In shadow of violence

VISITORS to Limerick are struck by the extent and quality of urban renewal, the splendid university campus, the glories of the Hunt Museum. They see a vibrant, prosperous, youthful population.

Few see the darker side. This year, six people have died in suspicious circumstances in the city. In a little over two weeks, four people have died violently, three from stabbings.

The violence has little or no impact on the daily lives of most citizens. They naturally resent the tag "Stab City". Their feelings have been expressed most frequently and colourfully by a local Fianna Fail deputy, Minister of State Willie O'Dea.

But the figures cannot be denied. Comparisons, especially with Dublin which has of course a vastly higher population, show the Limerick murder rate out of all proportion to the city's size.

And ignoring the reality will not cause it to go away. Before the city's difficulties can be alleviated, the authorities need to know their causes. So do the law-abiding majority.

Wretched social conditions prevail in parts of Limerick, but that is true of other cities. Family feuds and gang warfare are not unique to one city; and there is no obvious reason why the use of the knife should be so common.

One aspect that should be rigorously investigated is the illegal drugs trade. Limerick appears to be the centre of import and supply for a large region. Fortunes have been made from the traffic.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan of Labour has called for an inquiry by the Criminal Assets Bureau. The CAB has a striking record of success, and has shown that the ideal place to hit gangsters is in their pockets.

But the CAB alone cannot solve the city's problems. Chief Superintendent Gerry Kelly has sought extra resources for the Gardai. His request should be granted promptly, and Limerick given the best available standards of law and order. The citizens deserve no less.