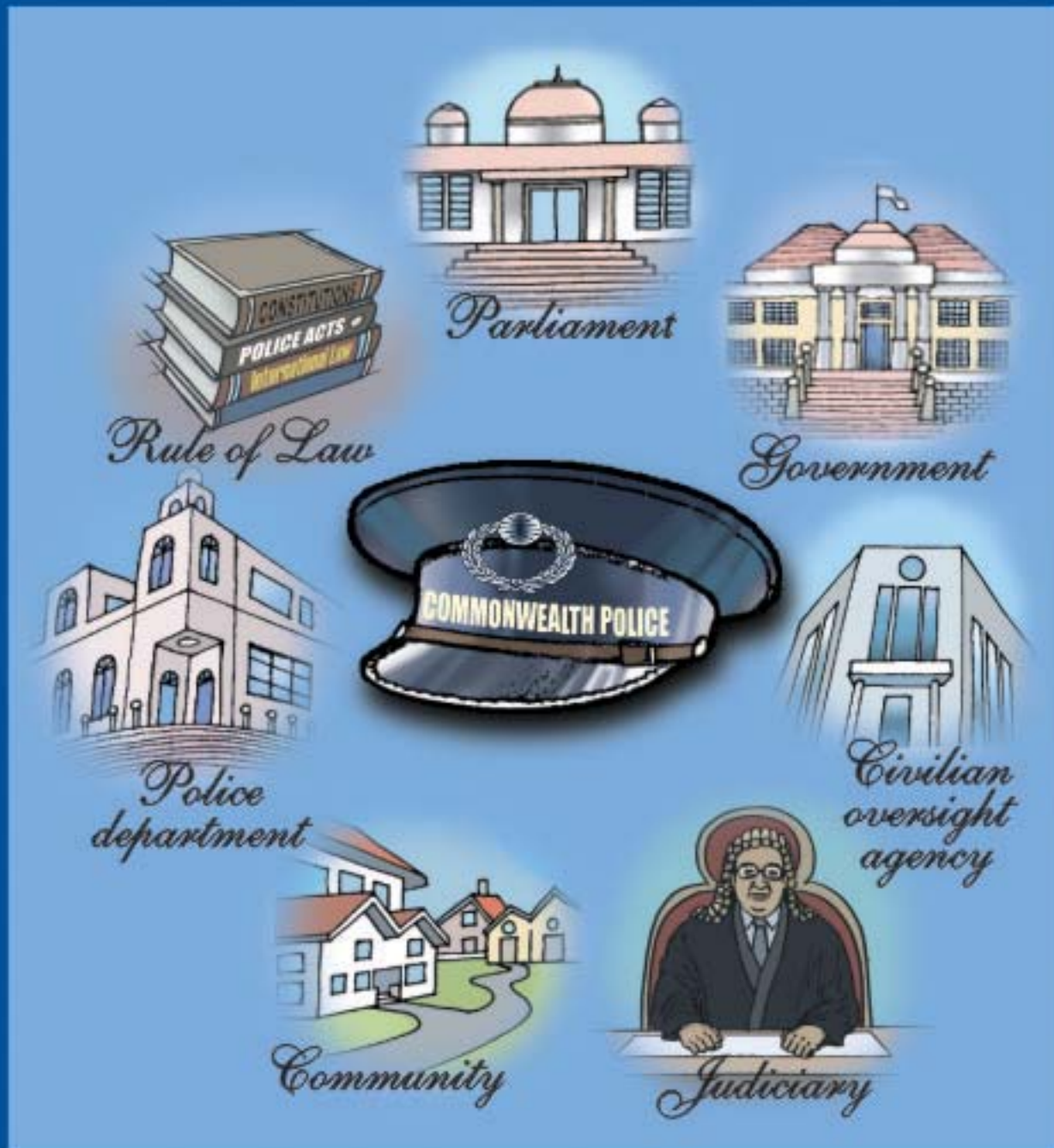


POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY: TOO IMPORTANT TO NEGLECT, TOO URGENT TO DELAY



COMMONWEALTH HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-partisan, international non-governmental organisation, mandated to ensure the *practical* realisation of human rights in the countries of the Commonwealth. In 1987 several Commonwealth professional associations founded CHRI. They believed that while the Commonwealth provided member countries a shared set of values and legal principles from which to work, and also provided a forum within which to promote human rights, there was little focus on the issues of human rights within the Commonwealth.

The objectives of CHRI are to promote awareness of and adherence to the Harare Principles, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other internationally recognised human rights instruments, as well as domestic instruments supporting human rights in Commonwealth member states.

Through its reports and periodic investigations, CHRI continually draws attention to progress and setbacks to human rights in Commonwealth countries. In advocating for approaches and measures to prevent human rights abuses, CHRI addresses the Commonwealth Secretariat, member governments and civil society associations. Through its public education programs, policy dialogues, comparative research, advocacy and networking CHRI's approach throughout is to act as a catalyst around its priority issues.

The nature of CHRI's sponsoring organisations* - journalists, publishers, broadcasters, lawyers, legal educators, health professionals, and parliamentarians - allows for both a national presence in each country and an international network. Notably these professionals are also strategic constituencies, which can effectively steer public policy in favour of human rights by incorporating human rights norms into their own work and acting as a conduit for the dissemination of human rights information, standards and practices. In addition, these groups bring knowledge of local situations, can access policy makers, highlight issues, and act in concert to promote human rights.

CHRI is based in New Delhi, India, and has offices in London, UK, and Accra, Ghana.

* Commonwealth Journalists Association, Commonwealth Lawyers Association, Commonwealth Legal Education Association, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Commonwealth Press Union and Commonwealth Broadcasting Association.

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



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FOREWORD

Every two years, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative brings out a report to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, drawing attention to issues of current human rights concern. CHRI's 2005 report is on police accountability and calls for police reform.

The conduct of the police is an important barometer of the state of governance, and their performance can significantly shape the social health of nations. Police, whether in a democratic or dictatorial regime, perform much the same functions. What distinguishes good from bad policing is the commitment to protect the civil and political freedoms of individuals, while helping to create an environment that will maximise the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights as well.

The price that democracies pay for unreformed, unaccountable policing is high. Overall human and national security is compromised in a global environment often prone to terror without and insurgency within. Access to justice, already remote for many, is further distanced from the population at large. The rights of the vulnerable like women, children, minorities, refugees and the vast population of poor that inhabit the Commonwealth go unrealised. Corruption, violence and fear thrive and the rule of law remains an aspiration on paper when it should be the demonstrable assumption on which all people can base their everyday lives.

The elements of reform are many and the Commonwealth is rich in excellent examples of how accountability has been achieved. However, there is also a stubborn reluctance in some jurisdictions to move away from "regime" to "democratic" policing. A deal of the tardiness associated with initiating reform and ensuring accountability comes from the inability of in-country police and political bosses to access knowledge about the nuts and bolts of how it can be accomplished.

In advocating for stronger efforts at police reform, this report showcases good practices in accountability. It provides practical suggestions about how reforms can be undertaken and the values on which policing in the Commonwealth must be premised in order to be effective.

The Commonwealth must explicitly acknowledge that police reform and accountability are crucial to realising democracy and development. It must commit itself to developing Commonwealth Principles on Policing that underpin best practices and provide member countries with assistance in reforming laws and crafting institutional arrangements that will eliminate abuse and corruption, and ensure the highest standards of policing.



Sam Okudzeto
Chair, CHRI's International Advisory Commission

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Maja Daruwala
Director, CHRI

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