



Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic & Social Council of the United Nations

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Executive Committee

December 12, 2008

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EMINENT CITIZENS CALL FOR POLICE REFORM

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The events that recently transpired in Mumbai were horrific and tragic. As the Prime Minister pointed out in his speech to the nation on November 27, police reforms need to be undertaken if we are to effectively address threats to national integrity. It must be recognized that reforming our police so that they are a professionalized service that is not misused for partisan purposes is central to ensuring basic security and combating terror. Doing so will ensure that protecting all Indians is the first priority of law enforcement and the foundation for good governance. Although such reforms have been discussed for years without much progress, we urge all politicians in the aftermath of Mumbai to finally acknowledge that police reforms are too important to neglect and too urgent to delay.

Indians are very angry. They are angry that there are people in this world that wish to harm innocent persons with their mindless violence. They are angry that those tasked with protecting them have failed miserably in that effort. And they are angry that politicians of all parties have wilfully allowed policing to deteriorate to a point where it cannot provide citizens protection in ordinary circumstances let alone in emergencies. Fighting terrorism and other crime is not possible on the basis of a foundationally weak and compromised police service that is used as a private handmaiden rather than as a truly independent public service. The present situation stems from three major factors:

1. Undue and illegitimate political interference in all aspects of policing;
2. Neglect by governments of the poor conditions of the constabulary. Examples include corrupt recruitment procedures, faulty and misdirected training, bad management, abysmal pay and inadequate equipment and infrastructure;
3. A lack of accountability for the performance of everyday duties like crime prevention and investigation, as well as for wrongdoing, bias, and corruption.

Reforming the police swiftly is entirely possible. Clear and practical recommendations, valid even today, were made by the National Police Commission in 1979. Subsequent committees, and most recently the Soli Sorabjee Committee, have repeatedly endorsed these recommendations. And in 2006 the Supreme Court of India issued seven clear time-bound directions to the Centre and State governments to set in place mechanisms that will address the aforementioned infirmities of policing. Unfortunately, neither the Centre nor the States have complied with these directions and indeed most governments have subverted, diluted or disobeyed them.

The directions policing should take in the future - of being a *service* in support of the law rather than a coercive *force* shoring up political patrons currently in power - are clear. The people demand that the situation be remedied at the earliest.

We therefore urge that:

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Registration Act; Registration No. DIT (E)/2005-2006/C-390/94/1226 U/S 80-G

Supported by: Commonwealth Journalists Association, Commonwealth Lawyers Association,
Commonwealth Legal Education Association, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association,
Commonwealth Press Union, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association.

- **All political parties immediately agree that police reform and independent policing be treated as a bipartisan issue above the compulsions of competitive politics;**
- **All political parties in power, at the Centre and in States, take immediate and effective action towards demonstrable police reform;**
- **All national political parties, in advance of the next national election, declare in their manifestos the practical steps they commit to take on police reforms during their first 100 days of office.**

Adherence to these suggestions will ensure that the police are more responsive and better prepared to deal with security threats and that they are allowed and compelled to do their job professionally. The people of India can afford no less since the price of inaction is far too high.

With our highest regards,



B.G. Verghese

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Anyone wishing to join the campaign for comprehensive police reform please contact the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative at policereforms@humanrightsinitiative.org or visit www.humanrightsinitiative.org.