

Pearls in Policing



In The Hague, the city of Peace, Justice and Security, thirty-two executive police leaders from 24 countries discussed from 10 to 13 June 2007 the challenges the police face worldwide.

Why this initiative?

The Netherlands is a small country, but with an ambitious police organisation! Its vision document is called: 'Police in Evolution'. Police education is well developed and the Dutch police has a clear vision on the importance of the exchange of knowledge, the development of human capital and the internationalisation of the police function. In addition, the city of The Hague hosts numerous international law enforcement and justice organisations. The Netherlands in general and The Hague in particular seems to be the perfect host setting for a coming together of executive police leaders to reflect on matters of policing. There are of course more formal structures in which this occurs. But in existing, international structures the representatives tend to discuss current operational questions and are tightly controlled by busy agendas. It was felt that by providing an informal setting away from the watchful eye of the media, 'thinking out of the box' would be stimulated and academic knowledge could be used in a more intensive way. Not only on a national, European but even on a global level. The idea for bringing together such an international think tank was developed by a strong cooperative framework of representatives from the Police Academy of The Netherlands, the Netherlands Police Agency (KLPD), the Royal Dutch Marechaussee and the Ministries of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, and Justice. Valuable support and advice was given by Chief executives from Europol, Eurojust and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Preparation

A select group of Dutch senior police officers, the so-called 'pearl fishers', have, in preparation for the conference, travelled the world to find instances of inspiring police work. Their assignment was to expand their horizons and identify examples of policing excellence. These examples are called 'pearls in policing'. One police commissioner accompanied a guru in India to look at how communities can be mobilised in the field of security. A participant from the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations travelled to Singapore, a country which is frequently associated with a rather repressive security policy. He was surprised to discover how much time the police puts into mobilising the community as part of its security policy. A member of a police management set off to Burundi. She examined the devastating impact of the trade in small arms. It is a crime that should be a global policing priority, but isn't. Further destinations included London in the United Kingdom, Los Angeles in the USA, South Africa and Toronto in Canada. At the 'Pearls in Policing' conference the pearl fishers jointly presented a film featuring the 'pearls' they found.

Interviews

Over 20 police leaders were interviewed before the conference. A number of topics were felt to be of importance by almost all interviewees. These included the connections between local and international police work. Police leaders realise that the connection with the local community is an important traditional police orientation. However, as far as covering at the same time also the international dimension of policing is concerned, there is much room for improvement. Moreover technological developments represent a point of attention; both the threats that it poses and opportunities that it affords. What does technology mean for our relationship with the citizens?

We must not only be a police service that controls the citizen with cameras and other technology; we need a human face too and work on maintaining the trust of the citizens.

The Australian Federal Police Chief posed an intriguing question concerning the future: the police has always been aimed at influencing human behaviour, but what does that mean if, at some point in the future, we might be faced with human robots? How do we act in virtual environments such as the highly popular 'Second Life'? Second life is a three-dimensional on line virtual world in which users (over 7 Million worldwide) create their own content. Are we prepared? Moreover the question of state sovereignty is pertinent. Terrorists and offenders have abandoned respect for national borders long ago, but the police seems to continue to hold on to them. The police apparatus is something that governments continue to seek to control at their own national level.

How can legislation be better connected and adapted internationally and at the same time ensure the confidence of the citizens in their local community? In many conversations it was very clear that we need a thinking police, a knowledge-intensive police service. The police must be able to think, analyse, anticipate, and see and smell what goes on in society and be able to give advice on matters of safety, both to citizens and to government. It is less about the flexing of muscles and more about smart and pro-active thinking.

Academic pre-conference

An academic pre-conference was organised by the Police Academy of The Netherlands preceding the 'Pearls in Policing' conference, where some 20 national and international scientists from, amongst others, Germany, Norway, the USA and the United Kingdom came together. Joint topics were explored, among which reinforcing the relations with the society and the role of the citizens herein, use of indicators from society within the treatment of crime, intelligence-led police techniques, what sustainable development means for the police, and police responses to crisis situations. A clear conclusion was that current police methods and concepts do not longer fit this rapidly changing world. Police officers are information managers and relationship managers as well. That asks for a multi-actor approach, both nationally and internationally. One of the pre-conference outcomes was that several agreements have been made between participants to produce joint papers and research proposals. That said, there is a lot more to debate, as topics such as corruption, accountability, human rights and change management did not get the in-depth treatment that they deserve. A permanent relationship of academics and practitioners is considered necessary.

Pearls

Inspiration for the exact setup of the ' Pearls in Policing ' conference came from the so-called Bilderberg meetings which are organised on initiative by the late Prince Bernard from 1954 onwards. Its characterisations are: small-scale and interactive; participants are speakers, and away from the prying eyes of the media. In his opening address, the Royal Patron of the conference, Professor Pieter van Vollenhoven, emphasised the importance of universal values and norms for police organisations and of independent police research. "How else would it be possible for executives in policing to share their daily observations of developments in society with the people responsible?"

The conference comprised three days of intensive discussion and exchange of views, mostly in small sized focus groups. Approximately fifteen short presentations were given by delegates about the problems they face and possible solutions. They concerned new and future forms of crime, and the linking of policing to today's big issues, such as war, global warming and globalisation. The Commissioner of the Burundi police emphasised the importance of tackling illegal arms trade, whereas drugs trafficking, disruption and public faith in policing were also discussed. The Indonesian police, for instance has set a target of 100% public confidence in 2020. At the end of the conference, its results were shared with Queen Beatrix who officially received the delegates at her Palace Huis ten Bosch in The Hague.

The conference has produced exciting ways forward. Four working groups have been set up and will start their work shortly. The first will focus on universal values and standards of *glocal* policing. It is aimed specifically at the connection between local and global police work. This working party is chaired by Commissioner Letoane of the Lesotho Mounted Police. The second party will look at police leadership of the future. What kind of competences do future leaders require? The lead is taken by Commissioner Khoo Boon Hui of the Singapore Police. The third working party, chaired by Professor Fijnaut has a more practical objective. It observed that the trade in small arms is a problem that affects the whole world. However, there seems to be an inability to tackle this problem together on the world stage. This working party will examine possibilities for generating solutions and enhancing the status of small arms trade on the international political agenda. The fourth working party will occupy itself with future scenarios, and is chaired by Commissioner Keelty, Australian Federal Police. Which questions will be relevant for the world in the coming years and what will this mean for the police force? The progress of these working parties will be presented at the next conference in The Hague, which is planned for 15-18 June 2008.

On the road to Peace, Justice...and Police

The pivotal role of the police in the contribution to peace, justice and security was emphasised during the conference by the unveiling of a work of art at the headquarters of the Haaglanden regional police service. The text on this work of art - in the four Interpol languages and Dutch - states the words 'On the Road to Peace and Justice'. The monument was unveiled in the presence of Minister of Defence Mr. Eimert van Middelkoop and representatives of the Ministries of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, and Justice. The role of the police in securing peace and justice will no doubt be a key issue for future 'Pearls in Policing' gatherings.

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More information

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