

# **When state policing is failing: security in the developing world**

**International Workshop, Coventry University, 9 July 2007**

## **Summary notes**

An international workshop was held on 9 July 2007 at Coventry University to disseminate the findings of Professor Bruce Baker's two-year ESRC-research on post-conflict policing in Rwanda and Liberia and to reflect on their implication for non-state policing and Security Sector Reform in Africa and the wider developing world.

Present were representatives of academia, government and commercial security consultants: Alice Hills, Leeds University; Gordon Peake, Security Consultant; Bill Dixon, Keele University; Simon Massey, Coventry University; Piet Biesheuvel DFID/Libra Advisory Group; Lars Buur, Danish Institute of International Studies; Suzette Heald, London School of Economics; Peter Alexander Albrecht Alert's Peacebuilding Issues Programme on SSR; Elrena van der Spuy, University of Cape Town.

In an introductory paper, 'Coping with the Failure of State policing in Liberia', Bruce spoke of the extent of the failure of the state police to protect people from crime or to investigate it when it occurs. The failure was not just one of a lack of resources, but was as much due to the insistence on establishing a state dominance in internal security whilst at the same time removing senior experienced personnel from the sector under a misguided and poorly implemented vetting process. The resources and experience were simply not there to fulfil the state's pledge of a nationwide safety and justice service. There had been little progress in winning over popular support for the police and the so called 'community policing' programme was only a half-hearted attempt by the state police to employ the energies and knowledge of the local people.

In the light of the failure of the police, Bruce outlined some of the initiatives that continued or had had arisen from communities to provide crime prevention, crime investigation and resolution and crime punishment. These included neighbourhood patrols by communities (since banned by the Government as 'vigilantes'), work-based groups investigation and resolution along traditional court lines of disputes; and of course customary courts. In the absence of the police over most of the country beyond the 'archipelago' of towns and main roads, these were the main providers of internal security. Yet, along with the commercial security that protects Liberia's main economic assets, they were not part of the SSR. The current position is that most people in Liberia feel abandoned by the state and on their own as regards safety and justice provision. The current state-building model of policing and justice clearly has not worked and does not appear to have the resources to provide a nationwide system in the foreseeable future. In such circumstances it is worth considering a multi-layered approach that provides service delivery through state, commercial and non-state actors.

The subsequent round tables considered the questions of: how seriously is the state failing in developing state; how important is the role of community-based safety and justice systems; how difficult is it to link state and community-based policing? Whilst it was recognised that, especially in Africa, there was a disregard by governments and donors of non-state policing, there were exceptions, such as Malawi. Much had to do with regime ideology and roots. The victors in civil war that came from rebel groups (and popular justice ideology) e.g. Uganda and Rwanda, had a different view of popular participation in policing to those who were headed up by World Bank

officials as Sierra Leone and Liberia or dominated by United Nations CivPol state-centric technocrats.

There were issues, too, around the question of what was state policing for. Some thought that they were only there to protect the regime and undertake certain symbolic functions, in which case they were not 'failing'. 'Failing', then, had to be qualified by questions of, 'as measured by what?'; 'in whose view?'; 'failing at what?'. With such uncertainties surrounding what is policing in a given context and problems of understanding a system so different from our own, it cautioned against a normative approach by outsiders who 'knew what was best' for a country. Caution was all the more appropriate as it was not at all clear what the nexus was between security and development, nor how democracy altered the equation.

As regards non-state policing there was a general ignorance about it in government and donor circles, and a consequent tendency to either demonise or romanticise it. It clearly had a variety of styles. Nor was it clear whether institutionalising it and/or bringing it under state police control would kill it off. Though it appeared to need government granted legitimacy to function, such linkages between state and non-state as community policing forums often foundered on police attempts to dominate or ignore. It seemed a strange irony that there was often a distinction between legality and justice: state courts and police could be within the law and yet denying justice by their delays, inaccessibility and procedures; whilst non-state systems, though offering quick and accessible results that were usually accepted as fair by both parties to a dispute, could be deemed illegal because they had transgressed beyond their permitted jurisdiction.

There was widespread agreement that non-state policing has an important role to play in providing service delivery of safety and justice in poor states. Just how that multi-layered approach will be implemented, however, will need to be carefully approached in each situation.