

The Leipzig Statement of the 13th German Congress on Crime Prevention
Committed citizens – a safe society

The quality of a society is also measured by the extent to which its citizens get involved in public activities and are willing to make a voluntary commitment. Civic commitment also makes an important – indeed indispensable – contribution to the safety of a society and the feeling of safety of the population.

The 13th German Congress on Crime Prevention (in Leipzig from 2 to 3 June 2008) therefore focuses on this commitment under the motto 'Committed citizens – a safe society' in the speeches, consultations and discussions and the expert report 'Civic commitment in crime prevention' by Dr. Wiebke Steffen.

On the basis of this expert report, the German Congress on Crime Prevention, its permanent event partners and this year's hosting event partners state as follows:

Civic commitment is widespread in Germany.

- In Germany, almost **70% of the population** 14+ years old takes part in public life through clubs, organisations, groups and institutions for purposes other than their private and professional life. About half of them (36% of the population) are committed in a voluntary sense in that they assume certain long-term tasks within these social groups.
- In addition to these more than 23 million people who are already voluntarily committed, there is a great potential for the expansion and intensification of civic commitment.
- Furthermore, civic commitment does not just mean the 'classic honorary post' or a person's regular voluntary work or involvement in public life – i.e. not just the commitment of the aforementioned 70% of the population but also all the other forms that reflect commitment like for example civil courage, donations, the participation in a civic foundation.
- The range of the commitment covers almost all areas of society. Many of them depend on this commitment; some would perhaps cease to exist without it.
- However, a significant **structural change** in civic commitment has been noticeable for the last decades: Civic commitment is now more seldom a 'lifetime commitment' than before, people do not just want to

get involved in an association or a club but also in new, informal structures and thus organise their field of activity themselves, have co-determination and co-organisation opportunities; what is needed is new access to active participation opportunities that harmonise the individual commitment offer and the social commitment requirement.

Civic commitment is the social capital of our society; it can prevent crime and reduce the fear of crime.

- When so many citizens are publicly active in Germany, then this is also an indicator for a high degree of **social capital**, social solidarity and social quality of the German society.
- Civic commitment is not just a component of this social capital, it also creates social capital: the solidarity and the understanding between the members of a society, the reliability of shared rules, standards and values and last but not least the confidence in the institutions of the country.
- It therefore also has a positive effect on the **safety** of a society and the **feeling of safety** of its citizens – and that applies in general without citizens actually getting specifically involved in crime control.

Successful crime prevention is not possible without civic commitment

- Crime prevention is deemed to be generally understood as a task, of the whole of society, in which also and especially committed citizens can get involved.
- The fact that citizens cannot only get involved in crime prevention but should and even must if crimes are to be prevented or mitigated in their consequences and the safety situation and the feeling of safety are to be improved can be illustrated by the civic commitment to crime prevention through civil courage, the willingness to help and report, through victim aid, delinquent assistance and probation assistance and through networks for safety at municipal level.
- These examples show that civic commitment is established in crime prevention and has positive effects on safety and the feeling of safety. A safe society would not be possible without committed citizens.

Using commitment potentials for crime prevention

- The commitment level however is still relatively low compared to other social areas and the commitment potential has not been fully exhausted by far. There are therefore great opportunities – and also necessities – for the extension and intensification of civic commitment to crime prevention. For this, it is particularly necessary to
- take into account the **structural change** in civic commitment, that fits in well with civic commitment to crime prevention, in which the incident-related and problem-related cooperation is needed rather than a life-time commitment and in which new informal structures have occurred.
- develop a **culture of recognition** that suits the variety and difference of the commitment types in crime prevention and credibly makes clear to those committed that they are really indispensable for making things happen. The culture of recognition also includes the training and further training of committed citizens and the evaluation of crime-preventive measures and projects.

Committed citizens – a safe society

The German Congress on Crime Prevention calls on those responsible in politics, clubs, associations and other civil groups at municipal, state and national levels

- to exploit all opportunities to present, show, recognise and appreciate crime-preventive commitment in public and particularly in the media,
- to especially counter the still existing prejudices against people who are committed to safety through crime-preventive action,
- to open up new commitment opportunities and to establish a more civic-oriented culture of planning and decision-making in the public areas relevant for crime prevention,
- to meet the need of those committed for self-determination and co-organisation, to further develop existing qualification offers and measures and introduce additional ones, to evaluate projects and measures and to build networks and infrastructures,
- to strengthen and promote the crime-preventive commitment by companies and company employees.

The German Congress on Crime Prevention strongly supports

- the report 'Civic commitment on its way to a sustainable civil society' by the Commission of Inquiry assigned by the lower house of German Parliament and encourages a permanent observation of civil commitment, also especially in crime prevention,
- the continuation of the 'volunteer surveys' commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Family Matters, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and encourages a more in-depth and differentiated recording of voluntary commitment in the crime prevention area.

Leipzig, 3 June 2008