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

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) the 8th of February 2012.

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

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 employment 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 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.

Download the report - Caribbean Human Development Report 2012. Human development and the shift to citizen security