

## **East African police charged with failing to reform Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the East Africa Law Society hold roundtable conference into police reform in East Africa**

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Over the last two days, high level police, civil society and government delegates have met in Arusha, Tanzania, to look at the state of policing in East Africa, and map out a plan for reform in the region.

Ms Maja Daruwala, Director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, which facilitated the conference with the East Africa Law Society, said that, "The roundtable has shown the huge amount of interest that the question of police reform in East Africa generates. For decades, the communities of East Africa have been subject to unreformed, undemocratic and unaccountable policing. For the people in those communities, that has meant violence, corruption and brutality."

The Roundtable brought together delegates from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, as well as experts from Ghana, Australia and India.

"CHRI has been working in East Africa for three years," said Ms Daruwala, "We have just published a set of reports on policing and policing budgets in the region. The release of the reports, as well as the groundswell of support for reform growing in the region, meant that it was the perfect time for key actors in the region to meet and flesh out the challenges to police reform in the region, and set out a way forward for reform."

The Roundtable looked at policing trends and challenges across the East African region, and within the national borders of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The delegates found that "reform of the police is required to provide a police service that fulfils its mandate of protecting the safety and security of all. The state has a responsibility to provide an efficient, accountable and democratic system of policing which enhances the enjoyment of rights and development."

The delegates also explored the challenges to good policing in East Africa. These challenges include police brutality and excessive use of force, outdated legal regimes, corruption, illegitimate political interference, militarisation of civilian policing bodies, partiality, impunity, internal police culture and hierarchies, lack of transparency, lack of adequate training and resources, police recruitment processes, poor service and working conditions, lack of adherence to the rule of law and lack of reform in the broader criminal justice sector.

The delegates proposed a number of points of action. They called on police, civil society and national human rights institutions to create networks and to make use of advocacy opportunities such as the 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, due to take place in Kampala, Uganda, late next year. The delegates also called on governments, civil society and national human rights institutions to work towards the demilitarisation of police in East Africa, the amendment of police laws to reflect democratic principles of policing and the strengthening of police accountability mechanisms such as civilian oversight bodies.

Ms Daruwala said, "This roundtable has shown the opportunities that exist for the police reform process to take place in East Africa. It has also shown that civil society, members of government, police officers and national human rights institutions are ready to make that reform happen. Police reform in East Africa is too important to neglect and too important to delay."

For more information, contact Daniel Woods at CHRI ([daniel@humanrightsinitiative.org](mailto:daniel@humanrightsinitiative.org)) or access the CHRI website at [www.humanrightsinitiative.org](http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org).

*The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-partisan, international NGO working for the practical realisation of human rights in the countries of the Commonwealth.*