Workshop on:
“Improving the Role of the Police in Asia and Europe”

Dates: 03-04 December 2008
Venue: Delhi, India

I. Concept / Background

The police can play a vital role in providing the security environment necessary for peaceful political and economic development, and are at the forefront of tackling international security issues and counter-terrorism. Further they are in charge of the “day-to-day” law enforcements and combating crime. The provision of security and the sense among citizens and communities that routines of their lives are, to a reasonable degree, protected by the actions of social control apparatuses of the state – is one of the basic demands laid against the state by its society. The role of the police matters beyond their merely functional work. The actions of the police will both reflect and affect societal changes and the meaning and legitimacy which society vests in state authority.

Security forces, however, may also actively provoke or deepen conflicts, especially where there is a lack of civilian oversight or countervailing watchdog on their conduct. This important public function can also on the other hand, place severe stress on inter-communal relations in some situations – particularly in multi-ethnic communities where communal tensions may exist. Further, in the post-September 11 climate of apprehension and fear over the threat of terrorism, police agencies at all levels must develop strategies and environments that prevent terrorism from flourishing on one hand, while certain basic rights of individuals need to be protected on the other. A competent police force is vital to enhancing governance and ensuring greater public trust in the state.

There is a growing consensus that the police must be specifically trained including maintaining effective relations with the local society and serving the public in their jurisdiction.

In this context, the oversight role is a crucial one in establishing a belief in the impartiality and fairness of the policing structures. This oversight role can include the Ombudsman institution in some contexts, human rights commissions, regional and international organisations as well as civilian structures entrusted with an oversight and “watchdog” function (e.g. media and NGO’s).

This workshop will examine existing oversight mechanisms in Asia and Europe and their role as a mediator between the constabulary and local communities. Further it will look at inter-sections between civilian (external) oversight, internal disciplinary mechanisms and other accountability/ incentive structures in policing as well as rules of engagement for the police and best practices to enhance police and community partnerships.

II. Objectives

To formulate recommendations to concerned actors for the improvement of the role of police and Asia and Europe.

- Examine existing oversight mechanisms for policing in Asia and Europe
- Find possible ways of how oversight institutions / actors in Asia and Europe can promote trust between local communities and the police
- Determine the factors that promote awareness, trust and confidence with the local society and share best practices
- Address discrepancies between citizens needs and current policies/procedures
III. Project Description

The workshop will be held over two days on "Safeguard and Oversight Mechanisms in Improving the Role of the Police in Asia and Europe" to continue the new Democratisation and Justice series.

Prior to the workshop one Asian and one European researcher will be commissioned to draft a background report on existing oversight mechanisms in all 43 ASEM member countries. This report has the aim of sharing information and establishing a common ground for discussion with the participants before the workshop.

The workshop itself will be divided into three sessions.

1. Oversight Mechanisms

Asia and Europe focus on different oversight mechanisms. This session will analyse, and compare different existing approaches and discuss best practices in both regions. A background report was written to establish a common ground for participants and to stimulate discussions at the workshop. It will not be exhaustive but will seek to highlight key factors that influence policing practices, particularly in new democracies or societies in transition. It will present an Asian perspective, giving an overview on selected Asian Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM)1 member countries as well as a European perspective, giving an overview on selected European ASEM member countries.

2. Rules of Engagement

When police must resort to violence they should use only appropriate violence as authorised by the law. In cases of excessive use of violence or abuse of police powers, police officers must be made subject to the courts as would any other citizen. This session will discuss methods in both Asia and Europe of accountability and transparency of the use of violence and monitoring in practice (reporting on the use of violence), rules for the use of weapons and promoting human rights within the police.

3. Police and Community Partnerships

Be it crime prevention, terrorism prevention or conflict prevention within a multi-ethnic society, responsibility for public safety and the maintenance of law and order rest, for the most part, lies upon the shoulders of the local policing authorities. Communication and public education are also important components of an effective crime prevention initiative. The development of strategic community-based information networks is essential. The foundation of a positive relationship for the police and its community is to practice respect for the citizens whom they serve on a day-to-day basis. Hence the importance of inculcating the police culture with good practice and promoting Police-Community partnerships are of great significance.

Format

The sessions will start with comprehensive papers (a balance of Asian and European speakers) designed to launch the discussion. The papers will be prepared for distribution among the participants prior to the meeting in order to better prepare the dialogue and also include 2-3-key recommendations with regards to Asia-Europe cooperation.

Two selected rapporteurs, one from Asia and one from Europe, who will synthesize the outcomes of the meeting.

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1 The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) brings together Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Laos, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom, Vietnam, the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat.
The workshop will be followed by a one day Advisory Group meeting of the Asia-Europe Democratisation and Justice series on the 5th of December 2008.

IV. Outcomes

- A publication with selected papers
- A short policy brief immediately after the meeting to be sent to the Board Governors of the Asia-Europe Foundation, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Contact Points and Senior Officials, the ASEM Foreign Ministries and other relevant ministries (such as justice and interior ministries), Ombudsman institutions, human rights commissions and relevant inter-governmental institutions (Council of Europe etc.)
- A final report of outcomes prepared by the two rapporteurs of the meeting to be sent to the same constituency as above.
- Increased understanding and enhanced awareness of issues related to oversight and improving the role of the police in Asia and Europe
- Greater dialogue between local communities and the police in both regions

V. Target Participants

30 participants from oversight institutions such as Ombudsman Offices in Asia and Europe, head of police forces and national police commissions, representatives from international and regional institutions (such as relevant bodies in the Council of Europe, the ASEAN Secretariat and the EC; EUROPOL etc.), international and national NGOs, field practitioners in the area of policing, representatives from police academies and from the academe, think tanks and research institutes.

VI. Partners

The workshop is organised in partnership with the Hanns Seidel Foundation Indonesia and the Developing Countries Research Centre (DCRC) of the University of Delhi.