

## Consultation Statement

People's Participation in Police Reform: A Consultation for the North East –  
February 21-22 2007, Guwahati

Implement Supreme Court directives on police reforms: civil society groups

Prominent civil society groups, media representatives and academics from different parts of the North-east today call upon all state governments in the region to implement without delay the Supreme Court directives aimed at sweeping reforms in the police system across the country, making police more responsive to public concerns.

“Good policing is policing that protects everyone’s person, property and rights,” was the consensus reached at the end of a two-day consultation organized jointly by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES), the Centre for Organization Research and Education (CORE) and North East Network (NEN).

The police in India continue to be governed by the 1861 Police Act; several police commissions have been set up to review the functioning of the system but most recommendations have been ignored by successive governments.

The court directives, if implemented, will ensure a dramatic reduction of political interference in police matters, proper recruitment procedures and the development of a professional and sensitized police service, critical to a region as complex as the North-east.

After decades of public pressure, lack of political will and continued poor policing, a police reform process has begun in India. Civil society groups across the country, not just in the North East, must mobilize their supporters and close ranks to ensure that these changes become sustainable and make a change to the lives of all people as well as the police.

The Court has said its directives are non-negotiable and binding and that all states across the country must file affidavits of compliance by April 10, 2007, or face contempt of court. The court’s verdict, delivered unanimously on September 22 last year, was aimed at enabling functional autonomy for the police and accountability for conduct and performance.

The participants, while supporting the implementation of all seven directives of the Supreme Court, hold several concerns including the transparency of state governments and public participation in the reform process.

The directives include setting up two new oversight bodies - State Security Commissions, which would evaluate the performance of the state police and

Police Complaints Authorities at the district and state levels. This statement further declares that the State Security Commissions and Police Complaints Authorities should be independent and have extensive participation of civil society members.

Participants expressed concern that the proposed National Security Commission for selection and placements of chiefs of Central Police Organizations (CPOs) could be politically malleable as it would be headed by the Union Home Minister and staffed by leaders of the CPOs and undefined “security experts” and give control to the central government.

Participants note that the police work in extremely disturbed and challenging situations in the North-east. Further, the army and paramilitary forces work under legislation that arm them with sweeping powers. They also cited evidence of extensive human rights abuse and targeting of human rights defenders.

In the North-east, the response to the court’s deadline has been mixed, with Sikkim and Meghalaya declaring full compliance while Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura have complied with some of the clauses. Assam has sought six months longer to complete its response while Nagaland has flagged its displeasure, saying the directives need to be re-examined in light of the state’s “special” context.

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