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Thank you. Viva Rio was born in 1993 as a social movement reacting to extreme episodes of violence in the city. As we looked for preventive approach to the problem we were drawn towards the public health experience and wisdom. So what I’m going to do here is present to you a very simplified version. Strategies must be simple, so I’ll try to simplify issues to describe a framework of action which is inspired by epidemiological discussions on the epidemics of violence in Brazil, in Brazilian cities, and particularly in Rio.

We are saying that urban violence in Brazil may be seen as an epidemic, so I would isolate three elements of that in talking to you. First, to make the case that the group at risk is composed mainly of young males, the described epidemic vector as being firearms, and the critical areas where this violence grows, the nucleus of the spread of violence all over the city and society, has been the poor neighborhoods and favelas in cities.

So the first point for the youth as we look at data for the main cities in Brazil which are the state capitals, you see that while the population – for the whole population we have a rate of 24 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 1999, which was more or less the number which was quoted here when speaking of Brazil. If you look for teenagers and young adults from 15 to 29, you have a number which is 4.5 times higher than that.

This table is particularly dramatic. If you go for the average number for the whole population you get 50 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. But if you break it down by age and gender you find that for young males from 15 to 29 this rate grows to 239 per 100,000 for young males, while young females of the same age have 10 per 100,000. So about 24 young men are killed in this process for each young woman. So we’ll be lacking men very shortly in the city.

And this is a trend that’s growing. In 1983 the slide is describing all causes of death for teenagers from 15 to 19 years old. You see how it grows. The red stands for firearms death, it grows from 35% of the deaths in this age bracket to 59% in 1999. So 16 years later you have this growing process. So we are saying it’s an epidemic, a growing curve.

So if this is the main risk group – young people, and males in particular – we are saying that there must be public policy addressing this age group very strongly. And there, the main point to be addressed is education. We have in Brazil these days strong schooling of children. From 7 to 14 years old about 97% of our children are in school, we have made
progress in that light. But if you look for teenagers and young adults you find that 40% of young adults in Brazil have dropped out of school before finishing elementary school. So 40% just in Rio state amounts to 1,700,000 youths who have dropped out of school before finishing elementary school. And these days in Brazil if you do not have an elementary school diploma you are out of it. It’s like you do not have the passport to enter legal society. The minimum requisite is elementary school, and that’s already a minimum.

So strong programs are needed for the education of this age group which have drop-outs from school, young adult education, fast education, quality education. We have been engaging that in Viva Rio providing offering schooling in slums and poor neighborhoods, but obviously an NGO can only do so much. We have had over 60,000 kids learning in these classrooms we set up, but we are advocating for mass public engagement of the schools in fast-track young adult education to face the problem. And there is a very clear correlation between years of study and income. Very clear. When you finish elementary school and go to middle school (high school) in average in the country in Brazil you get about a 54% increase in your income. So the education is really significant to income.

So that’s for the risk group. For the vector, we are saying of course small arms are not the cause of violence, but they are the main tool for the spread of violence in Brazil. I will skip the demonstration of that in numbers, just to make the point that Brazil stands as one of the first countries in the number of homicides caused by firearms. So firearms have become a very strong element for homicides in Brazil over the last 20 years. The curve is really impressive going from the early 1980s to the present.

So how to approach the issue? First, violence is confusing. It’s painful but it’s also confusing. The question who is to be blamed is a very confusing question. Basically we are all to be blamed, every sector in society has some share in responsibility, so you create a kind of verbal shoot-out of accusations which is a closed circuit. So focusing on youth and firearms has become a major task for campaigning, public awareness, and mass campaigns, media campaigns. This is just a picture of one of these campaigns. These days we are also focusing on campaigns by women. Women are playing a major role by saying this has become a male pathology. So women are being asked to say “either the gun or me.” With a gun, I won’t go. Remembering the Greek women in the Peloponesian war? No guns.

So, how do you go about this. So we are talking about three levels: 1) supply. We’ve been doing studies on the small arms which are apprehended in Rio by the police and we’ve found out that about 83% of those guns are Brazilian made. The traditional image was that the bad guns are those imported, and long ones. We found that in fact 83% of them were Brazilian made and shortguns, handguns. So domestic control is very crucial. We’ve been campaigning for laws restricting radically the access of the public to guns.
The other side of that is reducing international supply. And there we’ve been campaigning internationally for the suspension of export licensing of small arms to Paraguay, because Paraguay in the southern sub-region of South America has played that middle role of reselling arms which are imported by Paraguay legally, and then they are sold in a very free market, and become illegal subsequently. So stopping exports to Paraguay has been a major issue.

And then we are finding now also that Uruguay, at the south of Brazil, has also a very free legal system which is also a doorway between legal and illegal. So the issue has become a MERCOSUR issue. Unless you have good subregional control mechanisms you cannot really diminish the flow of small arms coming into the country. So that’s for supply.

A second point is there’s lots of guns and small arms circulating already, so stock reduction is basic. We’ve been campaigning for small arms reduction. Last June we had a 100,000 small arms destroyed in Rio in a major event, and we are planning now to have a second round of about 50,000 small arms destroyed next March.

The most difficult part is curbing demand. And here a few points: First, supply is grand – it is national and international. Demand is local. Demand varies from place to place. So Brazil has a much higher demand than Argentina, and within Brazil Rio Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Recife, three major cities, have higher demand than Salvador, Belo Horizonte, or Porto Alegre, which are also major cities. And within the city of Rio, the southern part of Rio, which is the marvelous region – the beaches, and sugarloaf and all that – has about a rate of 14 homicides per 100,000. While the western zone of Rio, which is the poor region and most populous part of Rio, has 150 per 100,000. So ten times as much. So demand varies, even within the city from neighborhood to neighborhood. To understand that you’ve got to go local history. Every history is somehow local, specific. So that’s the first point. Demand is local.

Second, in our strategy to deal with the problem we are saying in the Latin American context you have to differentiate between small arms issues and drug issues. Seen from the demand side, drugs are issues of education, culture, religion, schools, family, health treatment and so forth. While small arms are related to power. Local power, neighborhood power, criminal power and so forth. So different kinds of issues. And particularly while the drugs are illegal from production to consumption, small arms are produced legally, traded legally, consumed legally, and then they go from legal to illegal in the process. So it’s a different structure. Drugs go up – the drug trade is created in the underground of society. And then people get money and grow. Guns and small arms they go down. They are produced by elite groups, state formation groups, big enterprises, militaries, so forth, and then they go down into the others. So, they are different kinds of syndromes. They get mixed in the end, but they must be approached differently.
And if the critical areas are situated in the poor areas, the public safety policy for poor areas becomes crucial to reducing demand. So we’ve developed an experience over the last year in Rio where we lobbied for the creation of a special police unit specialized in policing poor neighborhoods in a community policing approach. It’s called GPAI. I’d love to talk for 15 minutes about GPAI, our chairman will not allow me to do so, so I’ll just say two points about it. Locally it passes on the message to the neighborhood and the dealers, that here GPAI is mostly concerned with curbing the use of firearms. So drugs are illicit and people will be arrested if seen, if caught publicly selling drugs, or even consuming them according to present Brazilian law. But that’s not a priority. The priority is curbing armed violence. So this is producing a very new approach at the neighborhood level about what you are talking about when bringing the police in.

And second point, and then I finish, is that police become, in this context a neighborhood which was in the hands of a parallel power, drug dealers, when the police enter and become a 24 hour a day presence, the police become a crucial factor for local development. There is a close association between public safety and human rights in the community, meaning the right to speak, to associate, to talk about problems, especially security problems, breaking the law of silence which is traditional. And two, by the presence of this new police unit, social work, governmental and NGOs, come in to try to join projects of local development especially aimed at youth. So we are disassociating youth with the drug dealers and with the informality of life and with the risks of life. So that’s the strategy, GPAI, this new police unit is experimenting there. It has been very successful in this past year. In the 6 months prior to GPAI we had had 10 homicides in this particular slum of 15,000 people, and after GPAI we had zero homicides in the last year. And no shoot-outs. But in great part of this is due to GPAI and the whole strategy, and also to astrology or the divine providence because that also counts. And in fact it’s been an experience that we hope can be expanded to other neighborhoods and opens up a perspective beyond the vicious circle of deadly violence which has confused us so much over the last 20 or 30 years in Brazil. Thank you.