



# Conference Security, Democracy and Cities: The Future of Prevention

## Summary of session Friday 14 December 2012

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### Collective violence

With the partners of the EU Street Violence project

*Chairperson:*

**Ms. Brigitte RAYNAUD**, Secretary General, National Council of Cities, France

*Moderator:*

**Ms. Marie-Dominique de SUREMAIN**,  
Sociologist, Expert in Gender and Development, Psytel, France

*Speakers:*

**Ms. Cristina GONI**, Secretary General, International Juvenile Justice Observatory (IJJO)

**Mr. Marwan MOHAMMED**, Researcher, Maurice Halbwachs Centre/ENS, France

**Ms. Laetitia NOLET**, Coordinator of the Belgian Forum for Prevention and Urban Security (FBPSU)

**Mr. Andy POWNALL**, NCSN Violent Crime Lead Officer, United Kingdom

**Mr. Harald WEILNBOÄNCK**, European Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)

#### Introduction by the chairperson

Collective violence is a very important theme nowadays. It is a fast-evolving phenomenon, and it is difficult to treat it because the causes are numerous: education, social and cultural background, etc. Collective violence is a reflexion of our own societies, especially in France, which is struggling with globalisation and "metropolisation". Collective violence have spread in all territories (outskirts of cities and rural zones), and are everywhere.

#### C. Goni:

There are several aspects to the experience we have garnered at the International Juvenile Justice Observatory. There are in Europe various ways to treat juvenile crime. Juvenile crime produces gangs. "One of the solution envisaged is to create early intervention programmes in order to avoid school

dropout." It would consist of individual training to teach kids social and professional skills. It is important to teach children what being part of a gang entails. Many young people get involved through peers (family, friends, etc.).

Restorative justice is necessary: "It is necessary to repair the damage caused to victims at the community level." Thus to promote social, rather than penal, justice.

The fact of not belonging to a group can also be a factor in crime.

We must promote social skills in individuals, and set up collective activities.

#### **M. Mohammed:**

There are six types of collective violence:

- Utilitary collective violence with the purpose of obtaining an object
- Violence linked to social conflict: revolt, social anger against institutions
- Honour violence: honour, competition among neighbourhoods and gangs
- Hegemonic violence: against institutions, shops, etc.
- Sexist and machist violence: cases of group rapes
- Violence linked to conflicts among social groups

#### **L. Nolet:**

Presents the EU Street Violence project, which was submitted in April 2010 to the European Commission. The basis was that data on street violence are not well known, and must be more accessible.

The first phase of the research consisted in defining collective violence. It was agreed that it is violence committed by two young people or more, in the streets.

The objective of the project was to set up a database of European data on the management of street violence by groups of youths, in cities.

Youth has a dual identity: it is both an innocent victim and a dangerous criminal.

Because of the criminal law framework, this problem is over-represented in statistics and in the media. Collective violence provokes social panic. But it actually is a means of expression and an alternative way to socialise.

#### **A. Pownall (United Kingdom):**

In the UK, we don't use the expression "collective violence". We speak of gangs and of street violence. It is a very serious problem in the UK, and all the cities are affected. Alcohol is a problem, and it fuels violence among young people. Peer pressure also plays an important role in gangs. Pressure from the family, poverty and financial insecurity may also drive a young person to join a gang.

Honour and prestige are very important: young people want to do the same as their older brother or their father.

Another problem is young girls and gangs: they often are victims of rites of passage that involve sexual

activity.

One possible solution is to have former gang members becoming mentors. They try to get younger ones out of the gangs.

In terms of education, it is important to start early. We do a lot of prevention in schools.

Also, when we get a youngster out of the gang, we make sure we closely follow him. For instance by calling him on the phone every day. Once you manage to get the leaders out of the gang, the gang might be disbanded.

#### **H. Weilnböck (Germany):**

Creation in 2011 of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) by the European Commission. The term "radicalisation" means this network tackles violent extremists. The RAN works on the ideological background and on the mentality of gang members. They are seeking a sense of identity.

The RAN project is founded on the importance of ideology, mentality and religion among radicalised youths.

#### **Questions from the public**

1) How do gangs emerge? What is the background of these youths, and why do they end up in such violent, conflictive groups?

- *Marwan Mohammed:* In the 60s, most young people were in work so they were not idle. Most of the conflicts were with the police. There are now three levels of conflicts with institutions: with school (it is a very important aspect, mentioned in all interviews). Later, conflicts are extended to the neighbourhood. And then it becomes structured around the justice system, and in particular with the police.
- *Harald Weilnböck:* It is very clear that gang leaders must become aware of what their lives have been, and also the lives of their parents. For instance in Germany, some neo-nazi groups were influenced by their grand-parents. The family history has a very important impact on education.

2) What about collective violence from non organised groups?

There is indeed some confusion around the term of "gangs". There are organised gangs who are involved in drug trafficking etc. It is very different from groups of youngsters who hang out in the streets.

#### **Some reactions from the audience**

1) Spanish experience: There is a new phenomenon in Spain: the Latin gangs, originated in the United States. They are new in Spain and cause a lot of social alarm. There has been a

lot of research on this subject. Most crimes are motivated by honour, respect, the need to affirm one's identity. Unfortunately, most surveys are done without asking young people why they join those gangs.

- 2) Guiding a youngster out of a gang requires long-term work. This is more efficient than sending the leader in prison for some time (he will reoffend when out). Individual, long term monitoring is fundamental.
- 3) M. Mohammed: The problem is what can we offer to these youths? It is easy to detect those gangs. More difficult is to know what to do next. It is interesting to gather information about former offenders who have left the gang, and have built a new life. We need to know how things are going for them, in their everyday life.
- 4) A remark about school: young people who are in gangs have never dropped out of school because they actually never really adhered to school. So there is here a major challenge for public action: to prepare young people to school. Another interesting question is how do you get self esteem independently from school and work?

### **Conclusions**

- \* Collective violence is not only linked to gangs, youth groups or large criminal networks. The majority of incidents are everyday misdemeanour
- \* We must identify intervention methods and work with families and the community
- \* Importance of restorative justice
- \* Early integration programmes
- \* The question of preparation to school, and how to "hook" youngsters to school
- \* De-radicalisation programmes (for instance for religious extremists)

*This summary has been prepared on the basis of notes taken during sessions by non professional, volunteer rapporteurs. The objective was to summarise the core debates, rather than to produce detailed minutes. We apologise for any omission.*