

Police Reforms

Police Reforms: Too Important to Neglect, Too Urgent to Delay

CHRI's police reforms programme aims to realise increased demand for and achievement of police accountability and reform throughout the Commonwealth.

The police reforms programme targets policy makers, police organisations, activists at the grassroots, civil society groups, the media and the general public to further its aims for reform and the implementation of democratic policing. It seeks to do this through a combination of advocacy, education, research and networking.

CHRI published a report on police accountability in the Commonwealth for the 2005 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. This report explores the issues around policing in the Commonwealth, sets out a democratic policing framework, considers the critical limbs of accountability that must be in place in a democratic police organisation and puts forward a roadmap for reform. Electronic copies of the report are available [here](#) , or you can request a hardcopy [here](#) .

What is police reform and why do we need it?

In too many countries, governments are failing in their primary duty to provide the public with an honest, efficient, effective police service that ensures the rule of law and a environment of safety and security. Today, membership to the Commonwealth is premised on countries practicing democracy - and democratic governance requires democratic policing. The only legitimate policing is policing that helps create an environment free from fear and conducive to the realisation of people's human rights.

The existing police systems in many Commonwealth states are a legacy of colonial rule that have been shaped by post-colonial histories. The consequences of poor policing include

brutality and torture, extra-judicial executions, a lack of due process, impunity, corruption, bias and discrimination and public fear, anger and resentment.

The Commonwealth has some inspiring examples of governments and police organisations working towards reform. Some police organisations have undergone varying degrees of modernisation and transformation. Impetus for reform has generally arisen out of public concern over rising crime or from incidents of police abuse or failure, accompanied by a willingness to learn and address changing contexts.

What is democratic policing?

CHRI believes that democratic nations need democratic policing, which gives practical meaning to the Commonwealth's promise of democracy and good governance and is applicable to any context - rich or poor, large or small, diverse or homogenous.

Critical to the success of democratic policing is the principle that the police should be held accountable: not just by government, but by a wider network of agencies and organisations, working on behalf of the interests of the people, within a human rights framework.

Democratic policing is both a process and an outcome. The democratic values of the Commonwealth lay down a sound foundation for the development of democratic policing.

A democratic police organisation is one that is

- accountable to the law and not a law unto itself
- is accountable to democratic government structures and the community
- is transparent in its activities
- gives top operational priority to protecting the safety and rights of individuals and private groups
- protects human rights
- provides society with professional services
- is representative of the community it serves

A Model for Police Accountability: 3 + 1

An effective model includes oversight by:

- democratically elected representatives (in national parliaments if police are structured at the national level, in state legislatures if police are organised at the state level, and in local councils if policing is organised at the local level);
- an independent judiciary;
- a responsible executive (through direct or indirect policy control over the police, financial control, and horizontal oversight by other government agencies such as Auditors-General, Service Commissions and Treasuries); and
- at least one independent statutory civilian body, such as an Ombudsman or a Human Rights Commission or, ideally, a dedicated body that deals with public complaints about the police.

How to get around this website?

Use the navigation buttons at the top of each page to find out more information on CHRI's policing work in [India](#) , or internationally (in [East Africa](#) , [West Africa](#) , the [Pacific](#) , [South Asia](#) and the [Caribbean](#)).

If you are looking for information on compliance with the Supreme Court directives in India, click [here](#) . Information on the Model Police Act is available [here](#) .

If you are interested in CHRI's conference and workshop programme, click on the [Workshops](#) button. This will take you to information about upcoming CHRI workshops, other upcoming workshops related to policing, as well as to reports on each of CHRI's past workshops. To find out about other upcoming activities or events, watch the side bar on the right.

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For the latest policing developments and news, press the [News Updates](#) button. If you want to access information on international, Commonwealth and regional standards, or copies of police legislation for particular jurisdictions, click on the [Laws and Standards](#) button.

CHRI's 2007 report to the Commonwealth Heads of Government, Stamping Out Rights, examines the impact of anti-terrorism laws on policing. For more information on CHRI's work on anti-terrorism and policing, click here. Click [here](#) to read Stamping Out Rights and [here](#) to contact a member of the team.

To read about a Commonwealth Expert Group on Policing click here.

If you have any questions or feedback, or would like to get in touch with a member of CHRI's police team, click [here](#).