in gender-based violence through better coordination by all levels of government and working to promote safety in public spaces. She further argued that, in the aftermath, the 2030 agenda is more powerful than ever to build safe communities.

Dr. Barbara Holtmann, author, Safer Community of Opportunity Tool (South Africa) and **Ana Falú**, UCLG UBUNTU Advisor, wrapped up the panel. **Dr. Holtmann** argued for the need to change our relationship, not only with the police, but with the law. A systemic change is essential, since law enforcement is a stakeholder in the city for safety but not *the* stakeholder. This, she stressed, is

a very long-term challenge and we need to institutionalize these views of long-term prevention so that we can fix these problems effectively. As we reimagine safety, she argued, we need to take into account mental wellness and the role of women to ensure communities remain healthy.

Ana Falú argued that violence is of the utmost concern, and present at all levels of decision-making, and to understand that security often does not mean the same for men and for women. She called to identify how the issues of discrimination intersect with racial, ethnic and religious issues. If we have to think about (post)pandemic effects, she argued, it is critical to build from the local knowledge, as well as from the vast experience of people who work for women's rights. UCLG, UN-Habitat, and Metropolis, she argued, provide us with possibility of replicating experiences, of generating development policies and incorporating our joint learning.

The session was wrapped up by **Juma Assiago**, Specialist/Coordinator – Safer Cities, HR&SIU/Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat, who emphasized how important co-production of security is and how critical it will be, moving forward, to understand urban governance and to build a new set of indicators that can allow us to assess how well the co-production of security works. Finally, he called for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, as a way to provide us with tools to build a new narrative on security.

Emilia Saiz acknowledged the calls to change how we interact with the law, and argued that to develop cities that care we need to include it in all plans, and even in budgets, highlighting how the redefinition of local finance can contribute towards this goal.

About Live Learning Experience Series:

The [**Live Learning Series**](#) hosted by UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat, has brought together more than 2,000 participants over the course of ten sessions in which participants from local and regional governments, the UN system, and partners from civil society shared their experiences, initiatives, and actions to support their communities facing the pandemic through the provision of key basic services. The series started late March and cities across the globe have shared their experiences, initiatives and actions in response to the pandemic. They also shared their frontline views on how cities may transform beyond the outbreak.

About United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

UCLG is the global organization of local and regional governments and their associations that represents and defends their interests on the world stage. Representing 70 per cent of the world's population, UCLG members are present in all world regions: Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Eurasia, Middle East-West Asia, Latin America and North America - organised in seven continental sections,

a metropolitan section and a regional forum. This network covers more than 240,000 cities, regions and metropolises and more than 175 local and regional government associations present in 140 countries. UCLG includes among its main areas of political interest local democracy, climate change and environmental protection, the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, the role of culture in sustainability, local finance, urban development and city diplomacy for peacebuilding. Visit www.uclg.org and follow [@uclg_org](https://twitter.com/uclg_org) for more.

About UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat is the UN agency focused on our cities, towns and communities. UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries supporting people in cities and human settlements for a better urban future. Working with governments and local partners, its high impact projects combine world-class expertise and local knowledge to deliver timely and targeted solutions. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a dedicated Goal on cities, SDG 11 – to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Visit www.unhabitat.org and follow [@unhabitat](https://twitter.com/unhabitat) for further information.

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