

**Police reform: An exchange of experiences from South Asia  
Roundtable facilitated by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative  
March 23 and 24 2007  
Concluding statement**

The state of policing in South Asia evokes serious concern. Widespread public dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the state of policing exists. Urgent action is needed.

Police reform was the subject of discussion by prominent civil society groups, police and government officers, academics, journalists and lawyers from Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who met at a roundtable in New Delhi on 23 and 24 March 2007.

**Participants noted the following:**

Across South Asia there is evidence of increasing fear of crime and threats to public order. It is clear that the present performance of the police is unable to deal with everyday policing concerns, and still less with extraordinary situations of lawlessness and violence.

We recognise that police work under difficult circumstances and with severely restricted resources. However, we believe this does not justify either the underperformance of police or their frequent use of illegal and brutal methods.

The public of our countries are increasingly disenchanted. Often the most vulnerable have negligible access to good policing and justice.

Governments of the region have been resistant or slow to respond to the need for effective police reform.

It is the duty of all South Asian governments to provide their populations with safety and security in accordance with the rule of law and human rights. Present policing in the region does not ensure this.

We condemn the illegitimate use of force, torture, extra-judicial killings, disappearances and persecution of individuals and groups. We demand prompt action on financial and political corruption within policing. The pervasive culture of impunity that prevails in South Asia must be transformed into a culture of accountability.

The police must be an essential service and not a force.

Meaningful improvement in police functioning cannot happen without prior consultation with the public across our countries. Equally, no laws or policing arrangements will be effective, unless the public are involved in reform efforts and future monitoring.

Police and governments in South Asia must conform to their international obligations.

**Participants demand that:**

- Governments make a clear public commitment to vastly improved policing that upholds human rights and democratic norms and values
- Governments immediately initiate a serious process of systemic police reform
- Any process to change current policing must be transparent and participatory

- The public and civil society must be encouraged and equipped to engage fully in the change process
  
- Reform must include:
  - strengthened accountability mechanisms;
  - better performance evaluation and monitoring;
  - training and constant retraining of police personnel at all levels; and
  - credible selection, transfer and promotion arrangements for police
  
- Command responsibility be strictly enforced
  
- Operational responsibilities of police are insulated against illegitimate political interference
  
- Complaints against police are investigated by an independent civilian body, promptly and in a manner that creates confidence within the public
  
- Protection of human rights defenders and those who file complaints against the police is assured

Reform is only as good as its implementation and should therefore be periodically monitored.