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POLICE REFORM IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES: WHAT WE KNOW AND WHAT WE STILL NEED TO KNOW

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The full report can be accessed online at:
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The rising number of organizations carrying out police reform evidences the increasing importance attached to it. The United Nations (UN) is joined in police reform efforts by bilateral donors, a large and diverse number of international organizations, nongovernmental organizations and, increasingly, the private sector. The circumstances in which reformers intervene have expanded as well. Internationally led police reform originally took place in the aftermath of conflict; now it is also part of a broader conflict prevention strategy.

Given the fast pace and wide scope of police reform activities, it is understandably difficult to assess experiences and draw out lessons from the wide range of initiatives being conducted. Based on desk-based research and interviews, this study examines what we know so far about police reform, and concludes by setting out what more needs to be learned in order for current police reform strategies to become more effective and sustainable.

POLICE REFORM: WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR

1. Police reform takes a long time, involves transforming power relations in a society and requires more than technical tinkering with police doctrine or practice.

Police reform, like any effort to change an institution, is intensely political. Power distribution and relationships will change, and resistance is to be expected.

2. Organizational change of any kind is never easy. This is doubly so for police in post-conflict or crisis countries.

UN initiatives on police reform must recognize that changing the culture or ethos of an institution is never easy. For most post-conflict and crisis states, the police

believe that crime and disorder will decrease as a result of the reforms. Part of the challenge for international reformers is to combine the human rights perspective on policing (revising codes of conduct, erecting oversight bodies and training) with the professional law enforcement and crime control perspective.

4. Effective reform requires paying attention to the institutional development of the police and broader criminal justice institutions.

Police reform must be carried out in tandem with judicial reform. Modernizing laws, training judges, making courts more efficient and humanizing prisons are all part of "rule of law" efforts.

5. Management tools, sound administration practices and fiscal controls are essential for building up the sound foundations of a police.

"For most post-conflict and crisis states, the police have to move from a model based on repression and social control to prevention and investigation."

have to "move from a model based on repression and social control to prevention and investigation." The population's historic and well-justified mistrust of the police must be overcome, and this will take time. The new or reformed police must earn the trust of the population, and one mistake or reversion to the past can have a devastating impact. In short, the reality is that there is almost no room for error, especially in the early days of police reform, so getting off to a good start is vital and generating early, tangible results is crucial as well.

3. Respect for human rights and effective crime fighting go together: police reform cannot be seen as resulting in "weak policing."

A police respectful of human rights is not soft on crime. The police themselves will reject reform if they believe that it will lead to greater criminality or will somehow undermine police officers' effectiveness. Police must

Tools of modern management, sound administration, financial controls and objective standards for judging performance are pivotal issues. Strong leadership, in the police and in wider

government officialdom, will also help determine the success or failure of police reform efforts.

6. Some of the best ideas come from the ranks: police officers should have a meaningful role in all aspects of the reform process.

Another key element in police reform is the time-consuming and difficult work of consulting police officers to get their views on what works and what does not. Reform cannot be simply decreed from above. While the support of top management is crucial, each person in the force must feel that s/he has a stake in change. The rank and file must have a say and be heard out, or reform efforts will not take root.

7. Local history, traditions and culture must be acknowledged in all police reforms; failing to anchor programs in local realities means that the programs, too, will fail. Broad-based expertise is required.

In their programming, international actors must be thoroughly familiar with the local traditions, practices and conditions regarding policing and security. A deep understanding of how the police were structured and organized in the past is essential. This type of understanding requires broad-based expertise. Changing the police is too important and complex to be left to human rights or police experts alone. Given the complexity of reform, it would be advantageous to have assistance from those with expertise in management, personnel, logistics, communications, procurement, data management, institutional reform, psychology, sociology, criminology, public information campaigns, anthropology and community relations.

8. International actors must offer more than just criticism of police; identified problems require positive solutions.

Blaming or shaming the police into reforming their behavior can be counterproductive.

Feeling under siege, the police may refuse to cooperate, share information or participate in reform efforts, or even revert to past behavior.

Experience across several peace operations shows that a "diagnostic approach" of analysis, diagnosis, planning, implementation, review and assessment has proven to be the best approach to police reform in post-conflict countries.

9. Internal and external bodies responsible for oversight of the police must be independent, objective, transparent and effective.

It is important that the public views a reformed police as qualitatively different from their predecessors. No police reform will be successful without a heavy emphasis on police accountability. The police as an institution must demonstrate a commitment to human rights that goes beyond training and includes oversight bodies that investigate and punish misconduct; incorporate human rights principles into all operating procedures including recruiting, promoting and

managing personnel; and publicly report on investigations into abuses and on crime statistics in general.

10. The entire system of incentives and rewards needs to reflect the new police ethos of serving and protecting the public; recruitment and promotion must be based on objective criteria.

As a corollary to accountability, a new police culture that rewards ethical behavior and punishes corruption and abusive practices must be established. Police reform must address the institution's entire system of incentives and rewards and must elevate integrity as the ultimate value. Recruiting must be based on fair, transparent and objective criteria that are publicly announced, and promotions, salary increases, favored postings and other legitimate perks must derive from a rigorously objective assessment of performance, eliminating political favoritism and nepotism. It is not enough to say that top management must support the

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change; the process must go deeper and also include department heads and station chiefs. Integrity and the "right way" must be recognized and rewarded, or the new ethos will never take hold.

WHAT WE STILL NEED TO KNOW

For police reform to become more effective and sustainable, a number of questions require further research and analysis:

- How can the need to remove unqualified or abusive members of an existing police force be balanced with the need to observe standards of fairness and due process, in a context where time is of the essence?

- How can police reform best be integrated with the equally important imperative to reform general public administration and the judiciary? We have seen that the former usually outpaces the latter two, creating new problems. How can these problems be anticipated and mitigated?
- How can people with the potential to become senior police managers be quickly identified and given the appropriate institutional support to take charge as soon as possible?
- What are the best approaches for engaging key representatives of civil society in the police reform effort, particularly in a post-conflict society whose people may have no trust in the police or the state?
- What can be learned from the experts in "change management" and organizational psychology about the best way to create a new system of incentives/rewards and sanctions to transform the ethos and organizational culture of the police or other rule of law institutions?
- What are the best sources of ongoing funding for the new police, and how can international actors help ensure that reform efforts will be sustainable in every way, but especially financially, once the international community leaves?
- How, beyond falling crime rates, can progress be measured? How are good governance and public confidence and support measured? What are good indicators? How can public opinion surveys be designed to measure whether the police inspire trust and confidence in the people they serve?

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About this Policy Paper

This report is a condensed version of a study prepared by the author for HURIST, a joint program of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery.

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